



Creating Cultural Safety in a Mainstream Organization

THE ALPHA HOUSE AND ABORIGINAL FRIENDSHIP CENTRE OF CALGARY STORY

Aboriginal Homelessness in the Calgary context

- ▶ 53% of the Homeless population in Alberta reside in Calgary (Alberta 2014 Point in time count)
- ▶ Aboriginal peoples make up 21% of Calgary's Homeless population (Alberta 2014 Point in time count)
- ▶ 2.5% of the total population in Calgary are Aboriginal
- ▶ Calgary Homeless Foundation data (2008/2009) showed that Aboriginal individuals who are homeless compared to non Aboriginal counterparts have the following attributes:
 - ▶ On average younger
 - ▶ Lower education levels
 - ▶ More likely unemployed
 - ▶ Twice as many hospitalizations in past year
 - ▶ More likely to report having been attacked
 - ▶ More likely to have a brain injury
 - ▶ Self-reported substance abuse higher
 - ▶ Twice as likely to have been homeless > 10 times

Enhancing service and program delivery through partnership



- ▶ **Alpha House**
- ▶ *"To provide a safe and caring environments for individuals whose lives are affected by alcohol and other drug dependencies."*
- ▶ **Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary (AFCC)**
- ▶ *"is committed to a holistic and traditional approach in the development and provision of services and resources for Aboriginal peoples of Calgary."*

History of collaboration—November 2009

- ▶ Alpha House
- ▶ provides a continuum of programs including shelter, detox, outreach and housing
- ▶ Aboriginal peoples represent 50% of Alpha House client population across programs
- ▶ Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary (AFCC)
- ▶ begins an new Homelessness Outreach program focusing on meeting the needs of street involved Aboriginal peoples
- ▶ staffed by one outreach worker



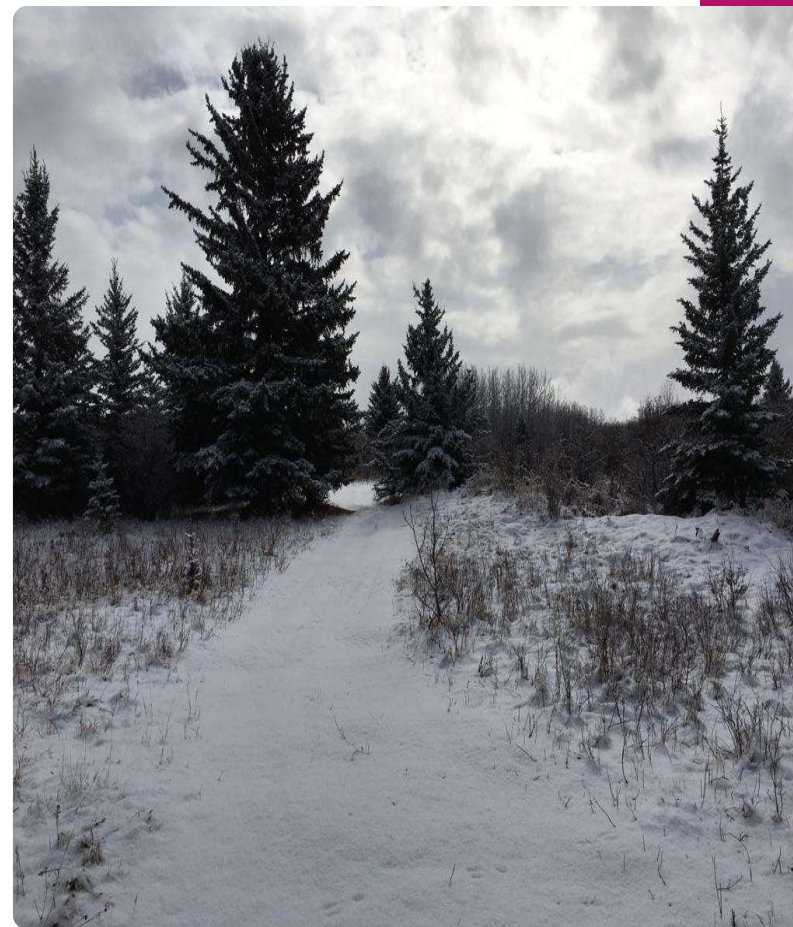
Sweat lodge on T'suu T'ina Nation—7 years of Ceremony

