

Konnichiwa, BooShoo, Hello

My name is Lydia Sherman. I live in Sioux Lookout. North of us are 32 small communities, all fly-in communities except two. I am Indigenous/First Nations. I am fluent in my language Oji-Cree.

Growing up, my dad was a fisherman, in the summer and a trapper in the winter. We went camping, in the spring time, all summer and part of the fall. We ate fish, wild food- moose meat, rabbits, ducks, goose etc. and various berries. We moved from campsite to campsite as we followed the movements of the wild life including the fish. My mom cooked on the wood stove or made fire outside to cook, to bake bannock and tea, perked coffee We ate mostly blueberries and raspberries.

My dad was also a hunter and we lived from the land. We lived in tents for the summer, spring and fall months. We lived off the land, water and nature. We were surrounded by nature, trees and lakes. We loved nature. It was healing and healthy to be around nature. Sometime in my early 20's. I finished a 2-year business course in college. I had no interest in business. Although my dad wanted me to take business, my heart was not in

business. My heart was with my people. I wanted to help people and be with them.

In my late teens and early 20's, I lost a brother and very close friend both tragically. There was no counselling and support available back then. I did find a place, a refuge to go to I called it. People at that place took me in occasionally and listened. This lead me in my early 20's to know I wanted to be in the helping field. I wanted to reach out to people and help them - adults, children, young people, families and older people.

I've worked in the Social Work/Mental Health field, thirty-five plus years inclusive. In the last five years, I have been working with a First Nations Organization as a Mental Health Counsellor with a Mental Wellness Team.

In the early 1980's, I started working with mental health at the old Zone Hospital (Joyce showed you a picture of it). Initially, there were 2 non-Indigenous counsellors doing this work. Sometime in the early 80's, they recognized the need for First Nations counsellors, who knew their culture and language. We started with 2 counsellors and expanded to four or six First Nations counsellors. Some of us travelled and flew to much

smaller communities monthly. We travelled in a small four- or six-seater planes to the cold North.



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Upon arrival in the small northern community, we sometimes stayed in a small one room cabin with no running water or electricity. Eventually, there was running water and electricity in the little cabins.



Photo taken by Joyce Timpson

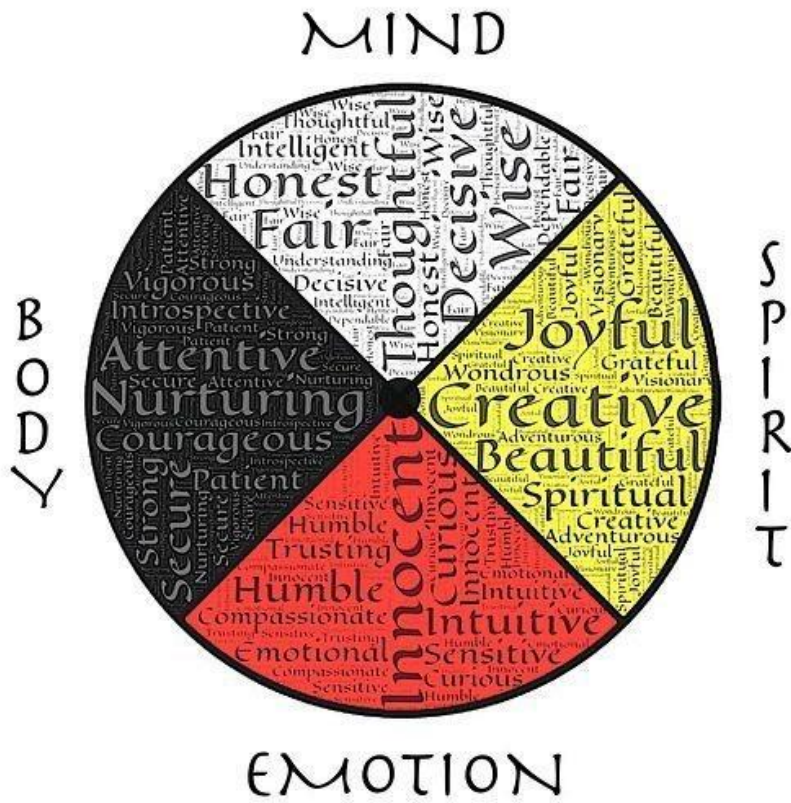
We would stay up there for one week to work. Sometimes, we travelled with a psychiatrist and worked with him or her. Sometimes a nurse worked in the community sometimes not.

Right from the beginning of working in this field, we were trained in various mental health aspects and basic counselling skills, by the Mental Health clinical staff and by psychiatrists. We also worked with 3 Elders, 2 female and one male. The Elders that worked alongside with us provided support and training from the cultural aspect.

