

**DECEMBER 2020**

# **FINAL REPORT: UNDERSTANDING WELLNESS IN NIPISSING NATION**



**PREPARED FOR**





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The Land, The People, The Future



Canadian Institutes of  
Health Research  
Instituts de recherche  
en santé du Canada

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## **Aanii, Aaniin, Boozhoo Nipissing First Nation citizens,**

As with many things during this unprecedented time, there was some delay in the reporting of our research due to the ongoing pandemic. However, we are now happy to share with you our final research report that focused on understanding wellness and the kinds of help necessary to achieve wellness for Nipissing Nation.

A community advisory committee including June Commanda, Dwayne Nashkawa, Nancy Allaire, Kimberly Lalonde, and participating NFN Managers guided much of our work. We acknowledge these committee members and honour generations of our knowledge holders, Elders, and community members for their work in fostering mno bimaadiziwin (the Good Life). A priority for our project team was to share this community knowledge with all NFN citizens. We acknowledge that this work was possible with the support of our funders the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

We appreciate all of the stories shared and the time spent visiting our team members to gather this knowledge.

Gchi miigwech baa maa pii miinwa.

**Dr. Peltier, Dr. Manankil-Rankin, Dr. McCullough, Phyllis Anderson,  
Megan Paulin and Kanessa Hanzlik**

\*\*THIS STUDY WAS REVIEWED AND RECEIVED ETHICS CLEARANCE THROUGH NIPISSING UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT, CONTACT: ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR, NIPISSING UNIVERSITY, 100 COLLEGE DRIVE - F307, NORTH BAY, ON P1B 8L7 OR [ETHICS@NIPSSINGU.CA](mailto:ETHICS@NIPSSINGU.CA)\*\*

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# OUR TEAM AND ADVISORY GROUP



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Nancy Allaire, NFN Education Director  
Kim Lalonde, NFN Health Director  
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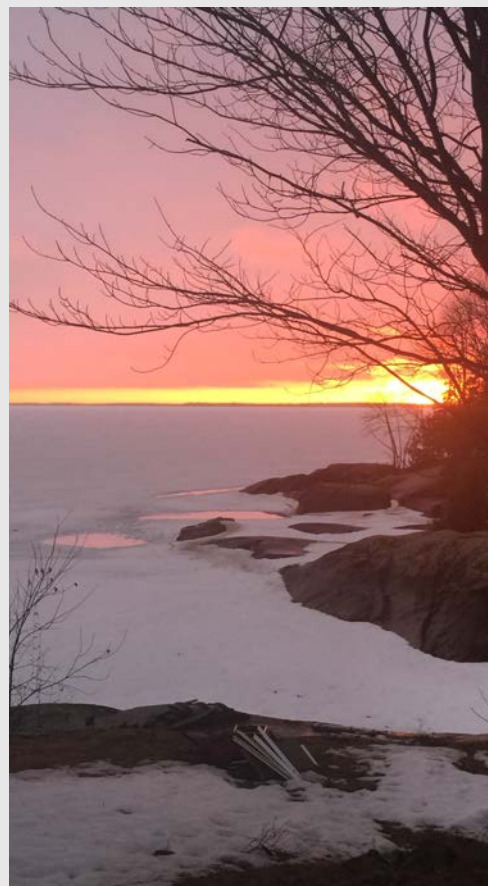
# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Indigenous peoples have unique conceptions of what it means to live well. *Wiidooktaadyang* - (we are helping one another) is a community-based model that emphasizes a relational approach to wellness. Working from this relational approach, our research team explored how Nipissing Debendaagziwaad (Nipissing First Nation citizens) on-reserve, off-

reserve, and staff understand and experience wellness. We inquired into what was perceived to be the “appropriate kind of help” to facilitate wellness. It was acknowledged by Nipissing First Nation leaders and elders that the *Wiidooktaadyang model* could be further informed by a broader understanding of wellness.

## OUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do NFN citizens (on-reserve, off-reserve, front line service providers and staff) understand and experience wellness?
- What do NFN citizens (on-reserve, off-reserve, front line service providers and staff) perceive as the “appropriate kind of help” to facilitate wellness?
- How can this understanding wellness and “appropriate kind of help” inform the existing *Wiidooktaadyang model*?



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# OUR METHODS

THIS SECTION INCLUDES THE METHODS OUR TEAM USED IN ACHIEVING THE PROJECT RESULTS.



We used a Two-Eyed Seeing approach that paired Indigenous methods with Participatory Action Research (Peltier, 2018). This pairing reflects Mi'kmaw Elder, Albert Marshall's Two-eyed Seeing and bridges Western participatory research approaches with Anishinaabe ways of being, knowing, and doing.

Conversational interviews were conducted with Nbisiing Debendaagziwaad: 30 on-reserve (given the pseudonym Eagles), 30 off-reserve (Bears), and 30 staff (Cranes).

It was important to involve an advisory committee of NFN leadership, elders and citizens in this project. In partnership with the advisory committee we developed a culturally-appropriate interview guide, we analyzed the stories together, and planned how to share this knowledge with community. We focused on strengthening capacity for research by hiring community-based research assistants and involving the advisory committee in all aspects of the research.



# STEPS IN OUR WORK

1

## GATHERING

We gathered stories:

- 30 On-Reserve NFN citizens (EAGLES) participated in face-to-face interviews
- 30 Off-Reserve NFN citizens (BEARS) participated in phone interviews
- 30 NFN front line service providers and staff (CRANES) participated in face-to-face interviews

2

## LISTENING

We listened and summarized:

- Stories were transcribed by *Transcript Heroes* in Toronto
- Research assistants listened to each recording, checked transcripts and summarized each story

3

## FOLLOWING UP

We followed up with each participant:

- Provided each participant with a summary of their interview
- Followed up with each participant 6 weeks later for corrections

4

## UNDERSTANDING STORIES

We analyzed the stories:

- Used NVIVO software to organize the codes within each story
- We always had NFN community representation involved in the coding of stories
- Presented our final themes to the Advisory Committee

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# RESULTS

Four themes emerged from the stories told by the three participant groups.



## 1. BELONGING

NFN citizens understand wellness to involve family and community.

