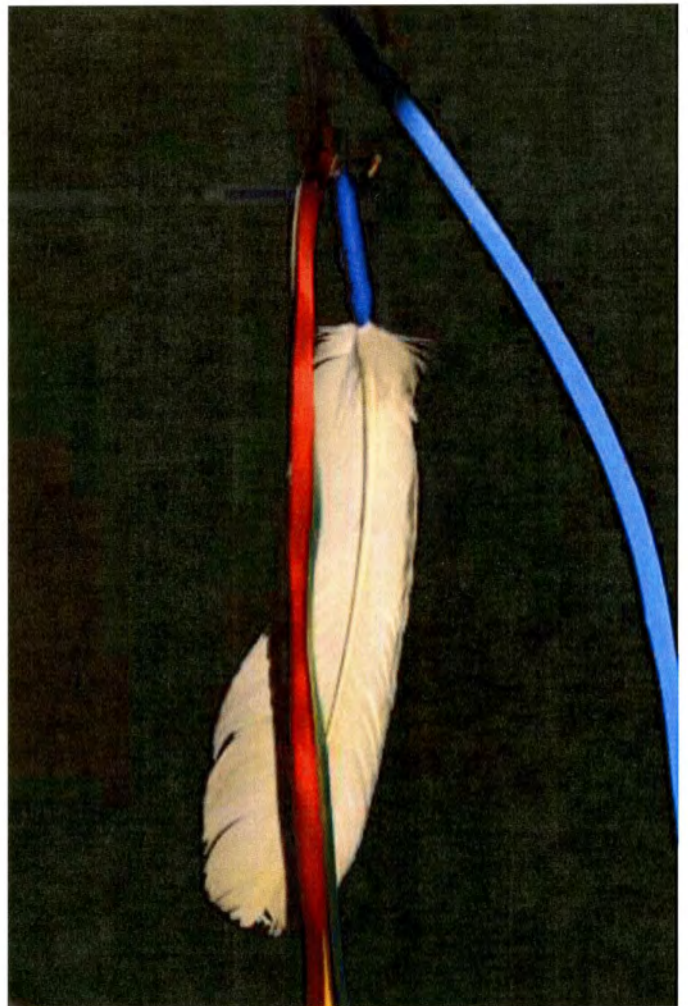


# Starting to Talk



*A Guide for Communities on Healing and  
Reconciliation from the Legacy of Indian  
Residential Schools*



The Sioux Lookout Community Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation is a local group of former Indian Residential School students, clergy and interested citizens engaged in gestures of healing and reconciliation.

The Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee (SLARC) is a community organization dedicated to helping all residents and visitors to our community learn to work and live together while respecting and celebrating our differences. The goal is to develop a just community where the future will be better for us all.

SLARC's logo was designed by Abe Kakepetum and is called *Together*. This design represents the four directions and the people of the world. The hands are colourless to symbolize that skin colour is not important. This concept removes barriers and allows us to work together because of who we are, not what we look like. All people have gifts to offer – all are a part of the whole – the circle.

Cover photograph by C.A. Kelly  
Report compiled and edited by Jennifer Morrow

# Starting to Talk

*A Guide for Communities on Healing and Reconciliation  
from the Legacy of Indian Residential Schools*

## Preface

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There is in Canada a habit of bringing to the fore the words and deeds of public figures. Considered in this manner, the footworn paths of healing and reconciliation are less regarded than the mountain peaks from which the declarations of archbishops, prime ministers, and other such VIPs are issued.

We do ourselves a useful service when we meditate upon the fact that there would have been no Government apology, no Truth and Reconciliation Commission, no Settlement Agreement, and no Aboriginal Healing Foundation had there not have taken place many thousands of undocumented conversations among survivors and church members and citizens, in kitchens and community halls and the basements of houses. For many years now, across Canada and across the world, the work of healing and reconciliation has been sustained by a mostly unacknowledged coalition of the willing. The citizens of that land, an open land without borders, are a motley bunch. In so many ways differing one from another, they share a desire to forge honest and respectful relationships on the foundation of ordinary human decency. In a country where for more than a century the cynical and chauvinistic work of aggressive assimilation was a state priority, ordinary human decency has extraordinary potential.

*Starting to Talk* is a clear and practical aid for those who have chosen to join the coalition of the willing. I welcome you to its pages and offer what I hope are words of encouragement. Over the years much has been accomplished by communities committed to the groundwork of healing and reconciliation. We all know this work is not easy and will not be accomplished quickly. There will be unavoidable setbacks and disappointments. Suicide, racism, despair, and anger are difficult problems to face.

Neither is it likely that the shame and silence of the recent past will return, and for this all honour is due to the survivors who have had the courage to speak. We at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation acknowledge this courage and I extend my appreciation for their good work to the Sioux Lookout Community Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation, the Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee, and the many individuals whose careful listening and whose truth are an earnest promise of a better future.

Michael DeGagné  
Executive Director, Aboriginal Healing Foundation



## Why Talk?

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*“The churches and the government have apologized to us – why do we need to talk about this?”*

*“You got your settlement money – get over it already!”*

*“But it happened so long ago. Isn’t it ancient history?”*

You might find yourself saying something like this. There’s a good chance you’ve heard someone else say something like it. For a lot of Canadians, no matter who they are, Indian Residential Schools (IRS) are a closed chapter in our history. It happened, it wasn’t the greatest, but the government and the churches have apologized and survivors have received settlement payments. End of story.

### An Unwritten Code of Silence

After leaving the residential school, I became very angry. I was bitter. I was mad at myself. I was mad at my parents. I was mad at the government and at the churches. I was angry at my Creator. I was mad at the world.

At the time there was an unwritten code of silence. Nobody talked about their negative experiences and bad memories of the residential school.

I also experienced denial from some members of my family and community. There was silence from the government. The church didn’t know how to respond to my allegation of abuse. Sadly, there was silence from my own leaders. I know now that the issue was likely too overwhelming – too painful – for them to deal with.

- Garnet Angeconeb, Pelican Lake Indian Residential School survivor, Sioux Lookout

The unwritten code of silence was broken through a number of small steps, starting with the 1990 disclosure by then Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Phil Fontaine, of abuses he had suffered in residential school. What had long been frozen started to melt. In families, churches, communities, and on a regional and national scale, people were starting to talk. Canadians of all backgrounds started to hear. And the churches that had implemented the federal government’s IRS policy started to take responsibility. And finally, so did the federal government. At the back of this handbook you can link to apologies from churches and from the federal government.

