



KNOWLEDGE
CENTRE

Sector Insights

FAMILY WELL-BEING THROUGH CULTURE & BELONGING

*A Conversation with the Family Well-being Team
of the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre*



EXCERPTS FROM A CONVERSATION WITH THE FAMILY WELL-BEING TEAM OF THE OTTAWA INUIT CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Tell us about your work and your program.

The Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC) is a multi-service agency that provides supports and programming to Inuit families in the Ottawa area and beyond. The Family Well-being program is a team at OICC that facilitates a combination of programs that aim to provide parents with support that allows families to be the best version of themselves.

In our work we offer prevention programs and activities such as weekly sewing groups, breakfast programs, family drop-ins, pre/post-natal activities, specific cultural education activities and an Inuit specific parenting program. Our Mental Health Services offer counselling for parents with an Inuk counsellor (in Inuktitut), a youth counsellor, and Trauma and Addictions groups based on Inuit knowledge. Individual supports such as crisis support, advocacy during involvement with the Children's Aid Society, escaping from domestic violence scenarios, and court accompaniment are also offered. We are pretty much the "go-to" team for families to bond and have fun and to get support or referrals, regardless of the need.

Why is culture important to child development and social emotional learning?

For Inuit, children were always the center of a very connected community. **What we often see in adults that were stripped of their culture or were raised to view their culture as a negative influence, is a feeling that something is missing from their lives** or that who they are is bad. What we all know is that children thrive when they feel safe, secure and have positive attachments. From the moment they are born, children are developing their understanding of the world and their place in it, to develop a base foundation of who they are. By learning about their cultural identity early, children can walk their path with a greater sense of connectedness and attachment to a whole community.

“BY LEARNING ABOUT THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY EARLY, CHILDREN CAN WALK THEIR PATH WITH A GREATER SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS AND ATTACHMENT TO A WHOLE COMMUNITY.”

***“HONORING
THAT PEOPLE
HAVE PRECIOUS
KNOWLEDGE
THAT DESERVES
TO BE PASSED
ALONG IN
THEIR WAY
REINFORCES
THAT THEIR
CULTURE HAS
VALUE.”***

What cultural components are part of the program and how did you decide the program components? caregivers important to your work?

In terms of the whole program, we knew that a focus on teaching the skills that made it possible for Inuit to survive the harshest climate in the world was important, but that it must be matched with an opportunity for people to start their healing journey. The result of this was a wrap-around approach to services that offered the Inuit Specific Parenting program as well as Healing circles for men and women and individual supports. The result is a very wholistic and culturally appropriate path for of growth.

The Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre (QHRC) in Nunavut researched and developed the [Inunnguiniq Parenting Program](#) in 2009 based upon years of discussions with their partners and colleagues across Nunavut and is rooted in the childrearing advice of the Elders Advisory Committee. Embedded in the format are conversation-based activities that Elders felt were important to share with future generations of Inuit in order to ensure the retention of knowledge. Topics covered include: Inuit perspectives on child-rearing and family relationships, Inuit naming and kinships, Heart-centred approach to childrearing, and Revitalizing Inuit stories and recognizing the power of story in our lives and in the lives of children, among others. [Their website has a complete list of topic areas.](#)

What have you learned from implementing the program?

We have been working with the community for many years, but this program allowed us to approach the work in a more extensive way. We piloted the Inunnguiniq Parenting program in 2016 and offered 3 times during this period. We found it interesting to see how each group had a unique atmosphere despite having some repeat participants, diverse learning styles, engaged with one another to varying extents, and involved a wide range of discussions. Repeat participants expressed that they gained a broadened perspective the second time around, which reinforced that it was a rich and stimulating program that encouraged participants to be reflective. We also saw that the **participants that accessed more than one of the programs offered (parenting program, healing circles and individual supports) had more success in working through the challenges they faced**, hence proving that the original concept was an appropriate and effective one.

What advice do you have to others who want to integrate culture in their programming?

The #1 key to success is to listen to the community you want to engage. They are the experts on what will work for them, from the type of programs they need to the days of the week that will work best to the topics that get discussed. **If you want your program to be successful it needs to appeal to the people, and they need to see themselves in it. The only way to achieve this is to listen honestly to what people are telling you.** The knowledge belongs to the community and having control over what is shared and how is very empowering.

Culture is too often represented by visual or ceremonial symbolism instead of the ways that people interact with each other and the personal relationships they naturally have, and it is often very subtle. Its facial expressions, body language, the sharing of food and building trust over time.

Take the knowledge you have gained from engaging the community and use it to create a program that reflects their culture. All too often marginalized communities are made to feel that they need to fit into another culture's "box" by trying to adapt to an existing program that may be similar. **Honoring that people have precious knowledge that deserves to be passed along in their way reinforces that their culture has value.**

Finally, as much as possible seek the advice of Elders and include them in your delivery method. They have incredible knowledge that needs to be shared and sadly, it will one day be lost. Honour them so that future generations will continue to benefit.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

You can continue the conversation on the Knowledge Centre www.otf.ca/knowledge/promising-young-people

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT OICC?

Discover what else is happening at the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre by visiting their website.

www.ottawainuitchildrens.com