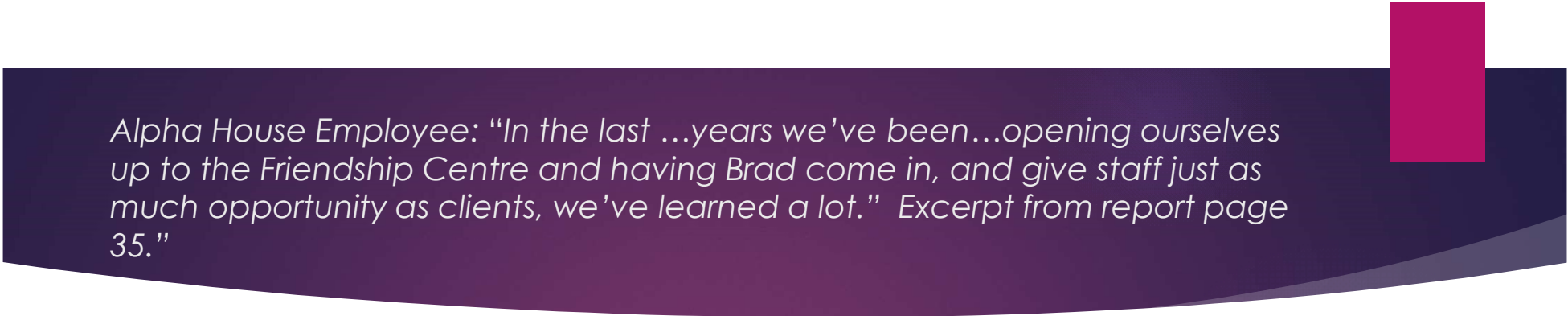
"I had a beautiful experience at the Sweat Lodge. I came here depressed, having bad thoughts and after the sweat lodge, I feel great, like a weight has been lifted from my mind, heart and spirit." Excerpt from a client feedback survey

Journey to the Lodge

The Cultural programming offered through the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary and Alpha House has been provided without conditions and prerequisites that are frequently required from other programs such as abstinence from drugs and alcohol, having to access treatment first, or housing stability.

" I love to share extensively with respect to making a prayer as an Aboriginal woman. This is my way of life in spite of all the hard times of addictions and street affliction. This is the best and only viable access to healing...Alpha House and the Friendship Centre deserve so much recognition socially and politically with respect to the help people are receiving." Excerpt from a client feedback survey.





Alpha House Employee: "In the last ...years we've been...opening ourselves up to the Friendship Centre and having Brad come in, and give staff just as much opportunity as clients, we've learned a lot." Excerpt from report page 35."

- ▶ Sharing ceremony, prayers, sundance and sweatlodge practices is a key concept that is part of the Aboriginal worldview that contributes to relationship development.
- ▶ The opportunity for staff and clients to equally access traditional practices at Alpha and AFCC has contributed to a deeper and more respectful relationship among clients and staff.
- ▶ **The experience at Alpha House and AFCC with traditional ways, has been to offer access to ceremony as an invitation, as an opportunity to experience a different way of healing.**
- ▶ **The invitation has been accepted by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients and staff alike who have come to witness the support as being more spiritual and relational.**

Alpha House Journey

- ▶ As told through a research study completed in 2013
- ▶ ***Understanding Cultural Safety: Traditional and Client Perspectives*** (Bird, Thurston, Oelke, Turner, Christiansen, Fisher, Ewenin, 2013). University of Calgary, Department of Community Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine)
- ▶ Link: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/wethurston/files/wethurston/cultural-safety-final-report-march-2013.pdf>



Research Goal and Approach

- ▶ Develop a theoretical framework for development of culturally safe homelessness services in non-Aboriginal or “mainstream” organizations
- ▶ A methodology that builds theory from the ground up and respects all forms of knowledge