“As citizens of this country, we must be engaged in meaningful dialogue,” writes Garnet Angeconeb. “We can no longer be afraid to talk to each other. We shouldn’t have to settle our differences in the courts. We can no longer speak to each other through the media.”

For many Canadians, the federal government's apology marked a turning point in Canada-First Nations relations. For many survivors, it was a significant moment from which to move forward. But wounds take time to heal, and different people heal at different rates and in different ways, just as different types of injury require different types of care in order to heal.

“Silence is more often than not an expression of hurt or pain kept inside.”  
(Where are the Children? Healing the Legacy of Residential Schools)

In Sioux Lookout, a town of 5,000 in Northwestern Ontario, a small group of us have started a process of dialogue at the community level. The Sioux Lookout Community Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation consists of former students, clergy of churches that ran residential schools, and interested citizens.

It is our desire to create awareness of our collective past and to understand where we are at today. So if we are aware of our past and understand each other today, together we can move forward to a better future.



Community Coalition members and longtime friends Laurel Wood and Garnet Angeconeb talk over lunch at a recent Coalition gathering in Sioux Lookout. Photo by Aileen Urquhart.



## Who is this Handbook For? What is it For?

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### Not Knowing Where to Begin

A business person I connect with occasionally in town asked recently what was keeping me busy these days. I described some of our work with the Community Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation, bringing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together to discuss the ongoing legacy of Indian Residential Schools.

Her response was immediate and negative. *Don't you think they should just get over it and stop asking for handouts?* was the gist. "People really suffered in Europe during the wars and look what they've been able to do. They just need to pick themselves up and get on with it."

I was completely taken aback. How could I begin to describe the legacy of hopelessness and pain that followed a systematic attack on all First Nations people of our country, for hundreds of years? Where could I begin to summarize the unresolved and ongoing problems that First Nations people face on a daily basis? How could I do this without appearing to diminish the horror of the holocaust and the many other genocides the world has seen?

I didn't know where to begin. I didn't know what to say.

I hope that this handbook will help give you the tools and the courage to speak your heart in these difficult conversations. I hope that all of us will keep talking.

- Laurel Wood, Sioux Lookout

If you have ever thought that you'd like to sit down with someone else in your community and have a conversation about this, then we hope that this book will help you get started. We wrote it because we hope that our experience as a community coalition for healing and reconciliation might inspire other people and communities to try something similar. This book is for community groups and church groups as well as individuals.

We hope that it will help to create awareness, but more importantly that it will promote that dialogue in communities, families, classrooms, cafés and even bars. We want it to promote understanding based on truth. We hope that it will inspire, enlighten and uplift, without glossing over the pain in this chapter of our shared history.

We don't try to give the nuts and bolts of how to organize a community event. We have some notes on this in the back of the book where you can also find other links to more information. What we are trying to give here is a little inspiration and some relevant pointers, from our own experience, on how to start to talk.

## But I'm Not an IRS Survivor, It Doesn't Affect Me... Or Does It?

Did someone in your family go to Indian Residential School – your parents or your grandparents, even a distant cousin? Or did someone in your family work as a staff member at a residential school? If so, then the residential school legacy is a part of your story, your personal story and the story of your family.

In fact, it is a part of all of our stories. We Canadians are all treaty people, whether we're Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, Métis, sixth generation, or new Canadians. The treaties that were signed between First Nations leaders and the crown were signed on behalf of all of the people now citizens of this beautiful country. So the residential school legacy is our history as a people of this country. We can all benefit from talking. In talking to each other, we are building bridges to each other, and when we cross those bridges, we may learn how to really understand each other.

Do we want to change how our communities look in the future? How our country looks in the future? Now is the time, and this is how.

### A Story Shared in Good Faith

My father and my kokum – my mother's mother – both attended residential school. My home was extremely violent and angry most of the time. My father was a hurt and angry man. He beat my mother up on a regular basis and I had to hide many times.

I attended a day school in my community. One nice spring day a bunch of us kids decided it was a good day to skip school. I suppose we thought nobody would notice because most of the adults were getting drunk. I remember that day because the sun was shining and the snow was melting from the railway tracks. So off we went along the tracks. We did what we always did in the spring time, we walked to the cliffs to climb around and play in the bushes. We were laughing and talking. I remember feeling so alive and free. The fresh air filling my nostrils, the sun so bright and I could feel the warmth on my hands and face. We just left everything behind, there was no school and no drunk parents.

Suddenly, one of the others stopped and yelled "somebody is coming down the tracks!" As they

got closer we began to recognize them. My dad and my aunt. We all knew we were in trouble and started running in different directions. I ran as fast as I could through the thick and sticky snow. I was about waist deep and the cold snow was getting into my rubber boots. It was like running up a river. I didn't know where I was going, just that I had to get away. I don't remember how or why I ended up back on the tracks. I think I just gave up even though I knew something bad was going to happen. I could see my cousin was getting her share of so-called discipline from her mother.

When I got back to the tracks my dad was standing over me with a long thick branch in his hand. He indicated to me my hands were to be held out and he hit my hand so hard that my fingers swelled up. He had been drinking and was yelling how I should not skip school. I started running down the tracks toward home. My hand was aching, tears streaming down my face.

When I got home my mom was there but what could she have done? She probably would have gotten a beating too.

- Caroline Paavola, Sioux Lookout



## The Importance of Building Relationships

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Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee (SLARC) has been active in the cross-cultural community of Sioux Lookout, Ontario, for over 20 years. SLARC has provided a forum for building relationships among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and has supported dialogue and education about the history of First Nations people in Canada and the impact of settlers in this area.

Meanwhile, several First Nations people began meeting in Sioux Lookout in the early '90s to discuss the impact of residential school and possibilities for healing.

Things were also starting to move on a national level, including public apologies by the Anglican and United Churches, and discussions that eventually led to the settlement agreement, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and the Truth and Reconciliation process.