## 2. EXPERIENCING COLONIALISM

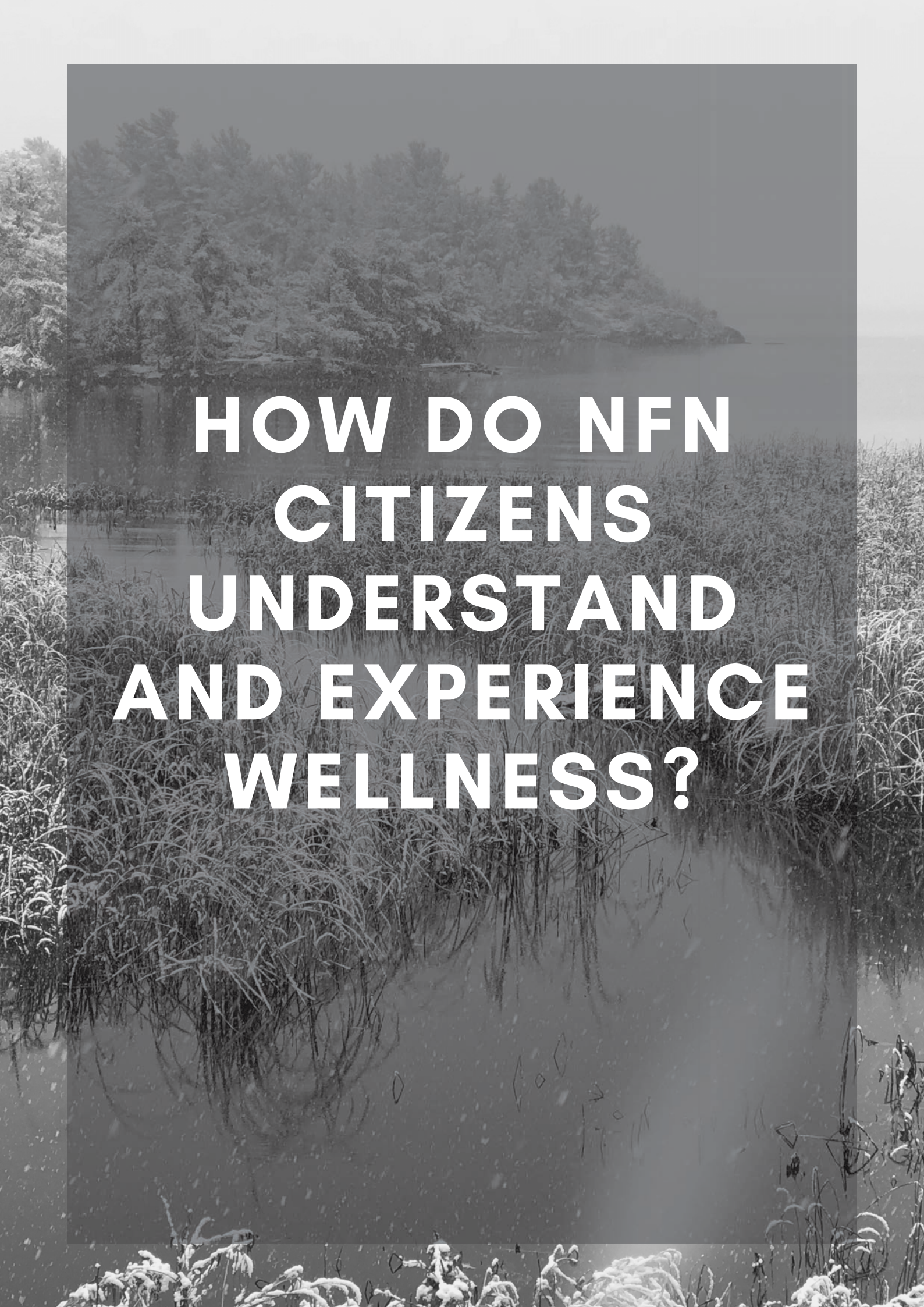
NFN citizens understand wellness to include challenges related to economics, oppression, and trauma.

## 3. LIVING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

NFN citizens understand wellness to include their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual components. It is experienced through their spirit through all stages of life, various identities, and is demonstrated through their values.

## 4. RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS WAYS

NFN citizens perceive the "appropriate kind of help" to facilitate wellness as involving: traditional practices, education, connection with land, wellness restoration, self-determination and services they receive.

A black and white photograph of a wetland landscape. In the foreground, there are tall, dense grasses or reeds growing in shallow water. The water reflects the surrounding vegetation. In the background, a forested hill rises above the waterline. The overall scene is serene and natural.

**HOW DO NFN  
CITIZENS  
UNDERSTAND  
AND EXPERIENCE  
WELLNESS?**

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# THEME 1: BELONGING

## FAMILY

*I feel good of where I am today even though with all the challenges that have been thrown at myself and my family because when you face a challenge your family faces the challenge also ... having those family values makes for a stronger group ... when I'm on Nipissing First Nation ... I kind of feel like my family is bigger and greater and stronger (Bear 23)*

*... when I harvest a moose, I share between all my brothers....they share with their family, and I share with my family... I know family is a huge thing ... (Crane 4)*

*When I moved onto Nipissing, I saw people at Little NHL and I knew of them, everybody knew who I was, whether they knew me as [Joe's\*] daughter or [Sandra's\*] daughter, and they knew my name obviously because not a lot of people are named [Sheila\*], everybody seemed to know me. People I didn't even know were my aunts were coming up to me and knew exactly who I was, I could go to the band office and everybody knows who I am ... (Eagle 4)*