Methods

Interviews

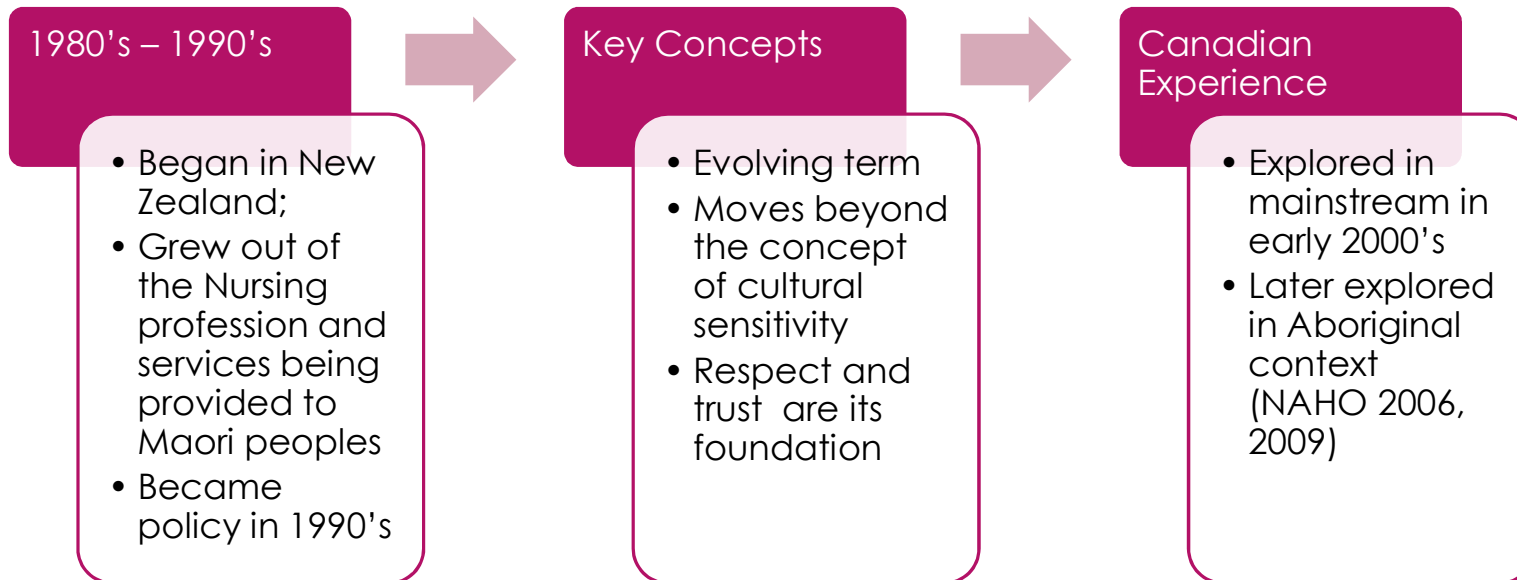
- ▶ 2 Elders working at Alpha House
- ▶ 12 Aboriginal clients who were identified by Alpha House staff
- ▶ 10 staff members

Analysis

- ▶ Individuals coding and writing and group coding and writing



Contextualizing Cultural Safety



Cultural Safety

***Cultural safety** refers to a state whereby a provider **embraces the skill of self-reflection as a means of advancing a therapeutic encounter** with First Nations, Inuit, Métis peoples and other communities including but not limited to visible minorities, gay, lesbian, transgendered communities, and people living with challenges. Self-reflection in this case is under-pinned by an understanding of power differentials.*

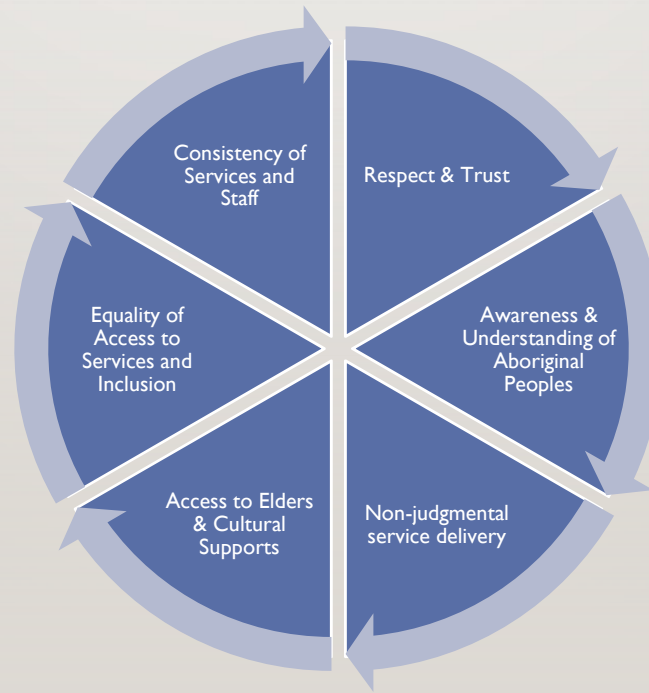
For First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities this power imbalance is unequal and can be seen as a residual element of colonization and act as a barrier to facilitating the health and healing for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis citizens of Canada.