In Sioux Lookout we chose to echo these discussions and move ahead at the local level towards healing and reconciliation. The Community Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation is made up of residential school survivors, church representatives and concerned community members. It is a good mixture of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and, importantly, receives the support of SLARC staff.

Building on 20 years of SLARC's work building relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in our community, the Coalition began hosting gatherings that brought people together in a variety of ways to build trust and good relationships between each other.

Out of our experience we have realized the great necessity for ensuring the sense of safety for survivors and now plan to have counsellors present at all events where sharing of stories will be happening.

### Reconciliation

We are waking up to our history  
from a forced slumber  
We are breathing it into our lungs  
so it will be part of us again.  
It will make us angry at first  
because we will see how much you stole from us  
and for how long you watched us suffer  
we will see how you see us  
and how when we copied your ways  
it killed our own

We will cry and cry and cry  
because we can never be the same again.  
But we will go home to cry  
and we will see ourselves in this huge mess  
and we will gently whisper the circle back  
and it will be old and it will be new

Then we will breathe our history back to you  
you will feel how strong and alive it is  
and you will feel yourself become a part of it.

And it will shock you at first  
because it is too big to see all at once  
and you won't want to believe it  
you will see how you see us  
and all the disaster in your ways  
how much we lost

And you will cry and cry and cry  
because we can never be the same again.

But we will cry with you  
and we will see ourselves in this huge mess  
and we will gently whisper the circle back  
and it will be old, and it will be new.

- Rebeka Tabobondung, Wasauksing  
First Nation, Ontario  
*Reproduced with permission*

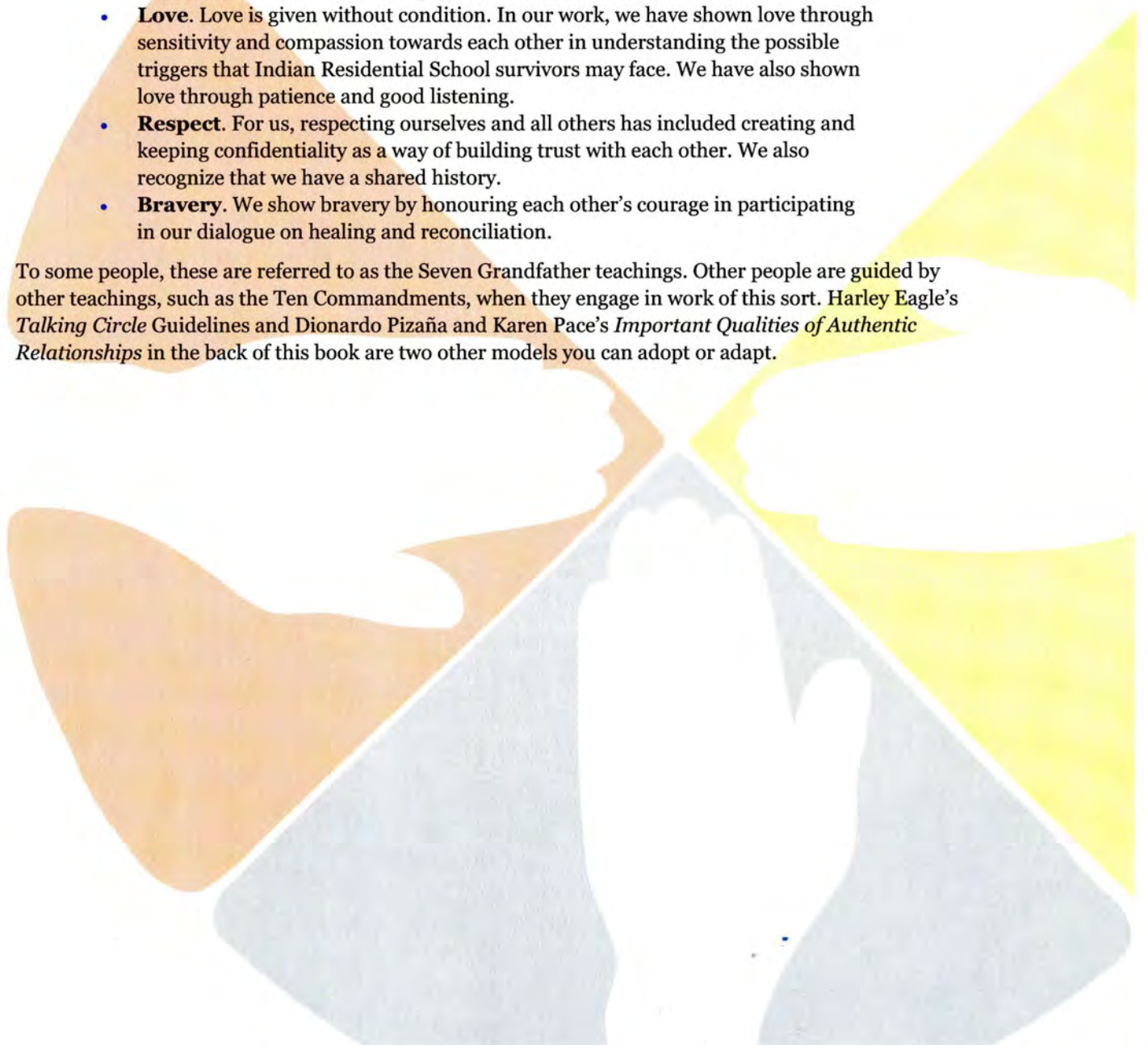


## Values & Principles

Our group has found that it is important to agree on some guiding values and principles, in both planning and carrying out community events for healing and reconciliation. We try to keep our eyes on these values and principles when we're doing our work.

- **Honesty.** We find that honesty is particularly important when someone is telling their story.
- **Humility.** In cross-cultural dialogue, humility is important to help us appreciate perspectives, values, and belief systems that are not our own.
- **Truth.** Speaking the truth will help us to educate each other and other Canadians about the Indian Residential School legacy.
- **Wisdom.** "To cherish knowledge is to know Wisdom" – Edward Benton-Banai's *The Mishomis Book*. We attempt to be wise in all of our decisions.
- **Love.** Love is given without condition. In our work, we have shown love through sensitivity and compassion towards each other in understanding the possible triggers that Indian Residential School survivors may face. We have also shown love through patience and good listening.
- **Respect.** For us, respecting ourselves and all others has included creating and keeping confidentiality as a way of building trust with each other. We also recognize that we have a shared history.
- **Bravery.** We show bravery by honouring each other's courage in participating in our dialogue on healing and reconciliation.