An Elder that I worked with said that our work is like the "wind". He said something like this: We cannot see the wind. Sometimes, we hear and see the effects of the wind. He said the wind can be calm and destructive. He also said that the wind can be a guide. He said when we work and see people, we cannot see their emotions or feelings. We don't know what they are carrying inside

their heart. There could be a lot of sadness, confusion, anxiety in their life. He said listen and be patient. This is their time, not your time. Sometimes it will take time. That's our job to find out what is bothering them. What, where do they want find help in. He said, "Walk the walk." of the person you are working with. Guide them in the "Path", they are walking on. He also said we can help them by talking to them and vice versa, but they might have other physical needs like having no water, or needing help with wood, which we cannot overlook.

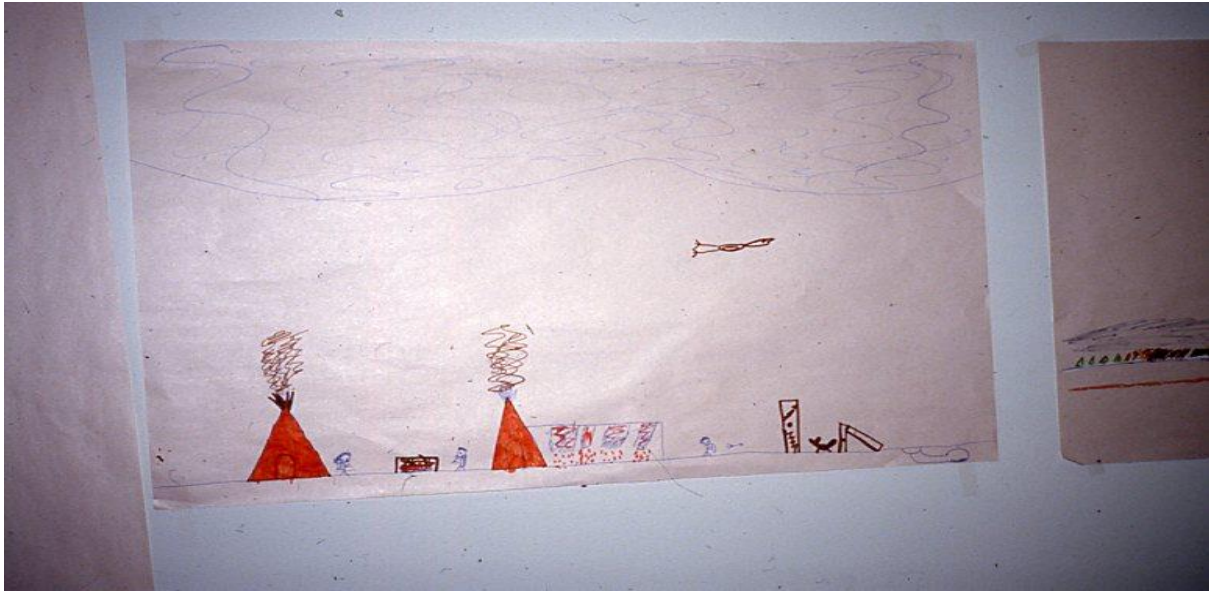
So, in the early years of my work, I looked at all the needs of the individual. I worked with what I called, the, "Sphere." It involves the, Physical, Emotions, Psychological and Spiritual of the individual. Indigenous social workers now call this a Medicine Wheel. I had not heard the name before and just knew that was how I was to approach the person.



As time went on, when in the helping field. I travelled to the Northern communities to work. Rather than working in an office or "box" as some people called it (which felt isolating for some people), I took the advantage of seeing and taking people out to nature. As, I grew up with nature as a young child. It appeared to be more therapeutic to the client, to go out to nature and sit by the shore by the lake, or the banks of the river watching the busy beaver, going back and forth building his home, listening to the sound of nature, like small water falls, watching slow-moving rapids, was more therapeutic for the individual. It enhanced their physical, emotional and

spiritual strength. It appeared each time it, the process of sharing and healing was taking place.

As many people have difficulty expressing their emotions as a result of Residential Schools, I also use non-verbal methods of expressing emotions such as Art Therapy or having the person make a Collage of their life. It was another way of helping and forming communication with individuals, who needed assistance in communication by writing and drawing. It slowly helped the individuals in moving on with counselling. Art Therapy benefited some individuals. Under the guidance of an Art Therapist, we learned what some of the drawings meant. For example, if the picture is all dark, it might mean the person was depressed. This picture shows a child drawing Teepees with an airplane flying over, shows the differences in cultures.