\*Names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants

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# THEME 1: BELONGING

## COMMUNITY

*...there's two parts of being Native, there's one who lives on the reserve and there's one who doesn't live on the reserve. And I feel that we're both treated differently, where when I go to the reserve I feel I'm a guest, but it's not home yet and I can see the same where I've had friends who'd come off the reserve and come down to where I live and feel uncomfortable, because they feel it's too big (Bear 7)*

*The old place and events that we used to do that helped bring us to this better place was around developing relationships with one another ... developing relationships amongst our clans ... how are we developing relationships with all our members in our community (Crane 3)*

*I started dancing when I was eight ...when I was in that toxic place, I just kind of stopped going to all different ceremonies ... but when I started to get back into it with my mom, we started going to a bunch of different powwows and just the feeling of being around that drum and doing our own ceremonies that we once weren't allowed to do and just --I don't know how to describe it but there is this part (Eagle 9)*

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# THEME 2: EXPERIENCING COLONIALISM

## ECONOMICS

“

*The other part of the challenge was our services were not enough, like in financial resources, to all of a sudden be servicing more people because as we know funding was according to numbers. So last year's funding was according to that number, and now this year we have this number, but in the meantime make do (Eagle 17)*

*Single people. They need housing. And I told council, there's street people here, but they sleep on couches. They'll stay awake at their aunt's over there. Next week, they're over at somewhere else. They need housing, those – that's why we have single housing (Crane 5)*

*I think about things like housing...are we building places that we're going to tear down in 20 years or are we building things that our grandchildren are going to still be able to use and have....things like hempcrete and solar power and wind power ... all these things that can have physical and like economic impact... in terms of wellness of the land... that's a really important thing (Bear 14)*

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# THEME 2: EXPERIENCING COLONIALISM

## TRAUMA



“

*The problem just isn't what happened to the people in the residential schools, it's what happened after that, after they had children, after they went and took their anger and everything out (Bear 3)*

*And it was dysfunctional right from the beginning, there was lots of fighting, lots of, I remember my mom being physically abused, I remember her being hit (Eagle 6)*

*For me, the big thing was the residential school. So, like at a very young age, like my father died when I was six and I didn't understand death. Like I still waited for him to come home (Crane 5)*

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# THEME 2: EXPERIENCING COLONIALISM

## OPPRESSION

“

*Yes, and the residential schools were such a successful thing in this area ... those people that went there, there was certainly lots of cases of abuse that came out of there. But abuse in such a way that they felt fortunate they were able to go there and they're happy that Jesus and God was brought into their life not realizing the abuse that even that mind set gave them (Eagle 18)*

*So I was part of that and right there I hit like a crossroads because then a lot of people would tell me to put like First Nation status on my resume but if I gave that resume to someone else, I felt like it could be discriminated against (Crane 17)*

*And if you have to go to the hospital, the treatment is not the same ... I was in for a heart attack, in emergency, and the doctor came out. He wouldn't come in the room. It's curtains, but he wouldn't come in ... they view us in a negative aspect ... They don't seem to realize Native people are just like everyone else, just a different colour, that's all ... either they're afraid, or they view us as drunks, all of us. That's the feeling I get (Bear 3)*

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# THEME 3: LIVING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

## PHYSICAL



“

*From having an illness that almost took away my lung capacity and my kidneys, bumping into this allopathic medical system that really couldn't give me an answer. I really did start to turn towards traditional medicines ... trying to find other alternative ways of healing (Bear 13)*

*I know one time they were having the senior's walk or something, senior's program, you know, exercises and whatnot ... I wish there were more exercise classes where you could go and somebody would lead you in a class (Crane 1)*