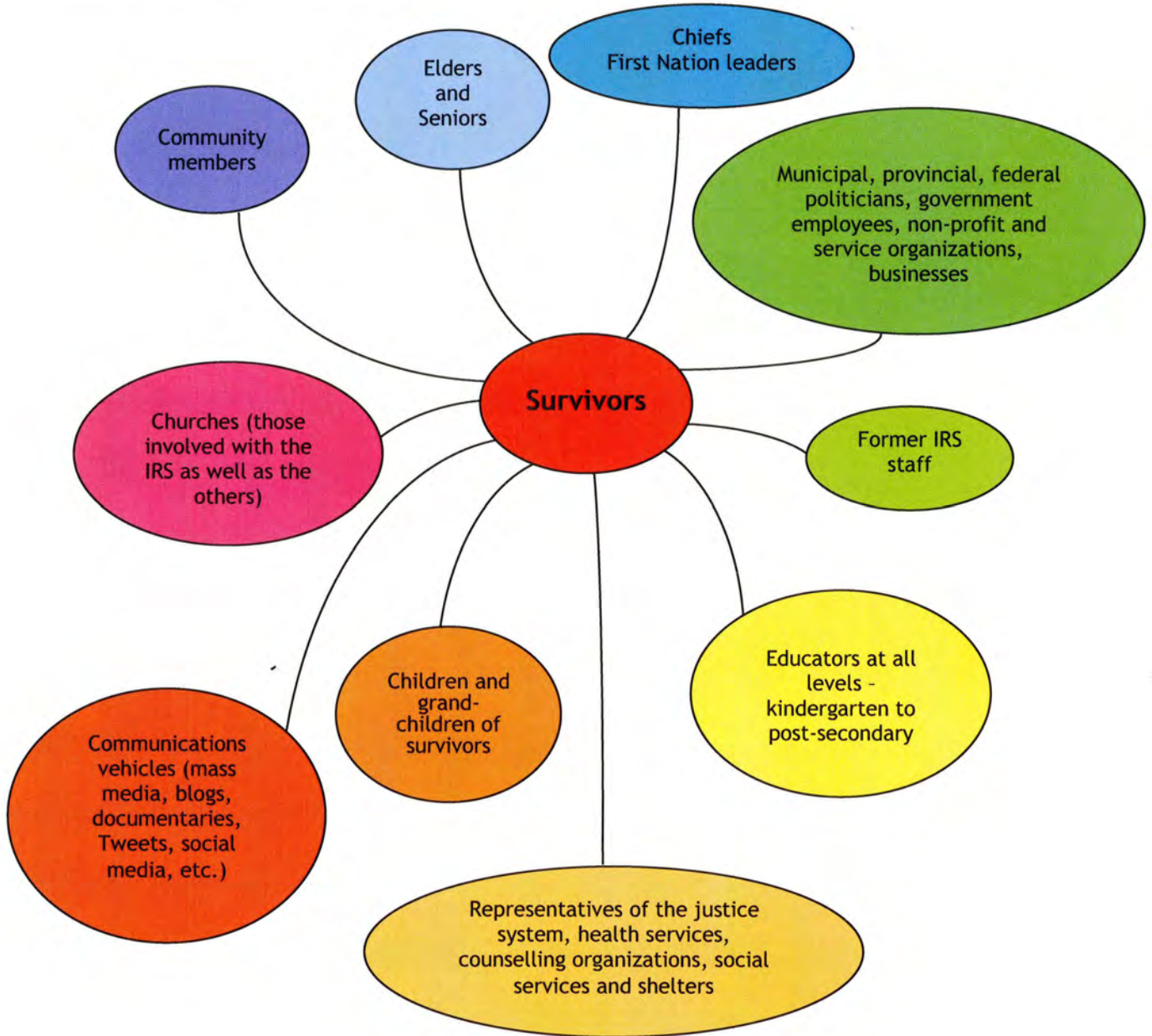
To some people, these are referred to as the Seven Grandfather teachings. Other people are guided by other teachings, such as the Ten Commandments, when they engage in work of this sort. Harley Eagle's *Talking Circle Guidelines* and Dionardo Pizaña and Karen Pace's *Important Qualities of Authentic Relationships* in the back of this book are two other models you can adopt or adapt.



## Who Are the Key People?

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It is important first and foremost for the project to have the blessing and direction of IRS survivors themselves. Take your cue from them. Here are some others you might involve...





In Sioux Lookout, a long history of working together has provided a solid foundation for the coalition. Our key people when we organize events look something like this:



## Involving Former IRS Staff

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In Sioux Lookout, we have encouraged former staff from Pelican Lake Indian Residential School to become involved in our community coalition. This has proven more difficult than we expected and colleagues in other parts of the country report similar difficulty. Certain things may discourage former staff from participating in a healing and reconciliation process. Perhaps because some former staff have been found guilty of physical and sexual abuse, all staff are now afraid of being “guilty by association.” Some claims have named individual staff members and this might perhaps have scared off some who might otherwise have participated in discussions. Be that as it may, we do recognize that former staff may need to engage in a healing process as much as survivors do.

“We have found that engaging staff members and their descendants in the ‘sharing, healing and learning’ process through inviting them to share any resources and memories with former students and their descendants has worked well,” writes Professor Don Jackson, Director of the Shingwauk Project and Residential Schools Centre in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

“Many of the staff members kept in touch with former students and also with each other, just as students have,” he continues. “Most staff members ... had their networks, just as students who had their own community and family connections had their networks. At our Residential School Centre we’ve tried to reconstruct some of these networks to bring people together and collect and share resources.”

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has issued a call for former staff to share their stories in order to ensure a fuller history of the IRS period. Justice Murray Sinclair, TRC chair, sought the assistance of the various churches that were involved in running the Indian Residential Schools. The *Anglican Journal* reported that he wrote to the Anglican Church that former staff can “provide us with a unique insight into the operation of the schools, the relationship between students and staff, and the day-to-day challenges of working in difficult circumstances” (April 18, 2011).