Providers should be able to understand their own biases and prejudices, and how racism might play a role while providing care to these diverse communities

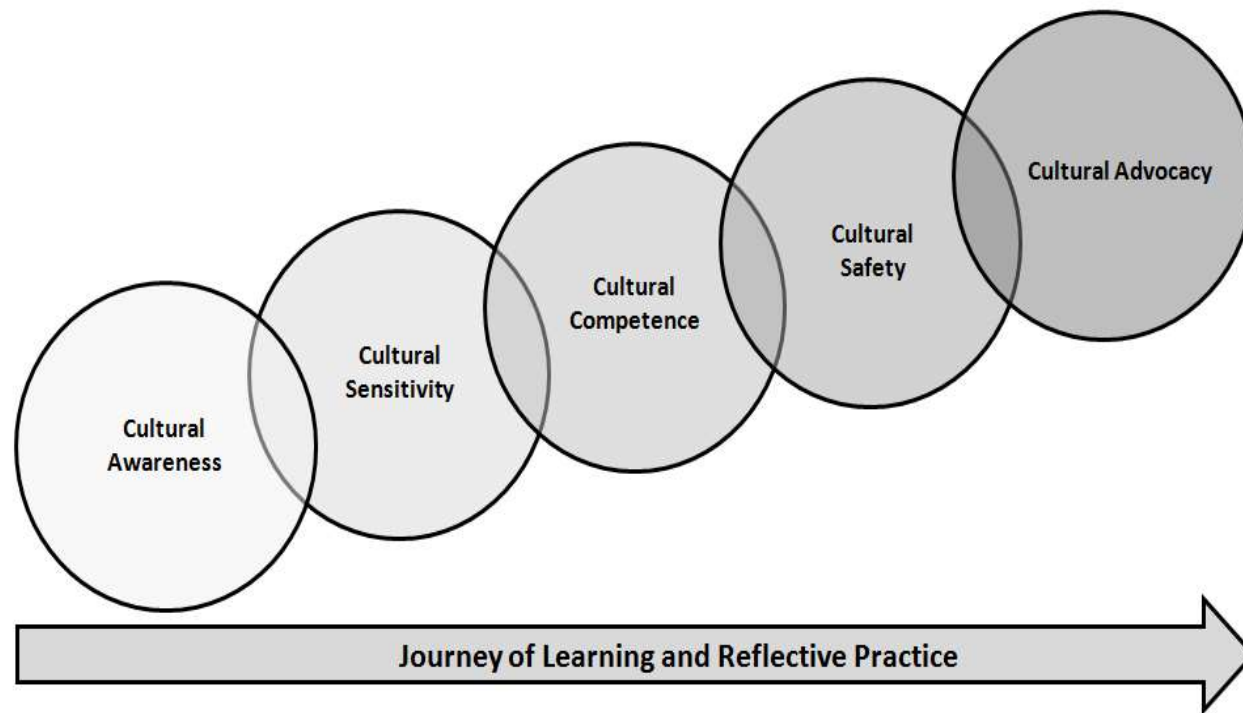
Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada and the Association of Faculties of Medicine in Canada, 2009

COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS OF CULTURAL SAFETY AMONG CLIENTS, FORMER CLIENTS, ELDERS AND STAFF

*(Brad): "Homelessness is almost like an institutionalization; people learn to survive in a certain way and part of that is routine; you get to know a routine, and you make room for that routine in your life. Like a lot of folks will use like crazy but coming towards a sweat day, they'll take a few hours off, make sure they're here, get their lunch, they're on the van. That's one of the hugest portions I think of, (cultural) safety is the continuation of services."
-excerpt from page 19 from report*



Concepts: Cultural Competencies

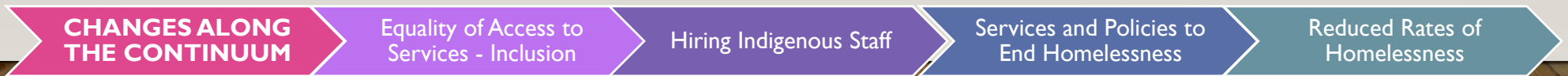


Oelke, Thurston, Arther (2013). Intersections between Interprofessional Collaborative Practice, Cultural Competency and Primary Healthcare