*... the physical, the mental and the spiritual, and she's all packaged into one ... sometimes my head would go one way, my heart would go another way and my body would go another way, I was never connected. And then, since my sobriety, I started looking at it as ... all connected. And I love the medicine wheel 'cause that expresses that ... and knowing what wellness was (Eagle 13)*

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# THEME 3: LIVING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

## MENTAL/EMOTIONAL



“

*Those sad emotions will probably never go away but I have it in perspective now and I've talked about it and I've shared it with counsellors and with elders and in my healing alone talking about it has helped me to deal with it (Crane 9)*

*There's an opioid crisis going on ... I'd like to see an Aboriginal clinic in the city ... for addictions ... We have youth that have gone in the wrong direction and it would be nice to see some kind of addiction centre with traditional medicines and healing and elders to talk to in the city (Bear 11)*

*So when you used the word mental, people thought you were mentally ill - then it's to try and get that information out there so it's understood to be ... part of our health. So if we're not happy, if we're sad, if we're depressed, and we kind of know why but we don't quite know how to get out of that state of mind. That's unwellness of course - it's just a way I think the society always thought of health is only physical (Eagle 17)*

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# THEME 3: LIVING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

## SPIRITUALITY



*I was denying who I was as both Anishinaabe and English. When I stopped this, my stress went away. I allowed myself to go out and learn from other Indigenous people. I've spent time today with an elder, and in listening to her talk ... I felt good again. It helped the spiritual which helped the mental part. I see my purpose. I see where I'm going and emotionally I'm happy (Bear 9)*

*A lot of how I'm fed spiritually happens through these two ceremonies when I'm fire keeping around the sacred fire and when I'm participating in a sweat lodge. I received lots of healing around those two ceremonies ... I've received ample healing and spiritual growth, which allows me to open myself today (Crane 9)*

*When I see those moments of wellness, we as Native people, are still connected [spiritually]. We don't need a big church. We don't need anything. When we go there in earnest and honesty, asking, we get that very beautiful feeling that comes (Eagle 5)*

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# THEME 3: LIVING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

## STAGES OF LIFE



“

*We had three daughters ... and a big discussion with them was about ... retiring ... they talk about us moving down ... They've all been good so we've been down here and connecting with family. It's quite an eye opener to see what other people are doing with their lives and their particular strength and determination (Bear 8)*

*Because we were talking about death and dying ... that's part of him releasing and enjoying telling stories ... I watch people who leave this world. I see the grieving they go through because people don't take the time to talk about the hard time, the grieving time, which is really, if you put it into perspective, it's a good time (Eagle 5)*

*When we're going to invest in wellness, we need to know what that is ... look into your programming ... we're not serving this age-group population ... this group's not really well ... have we ever given them a voice to say this is what I think we need in our community? (Crane 3)*

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# THEME 3: LIVING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

## IDENTITY



“

*I have family history on paper. That's how we got our status card, and know who we really were and how to be connected to our reserve. I'm just glad to really be known, not that I just belong to a White dad, but my mom is pure Native. I belong there too. Being registered and accepted is an amazing feeling (Bear 1)*

*I remember [Rose\*] saying that she came here after [Residential School] when she was 18. She probably never came home. She said, "I came here. Nobody knew who I was, and nobody cared". So, she left. They all leave. (Crane 5)*

*I think the key ... is to move towards a community model of wellness, which to me ... begins with identity ... One of the key things that the residential school and colonialism did to us is take away our identity. So we kind of lost those things. We're not proud, we're used to racism, we're used to those kinds of challenges (Eagle 18)*

*\*Names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants*

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# THEME 3: LIVING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

## SPIRIT



“

*Wellness would mean that we'd be able to accept our past, grow from it and open our doors for new (Bear 24)*

*We choose too much of what we think is the right way for the individual. I think the community is really on a good path. Do we take the time to reflect on what is it that we've done over the years? You could have somebody in the community come in, and one day they're feeling well, and the next day they're not. I would think our community is really on a wellness journey (Crane 3)*