Professor Jackson adds that stories, memories and memorabilia, such as photographs, are particularly important to IRS survivors and former staff. “It’s amazing how a letter, a photo or some other document can mean so much to a former student, descendant or staff member, especially since many students left the schools with only the shirts on their backs and no tangible record of their childhood.”

He recommends that communities interested in engaging former staff might advertise in church publications, encouraging former staff and their descendants to contact them to share stories and memorabilia.

In the meantime, the Assembly of First Nations has launched its Indian Residential School community site ([www.afn-irs.ca](http://www.afn-irs.ca)) where visitors can find a school by clicking on a map or looking at a list. Each school has its own page, together with a link to an interactive Facebook site where visitors can find each other and post images of photographs, newsletters, and other information.

Professor Jackson emphasizes the importance of this work in an organized fashion and on a national scale. A national network of survivors, former staff and their relatives and descendants would help in information sharing, “since ultimately the IRS experience is theirs most directly.”



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## Sharing Stories and Experiences

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Oral storytelling has been a part of the culture of humanity since our beginnings. Stories were the way we learned and passed on our traditions. In our work in Sioux Lookout we recognize the importance of honouring the stories of Indian Residential School survivors and former staff as well as the stories of their families, their children and grandchildren.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has been collecting statements, documents and photographs from Indian Residential School survivors and former staff in hopes of helping Canadians today and in the future understand “what the schools were like, what happened inside them and how the experience affected generations to come.”

You may be interested in organizing an event to collect stories and statements, documents and photographs from survivors, former staff and others. You can connect with the TRC and look at their community event criteria. Note that while the Commission’s mandate expires in 2013 community groups might continue taking statements and hearing stories. These can become a part of your local community’s archives.

If you are interested in creating an event in which community members can share their stories, there are some things you might wish to keep in mind.

- Be prepared. Many stories are painful and solicit strong emotional reactions. It is important to provide a supportive and trusting setting as well as easy access to after care in the form of counsellors, healers, Elders, clergy, family, etc.
- Sign an agreement with participants that allows them to dictate whether their story will be recorded and how it will be used.
- Consider what will be needed to help someone relax and debrief afterwards.

Some survivors have few or no mementos from their childhoods. Collecting and sharing is another way to collect and protect their history.



Hard at work in Sioux Lookout. Photo by C.A. Kelly.





Darlene Angeconeb during her residential school days.

## Cookie and Banana

I want to talk about the unique bond that we, as students, developed in residential school. We developed this unique bond because I think it was a way of coping with a bad situation – lack of family life.

I was somewhat of a mischievous student and noticed that the food delivery persons would leave cases of bananas in the basement hall. I would steal a lot of these bananas out of the boxes and share them with the rest of the girls in my dorm. I really didn't have to steal food, we weren't hungry, but I had an affinity for bananas. I did this numerous times.

With nothing better to do but to talk to each other at night from our bunk beds, my friend decided she would go down to the kitchen and steal some cookies. She snuck down to the kitchen and never returned. We were worried. Her cousin eventually decided she would go down to look for her.

Both came back minutes later. My friend did get the cookies but they were all broken inside her shirt. They were laughing and she told us that when she was making her way back from the kitchen, she heard a noise and jumped in her locker. That was how she squashed the cookies in her shirt. I guess the latch outside the locker had prevented her from getting out.

When her cousin came down to look for her she whispered and knocked on her locker to get her attention. Her cousin found the locker and let her out. We enjoyed the story and the broken cookies.

Today, we now know each other by the nicknames Cookie and Banana. We made a pact with each other: if she passes on first, I will put a cookie on her grave; if I die first, she'll put a banana on my grave.

Through residential school, a lot of us have remained good friends with a bond, or love, that ties us together. It is a bond that will never be broken.

Even if it's from across the street, my friend will yell out, "Hey Banana!" I know who it is right away. I smile. It's my friend Cookie.

- Darlene Angeconeb, Pelican Lake Indian Residential School survivor, Sioux Lookout



## Developing Creative Strategies

So you want to talk, you have a group of people who share your vision, and now you want to do something. What will you do? Well, the sky's the limit... But here are some ideas from projects in communities throughout Canada to get you started... And remember, whatever you do, if you try to make it concrete, visual and engaging, people – all people – will be able to understand and appreciate it more.

Cultural events - movies, concerts, music festivals, coffee houses, with a public discussion after the event. Maybe in an outdoor venue, around a campfire.

Creative workshops for all ages. Work with a local artist or educator to help participants find ways to express their ideas, stories and experiences through writing, artwork, or other creative means.

Cultural spaces - perhaps your local museum, art gallery or library might be interested in working with you to find ways of acknowledging the full history of your community or region. They might consider a "future exhibit" in which the community can display its hopes for the future.

A local historical or genealogical society might be a good organization to partner with.

Community gatherings over coffee or a meal, with or without an agenda for discussion, can bring the community together in a celebratory atmosphere. Good discussions often follow. Sioux Lookout's multicultural feasts and Kenora's café conversations are examples.

Hold gatherings where the focus of the evening is something creative, such as a quilting bee or a beadwork lesson. This brings participants together and can serve as a base for posing questions and inspiring discussion.

Hold a poster contest within the community or within schools. Winning designs could also appear on buttons, bookmarks, or t-shirts.

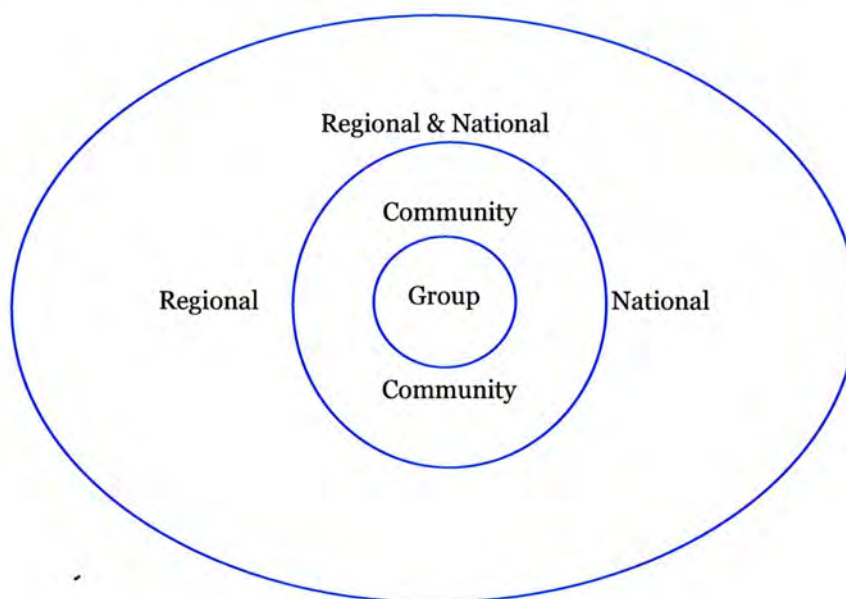
Hold a story time at a library or café and make it cross-cultural. Participants can share stories between peers or with children.