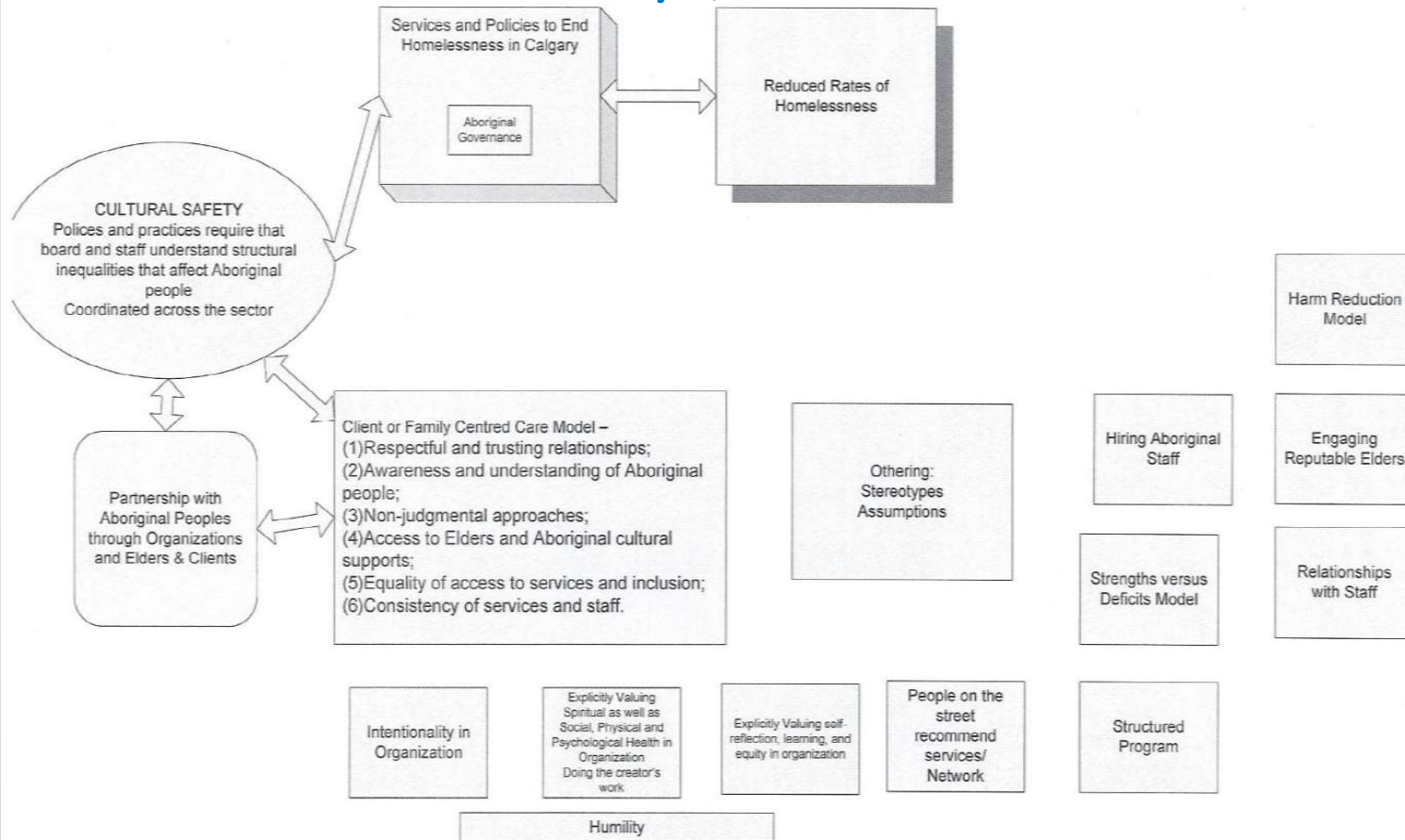
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING CULTURAL SAFETY IN MAINSTREAM ORGANIZATIONS

Alpha House Calgary Experience

CULTURAL COMPETENCY CONTINUUM – BUILDING BLOCKS



Theoretical Framework for Cultural Safety Project, 2013



Alpha House Employee: “ We will never address homelessness unless we have culturally safe services.” Excerpt from page 50 of the report.

Recommendations

- ▶ **Primary Recommendation**

- ▶ *“Our one recommendation is that funding bodies provide motivation and practical financial support for projects that help organizations move along the cultural competencies continuum.”*



Reflections.....Questions