*I feel very strongly that our ancestors had a lot of faith that things would change and that we would learn to live in a good healthy way with strong moral character. Their example of overcoming hardship would prevail (Eagle 13)*

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# THEME 3: LIVING THE MEDICINE WHEEL

## VALUES



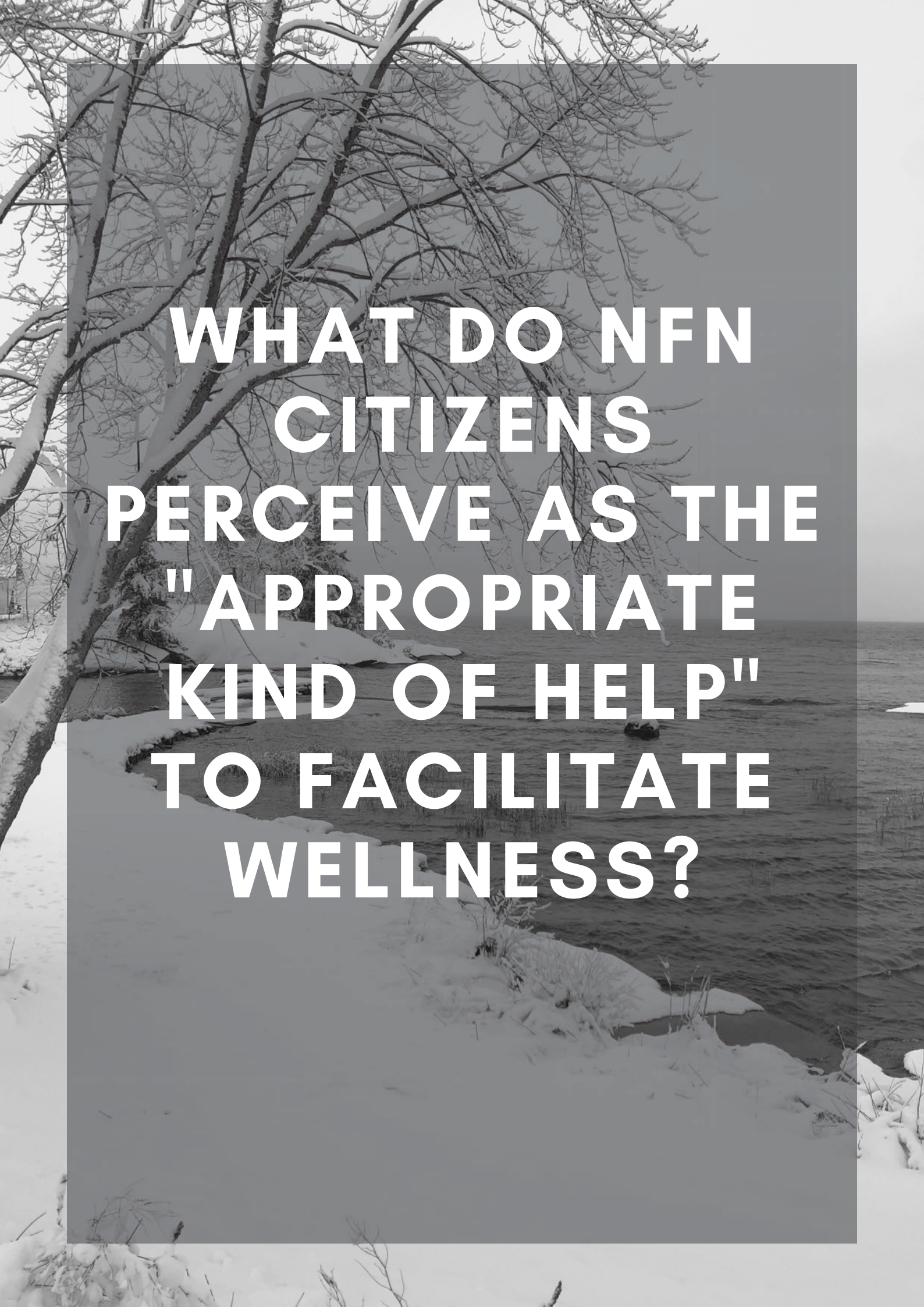
“

*You take care of your family no matter what sacrifices. I think that was my parents, that's what they believed in. I think we pick up those beliefs, too (Crane 2)*