## Promoting Effective Communication

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Good communication is key to any successful project. But how do we know we're communicating effectively? Communication happens at many different levels – within your group, with your community, and with your region or the whole country. Depending on your project, you may not need to be thinking in terms of national or regional communication, but you definitely need to be communicating well within your group. As the picture shows, good regional and national communication relies on good community communication, which in turn relies on good group communication.

It is also important to remember that good communication flows in more than one direction. Ensuring useful feedback and follow-up might involve some more creative communications tools such as questionnaires, feedback forms, and online tools such as blogs and discussion forums.



Concrete ideas for communicating effectively within your group, with your community, and the regional or national level are contained in the appendix.

### I Apologize

I can't begin to know your pain  
You can't forgive as long as memory remains  
Through it all you still survive  
And all that I can do is say I'm sorry  
Choking on the words that say I'm sorry  
I apologize

- Gary Fjellgaard, musician,  
*I Apologize*



## Resources

We hope that this handbook has helped you to get started. In our work, we collected resources to help you in your journey to community-wide healing and reconciliation. We wish you all strength, courage and resilience in this journey. Take care.

### Healing Initiatives

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

[www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca)

TRC's Community Event Criteria Guide

[www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/pdf/s/TRC Comm Events%20Guide en p12.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/pdf/s/TRC%20Comm%20Events%20Guide%20en%20p12.pdf)

National Day for Healing and Reconciliation

[www.ndhr.ca](http://www.ndhr.ca)

Aboriginal Healing Foundation

[www.ahf.ca](http://www.ahf.ca)

Legacy of Hope

[www.legacyofhope.ca](http://www.legacyofhope.ca)

Where Are the Children? Healing the Legacy of Residential Schools

[www.lesenfantsdevenus.ca](http://www.lesenfantsdevenus.ca)

### Church Apologies and Initiatives

Anglican Church Apology (1993)

<http://archive.anglican.ca/rs/>

Anglican Healing Fund

[www.anglican.ca/healingfund/](http://www.anglican.ca/healingfund/)

Presbyterian Church Apology (1994)

[www.rememberingthechildren.ca/press/pcc-confession.htm](http://www.rememberingthechildren.ca/press/pcc-confession.htm)

Presbyterian Healing and Reconciliation:

[www.presbyterian.ca/healing](http://www.presbyterian.ca/healing)

United Church Apology (1998)

[www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1998/a623](http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1998/a623)

United Church Healing Fund

[www.united-church.ca/funding/healing](http://www.united-church.ca/funding/healing)

Circle and Cross (United Church resource for cross-cultural dialogue and healing)

[www.ucrdstore.ca/social-justice/race-relations-gender-justice/circle-and-cross-dialogue-planning-tool.html](http://www.ucrdstore.ca/social-justice/race-relations-gender-justice/circle-and-cross-dialogue-planning-tool.html)

Apology by Catholic Bishop Murray of the NWT to the Dene People (2009)

[www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/story/2009/05/28/catholic-dene-apology.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/story/2009/05/28/catholic-dene-apology.html)

### Run

Just saw my dreams under water  
Trying to forget how I got here  
I swear, I swear I'm my Father  
Looking down holding onto God's word

Oh I can run  
Oh I can run  
Oh I can run  
And, oh, I can run

My feet were cold and your lips were warm  
Talk about a war in heart son  
If you can live with my stuff, girl, then  
you're the one  
I never held on perfect  
But sometimes just enough

Oh now you can run  
Oh now you can run  
Oh now you can run  
Now you can run

- Nick Sherman, musician,  
Sioux Lookout

The Pope's Apology (2009)

Reported on the CBC:

[www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2009/04/29/pope-first-nations042909.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2009/04/29/pope-first-nations042909.html)

From the Vatican's website:

[www.vatican.va/resources/resources\\_canada-first-nations-apr2009\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_canada-first-nations-apr2009_en.html)

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

[www.cccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/files/2630-apology-on-residential-schools-by-the-catholic-church](http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/files/2630-apology-on-residential-schools-by-the-catholic-church)

### **Government**

Canadian Government Statement of Apology

Text: [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/index-eng.asp](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/index-eng.asp)

Video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ryC74bbrEE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ryC74bbrEE)

Apology by the Commissioner of the RCMP (2004)

[www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/aboriginal-autochtone/apo-reg-eng.htm](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/aboriginal-autochtone/apo-reg-eng.htm)

Health Canada's Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/services/indiresident/irs-pi-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/services/indiresident/irs-pi-eng.php)

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

[www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca)

Address by then Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Jane Stewart "Gathering Strength — Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan" (1998)

[www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015725](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015725)



The generations at work: Caroline Paavola, Iris Stünzi and Elder Joseph Morrison, Sioux Lookout. Photo by Aileen Urquhart.



**Other Resources of Interest**

Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee

[www.slarc.ca/coalition](http://www.slarc.ca/coalition)

1000 conversations

[www.1000conversations.ca](http://www.1000conversations.ca)

I Am Indigenous

<http://iamindigenous.blogspot.com/>

Myth Perceptions: Deconstructing stereotypes, myths and untruths about Indigenous peoples

[http://mythperceptions.ca/english\\_home.html](http://mythperceptions.ca/english_home.html)

*Our Truth: The Youth Perspective on Residential Schools*, © Marlisa Brown and Molly Tilden, two high school students from Yellowknife. Link from: <http://ictj.org/news/canada-needs-reckoning-continued-impact-residential-schools>



A long history of working together has given rise to many rich friendships.  
Photo by C.A. Kelly.