Some of the other things we use is the Collage. It is cutting and using pictures and letters from used magazines or old news papers, and pasting and glueing them on paper. It was hands on activity and was therapeutic for the individual (s) helping them to focus in a less threatening way than talking. Both Art Therapy and Collage are therapeutic. They help people process their feelings and thoughts

Here is an example of a worker in a training session about Collages doing his own life story. One thing we believe is that people must participate in their own healing before attempting to heal others.



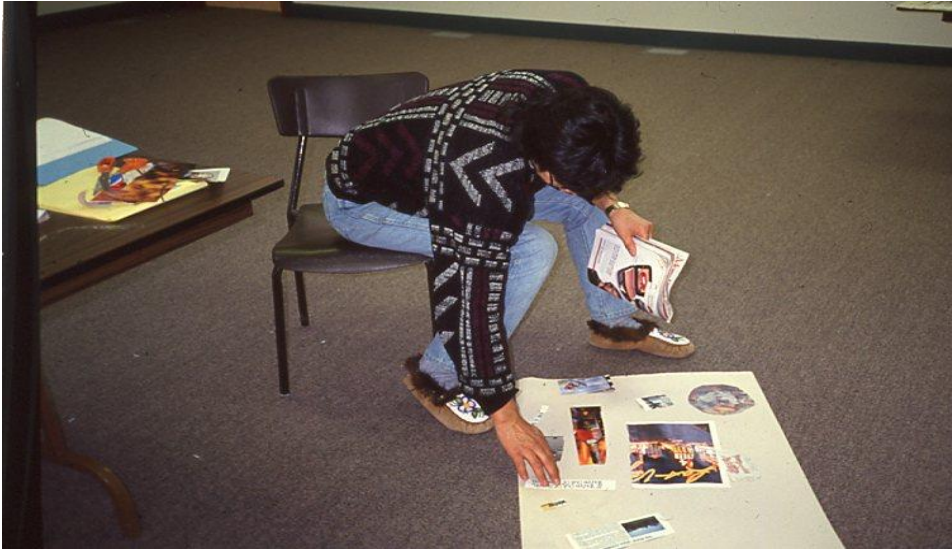


Photo taken by Joyce Timpson

Joyce mentioned the historical things that happened to our Indigenous People and the Intergenerational Trauma. Here are examples of how this affected my family and my people:

In the 1940s and 1950s Tuberculosis invaded the communities in the north. A lot of people had T.B. and were taken from their homes to T.B. sanitariums in various parts of Ontario and Canada. Both children, young adults and adults. Families were separated for long periods of time. My dad had tuberculosis. He was gone away and in the sanitarium for a total of five years before he came home. So, I was without a father for that time. My oldest, Auntie and youngest Auntie were also in the sanitarium, in the 50's. My oldest, Auntie, never came back and we did not know where she was buried.

Her gravesite was found sometime in the late 90's by her much older children. My youngest, Auntie also never came back, not until in the middle 1970's, to visit her homeland, for a short visit.

Residential Schools happened from the middle of 1800's until the middle of 1990's. A lot of families were separated, not by choice before the 1970s. Children as young as 5 years old were taken away from their families sometimes for many years. Children suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse. To this day a lot of families are still impacted by the Residential Schools, causing, "Intergenerational Trauma." We have to take this into account when we are counselling people to look at what someone's parents might have been through.

I, myself, never went to Residential School. My two younger sisters, one brother went to, Residential School. Those were the lonely years for me and my family when my siblings went to Residential School.

In the 60's, many Indigenous children from infants or toddlers up to the age of 16 were removed from their families by child welfare authorities. This was called the "Sixties Scoop" because it felt like a scoop. Just like with mental health counselling, non-Indigenous workers did

not understand how to work with our people to find other alternatives. These children were placed in foster and adoptive homes across Canada, the United States and even across the oceans usually with non-Indigenous families. Many of these children had parents who had gone to residential school and were suffering from its affects. Many of them now suffer from the loss of their cultural and feel lost in the white world. This is another example of the Intergenerational effects of the schools.

All of the above examples, disrupted family unity, loss of language, culture and loss of land. This caused loneliness, separation, anxiety, depression to say the least and name a few.

Today, our Indigenous people are suffering trauma and loss much of which originated from the impact of the, Residential School and loss of culture. Some cope by using alcohol and drugs.

At the same time, our Indigenous People are resilient People. In the past we acknowledged our loss but kept on moving as there were so many physical things to do to survive. Today, we are trying to return to some of those ways. We are teaching our children land based activities, teaching them our culture and our language. We are

training more people to be health care workers and social workers. More and more of our young people are going to college and university. We have taken control of services for us. First Nations are working with the government to improve our quality of life. We are on our Healing Journey.

Arigatou, Meegwitch (Oji Cree), Thank you

Lydia Sherman