*Good values, well, yeah, I always tried to instill family values in everything that I've done. Respect is always earned. I always wanted to give back to the community, the Nipissing First Nation community... because I always found that I was receiving a lot of benefits from being a member, even though I was not always welcome in certain areas (Bear 23)*

*... I was brought up in a large family. And you gather lots of gifts and being raised in a large family you learn all kinds of things, how to treat someone else, how to share, how to empathize, sympathize. And then you learn ... to look after the other person ... You do the best you can, you try to take care of them (Eagle 7)*

”



**WHAT DO NFN  
CITIZENS  
PERCEIVE AS THE  
"APPROPRIATE  
KIND OF HELP"  
TO FACILITATE  
WELLNESS?**

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# THEME 4: RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS WAYS

## TRADITIONAL PRACTICES



“

*Ceremony, the language, those are really big things for me and again, sustainability ... just in terms of survival, like old ways of using the land, of farming, of fishing ... I think a lot of times tended to be a lot more integrated and a lot less damaging, a lot less harmful. I think that would, just to improve the relationship to one another, to the language, to the culture, to the land ... would mean a much stronger, much more wellness in general at a community level (Bear 14)*

*We need role models, we need our language, we need our songs, we need our dance, we need our teachings, but all that stuff is happening still. It's just a slow process, and it really is getting there (Eagle 4)*

*We are Ojibway from our territory, and we have a history, and we all need to understand that, and celebrate that. We have our culture, even though we weren't able to practise it. We have to really acknowledge that, that we are Anishinabek. We're Anishinabek people, and there is teachings that come with that. There was a land base connection. There was all those things, and you hear glimmers of that from our elders, and we're trying really hard to bring that back, which has helped with wellness in the community (Crane 3)*

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# THEME 4: RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS WAYS

## WELLNESS RESTORATION

“

*Being able to really use traditional forms of medicine and alternative forms of medicine to bring back wellness where the medical system ... really didn't know what to do after that, there was no support. I was able to find support to finish off the healing that was required ... because [they] don't just consider the illness (Bear 13)*

*I think in a traditional healthcare model you forget about how sacred ... the bonds that you're creating or the confidence that you're trying to build in somebody's ability to mother or even to be a father. You're working within a whole family (Eagle 27)*

*She taught us ... when you're missing that component, that may bring imbalance in your life. Especially when you're going through transitional changes ... at least have a relationship with somebody who can help support you ... growing up, mom would talk about those things ... you can really see how the Medicine Wheel and those four components were always encouraged ... ask for forgiveness, or reconcile with that, and move on, and not to stay stuck. Like keep moving, keep challenging those things (Crane 3)*

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# THEME 4: RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS WAYS

## EDUCATION



“

*Education is part of wellness. I believe that it's enlightenment. I believe that you learn something every day and sometimes you're in a classroom and it gives you more direction being in a structured program versus just reading some books yourself (Bear 8)*

*I think with all the resources and all the things that are happening now, I think they're well on their way. Education is not just in schools, which is really nice. AEI's progressing and getting our own education established, and not just in schools, but in our homes . . . Big Medicine Studio, Aanmitaagzi. All the other things that we see on a regular basis (Eagle 13)*

*Capacity meaning they're learning new technologies ... as an example, I'm working on a study right now for a green house on Nipissing First Nation. It's a high technology greenhouse using hydroponics, cold climate, we'd be able to operate all-year round. So, it's not one that has windows, it's completely closed ... we're looking at developing that technology, hiring folks, training them in that growing method, and running a business, growing vegetables, and providing fresh vegetables all-year round (Crane 21)*