## Getting Started Planning an Event

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Here are some other things to think about, from our experience in planning cross-cultural community events for healing and reconciliation.

### Step One

- Find others who share your desire for healing and reconciliation
- Gather a group of people representative of residential school survivors, churches, and community ensuring that there is a balance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
  - o Who else needs to be part of the planning?
  - o What Aboriginal communities, organizations are in the local area?
  - o What churches are represented?
  - o Is there a local Friendship Centre?
- Choose one or two people to be the overall coordinator(s), either paid or volunteer
- Arrange for one person to take and circulate notes



Linda Skead of Lac Seul First Nation draws a road map to healing and reconciliation. Photo by Aileen Urquhart

### Step Two (if wanting TRC representation)

- Contact the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for their Event Planning Guide ([www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/pdfs/TRC\\_Comm\\_Events%20Guide\\_en\\_p12.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/pdfs/TRC_Comm_Events%20Guide_en_p12.pdf))
- Make contact with a staff member at the TRC office
- The TRC provides a check list for planning an event (useful for any event)
- If the TRC is recording stories of residential school, plan to have private spaces available for the storytelling and for counselling

### Step Three

- Discuss and adopt a theme for the event
- Develop an agenda and budget
- Check out costs and availability of venues, food, catering, human resources, hotels, billets
- Develop menus – especially healthy snacks and traditional foods for feasts
- Identify Elders for any traditional ceremonies
- Ensure that people are available for counselling, debriefing and support (it is especially important to have First Nations counsellors)
- Identify people who would act as Master of Ceremonies, do registration, buy and wrap gifts
- Be sensitive to traditional practices if appropriate (e.g. prayer, tobacco, etc.)
- Contact local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leadership who might offer a welcoming address (e.g. Chief of local First Nations communities, mayor, church representative, MP, MLA or MPP, other dignitaries)



## Silenced

For the child, six years old,  
who was taken from his home  
and sent to school far, far away –  
take away my favourite, familiar books.

For the child, eight years old,  
strapped for speaking her mother tongue –  
snap my pens.

For the child, ten years old,  
who lost his native tongue –  
throw away my pencils.

For the child, twelve years old,  
who wept in her dark, dormitory bed  
with no one to speak soft words –  
take away my desk, my cozy chair.

For the child who was ridiculed for his name,  
for his way of talking,  
for the way he pronounced his words –  
cover my mouth with duct tape.

For the child, now adolescent, who returned home  
illiterate,  
unable to read either city or bush –  
tie my hands behind my back.

Don't let me write this poem.  
Rip it up and throw it away –  
because I didn't go to that school.  
I can only imagine.

- Holly Z. Haggarty, writer, Thunder Bay

### Step Three (continued)

- Communication and Promotion: Plan posters, press release, TV, newspaper and radio advertisements, faxes to various organizations, invitations for special guests
- Develop email contact lists and use social media to promote the event
- In Sioux Lookout we had weekly meetings to keep track of progress
- We also used e-mail to keep information flowing in between meetings
- Book entertainment (if required)
- Arrange for sound equipment as necessary
- Discuss the presence of media, develop protocol and invite representatives, providing orientation and sensitivity to safety for survivors
- Order resource material and free promotional items from related national and local organizations

### Step Four

- Finalize budget, agenda, venue, food, volunteers
- Arrange for people to meet and welcome special guests
- Identify who is introducing speakers, presenting gifts
- Arrange for drivers if necessary
- Confirm attendance of guests, speakers
- Arrange for people to do set up at the venue(s)
- Arrange for people to clean up after the event

### Step Five

- We find it important after each gathering to have a meeting to debrief
- Prepare a thank you and appreciation list
- Reconcile the budget!
- Have a good laugh at all the mistakes and funny things that happened along the way

## Communications with Each Other and with the World

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Our group brainstormed some specific ideas and tools from our own experiences that you can use for communicating within your group, with your community, and beyond.

**Group:** for communications within a group, there is a range of options: phone trees, fax, e-mail, social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), group texting, small group work, focus groups; some highlighted the importance of sensitivity to the need for translation, accessibility, room setup to facilitate communication, and accounting for differences in age, culture, and knowledge of technology.

**Community:** many of the same strategies would work for communications between the group and the community: fax, e-mail, phone trees, social media, group texting; awareness of the need for translation is equally important. As well, a whole list of other strategies have shown to be helpful: flyers, posters, networking by word of mouth, websites and website links, local media (press releases, public service announcements, advertisements), making use of “snail mail” to send flyers and invitations. Some more involved suggestions include sending representatives to community events and community organizations; networking with employers to include flyers in employee paycheques or to make presentations at work places; one-on-one meetings with key individuals; community information sessions; and presentations to council meetings (town, city and First Nation).

**Regional/National:** communications strategies on the regional and national levels include having a PR person on staff if possible or designating a spokesperson, advertising (if affordable), press releases, maintaining up to date websites with links from other websites; newsletters, social media, and videoconferencing for site-to-site communications.



Elder Joseph Morrison of Kenora and Father Mike Mahoney of Sioux Lookout work together at a recent Coalition gathering in Sioux Lookout. Photo by C.A. Kelly.



## Additional Resource: Talking Circle Guidelines

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*These guidelines are used by Harley Eagle and the Indigenous Issues Forum, an initiative to create safe and respectful family-centred environments to talk through tough issues. Reproduced with permission.*

**Humility:** For our time together we remember that we are all human beings here equal in the eyes of Creator. No one person is valued more or less. (It is only the teaching of the cultures and society of man that socializes us to believe that some of us, based on gender, ethnicity, skin colour, class or belief system are better than others.) Be mindful of power dynamics and patterns that uphold unhealthy hierarchies and do your best to promote those that encourage equality. Strive to be and speak in modest and unpretentious ways with each other.

**Respect:** Speak and listen with respect, take time to consider words carefully. Give full attention to the other participants as they speak. Respect the process and facilitator, staying focused on the topic or question at hand. Respect each other's opinions. Resist the urge to *fix* each other or their comments. Consider those not in the room – ancestors, Elders, children, loved ones, and enemies. Respect each other's silence if they need time to collect their thoughts when it is their turn to speak. Respect each other's emotions as they speak.

**Integrity:** We ask that we all speak from our own experiences and understanding with honour and honesty. Hold each other's stories and comments with integrity, in confidence, by not sharing them beyond the circle. If you feel the need to hear more about someone's story, first ask yourself what it is about you that has you reacting to the story, if you need to hear more go to the person and ask for further conversation. Be ready and OK with the person *not* wishing to talk further.

**Generosity:** Be generous with your time. This is a time and space for all to share with equal amount of time and not a time to control the conversation. Be generous with your emotions and support. Sometimes the topic is difficult and we may need to support each other.

**Courage:** Allowing oneself to share in this circle setting can be scary. Some of us are fearful of public speaking. Some of us may be fearful of taking this opportunity to be equal with everyone. Some of us may be fearful of giving up power and control, or of a new process, yet others of expressing our emotions. Most of us are nervous in some way or another. Take courage; you are not the only one. Be willing to risk. We will respect silence but also ask to take courage to share.

**Compassion:** Strive to walk with others and yourself with empathy and sympathy remembering that we are all connected and in this together. Be a co-journeyer with one another and be ready to support one another.

**Fortitude:** The topics and reason for circles often can be quite difficult. We will need to be patient and tolerant with others and keep an open mind because you may hear difficult things that evoke strong emotions. At times we may need to embrace the uncomfortable and will need fortitude to do so. The circle process itself is difficult if it is new to you. Be patient with yourself.

## Additional Resource: Important Qualities of Authentic Relationships across Differences

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By Karen Pace and Dionardo Pizaña, Michigan State University Extension, June 2003.  
Reproduced with permission.

Our commitment to the ongoing process of developing an authentic relationship across racial and gender differences has helped us to identify important foundational qualities of our relationship. These characteristics are essential to building trusting and lasting relationships across race and gender within a society that continues to be grounded in racism, sexism and other forms of oppression. It has also been important for us to recognize that, although much of our work in developing an authentic relationship has occurred on the personal and interpersonal levels, our relationship is also deeply impacted by institutional and cultural systems that have influenced our behaviours and defined our privileges – or lack thereof. The following characteristics have been important to us in creating and nurturing an authentic relationship across race and gender:

- **Willingness and eagerness to be challenged.** I understand that out of the challenge comes a deeper understanding of my privileges and the continued work that I must do to remain in an authentic relationship.
- **Willingness to not be in a place of denial and resistance.** I know that denial and resistance maintain power and pain and serve only to block the growth and understanding of myself and others.
- **Willingness to look first at myself when feelings of mad, sad or scared surface.** When these emotions surface, I ask myself first what is going on with *me* rather than becoming defensive, judgmental or critical of others. I focus on what my feelings are telling me about what I need. I communicate my feelings and needs with the goal of staying in right-relationship with others.
- **Willingness to remain humble.** I don't know what I don't know – and I will never know everything.
- **Willingness to recognize and own my places of privilege.** I am clear that authenticity in relationships cannot happen if I do not confront my privileges, own them and work at using them differently – from a place of empowerment rather than guilt or shame.
- **Willingness to avoid “hierarchy of oppression” debates.** I understand that oppression exists in many forms and at many levels. I resist the temptation to try to convince others that “my pain is greater than your pain.” I work toward unveiling the interconnectedness of “isms” (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism) in order to create change at the personal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural levels.
- **Willingness to hear the anger and rage of target group members without taking it personally.** I know that anger and rage are the understandable by-products of oppression. I do not become defensive or take it personally when people in target groups need to talk about their anger and pain in powerful ways.
- **Willingness to be compassionate with myself and others.** I understand that I am no good to myself or others if my existence is centred in guilt, shame and anger. Compassion for myself – while owning my points of privilege and power – will allow me to be able to provide the same for others.



- **Willingness to be patient with myself and others.** I am keenly aware that multicultural growth and change are slow and sometimes painful processes. I remain committed to my own learning and change process, and resist the urge to give up on myself or others when “the going gets rough.”
- **Willingness to be on the journey of growth, learning and change for life.** I understand that authenticity is not a one time conversation or interaction. I put myself in places which provide ongoing and lifetime opportunities for continued growth. I am committed to being “under construction” and de-construction for a lifetime.
- **Willingness to be an active listener even when I am not ready to hear.** I appreciate that active listening assists in my personal understanding, growth and learning. As I listen, I am open to accepting “gifts” from others even though they may not be gift-wrapped in ways that are most familiar or comfortable to me.
- **Willingness to remain in relationship.** I realize that most of us are not practised or proficient in authentic relationship-building because of the pain of oppression in our lives. This is not a prescriptive process. It is fluid, continually open for redefinition, nurtured, open to tension and designed to create sustainability.
- **Willingness to be honest and trusting.** I understand that I need to work very hard and over time to build trust and honesty in relationships across differences. Oppression and “isms” have not supported the development or presence of either of these relational characteristics.
- **Willingness to be grounded in integrity.** I know that I am only as good as my words and actions. Being an individual of integrity will lead to building and sustaining trust.
- **Willingness to maintain a relationship grounded in safety and healing.** I fully understand that this is not an easy process and that there are times when I need to be aware of my personal and spiritual safety. I am also aware of what I need to heal myself as I unveil realities which redefine my world and which challenge my power and privilege – or lack thereof. A commitment to a healing process assists in my ability to continue to be fully present in authentic relationships.
- **Willingness to understand the power of language.** I know that language is a primary way in which we communicate our thoughts and ideas – and that language has been influenced by racism, sexism and systems of dominance that contain inherent biases, prejudices and power. I am open to understanding and unravelling my use and misuse of language.
- **Willingness to focus on the impact of my words and actions rather than my intentions.** Well-intentioned racists and sexists are simply that – racists and sexists. Focusing on the impact of my actions rather than the intentions, allows me to challenge my points of privilege and work toward more meaningful and authentic relationships across difference.
- **Willingness to hold both joy and pain in relationship.** I am clear that authentic relationship-building across human differences brings me pain at times as we challenge each other and ourselves. I am also energized regularly by the abundant joys that come with a truly authentic relationship across race and gender differences.

## Acknowledgements

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Coalition members and friends at a recent gathering in Sioux Lookout. Photo by C.A. Kelly.



## Notes

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