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# THEME 4: RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS WAYS

## CONNECTION WITH LAND

“

*I'm a little torn away from my ancestors in a sense that I'm not doing the things that they used to do but I want to learn them. I could never just live off the land like my ancestors did and I know a lot of our youth are learning all of those things, how to trap, how to pick medicines ... (Bear 20)*

*Hunting and fishing for me is like my therapy basically. I go out a lot of times by myself and just enjoy the nature, enjoy being outside. Just listening to the wind, listening to the birds and nature (Crane 4)*

*Best ecologist I ever knew in my life was my grandmother. She knew more about ecology than most people know in their whole friggin' lifetime. She lived ecology. Like, the things that she taught me about respecting the earth and respecting – walking through the bush and I remember slashing some trees with a stick one time, and she said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Nothing," and she said, "You don't slash trees like that, because everything has purpose" (Eagle 13)*

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# THEME 4: RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS WAYS

## SELF-DETERMINATION



“

*We should be the most stable, the healthiest, the most educated. We should have positions of leadership, as high as the prime minister - we don't have that ... It'd mean a stronger community. I think our education should get higher. I'd like to see more people in positions of leadership and more women in those positions. But if you don't have a proper home to live in, if you don't have your health, you have nothing (Bear 11)*

*The challenges I mean are dealing with government and like Indian Affairs, even simple decisions come from somebody's desk and they're not here - they don't live amongst us. They don't know what we need or what we really have. The ones that have the final decisions are on the outside (Eagle 7)*

*If we're brave enough to take the chains off of Health Canada - not totally off, as I said, because we still need them but not to let it be the overwriting, overarching thing of how we think. I think if we're brave enough to let some go and not be owned by a bigger corporation and if we start to put money into our own health ... if we really want to achieve it it's going to take some money and that's going to take bravery - and leaders in that field (Crane 29)*

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# THEME 4: RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS WAYS

## SERVICES

“

*I believe that it takes time and consistency in dealing with the hard stuff ... everyone has a role to play in community wellness whether or not you work in the community. You have to be able to address your own healing. I see a lot of people who don't really deal with their traumas and then it pours out in other ways, whether that be in the workplace or in their families (Bear 19)*

*Well you need to go out and ask the people themselves and I don't mean in letter form ... going to talk to the people, you're going to know in their own words what they feel ... There has to be trust first, trust because we've been dealing with so much paperwork, forms and then you don't really want to open up sometimes ... let the people know that you really care, that you want to know what their needs are at community level (Eagle 7)*

*... the lack of family doctors ... I'm sure there's other people who just go to emergency and see who they can see ... I think that's also a detriment, because there's probably a lot of people who have issues that can't be met with this kind of clinic ... It has to be more personal, more available – because people have different needs at different times (Crane 2)*

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# RECOMMENDATIONS



Create a space that is welcoming for members living on- and off-reserve to build a sense of community, connection, and belonging



Use the Medicine Wheel as a lens through which to re-imagine connecting community programming towards wellness



Enhance access to educational and language revitalization programs to facilitate transfer of Nbisiing ways of being, knowing, and doing



Enhance educational opportunities to build capacity in all facets of community life including leadership and sustainability

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# RECOMMENDATIONS



## HONESTY

Re-imagine health care service issues to include healing interventions connected to the land to address mental health and addiction issues



## RESPECT

Continue healing circles and ceremonies that address the impact of colonialism on identity



## HUMILITY

Re-envision a strategic economic plan that addresses the lack of employment and housing availability

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# BUDGET AND PROJECT SPONSORS



WORKING BUDGET:

**\$100,000**

Gchi miigwech to our project sponsors. This project would not be possible without the funding and in kind support provided by:

