

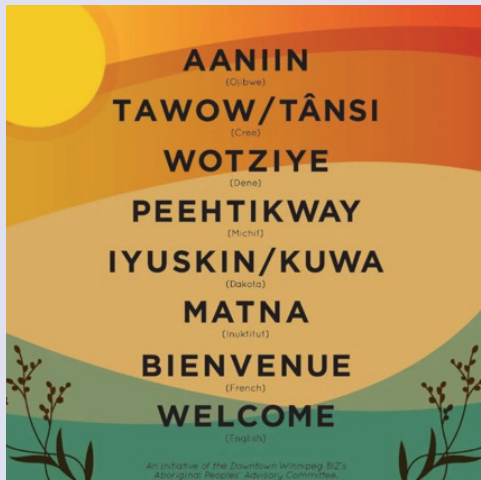
# 6

## Building Relationships Part 2: Stories from Community



video summary

(57:35 minutes)



Welcome Decal retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/downtown-winnipeg-initiative-aboriginal-welcome-1.3540620>

In Building Relationships Part Two Lewis is joined by Karen MacKenzie and Elder Betty Letendre for a conversation about how non-Indigenous organizations are working to build more positive relationships with Indigenous organizations and the Indigenous communities they serve. Karen and Elder Betty share their principles and philosophies about the transformative power of relationships and their experiences building kinship and community with large non-Indigenous organizations that have a long and difficult history with First Nations.

Elder Betty Letendre is a traditional Cree/Metis woman from the Papaschase Band and is a direct descendant of Papastewo. She grew up in the area northeast of Lac La Biche. Her parents, her first teachers, lived off the land in a traditional way. Betty is grounded in her Cree/Metis culture and traditions. She is a Cree speaker and proudly mentors Cree language students. As a champion for children, Betty is active in her community, she is an advocate for a just and safe society where all children, families and community are accepted and nurtured...a world without discrimination where all people work together towards a shared vision. In her capacity as Elder, she provides leadership to the Council of Elders and serves as Manager of Edmonton Catholic Schools: Council of Elders.

Karen MacKenzie is a proud Cree-Métis woman and the Co-Founder and President of MacKintosh Canada, an Indigenous owned, international consulting company. Karen brings her traditional knowledge of Indigenous ways into the contemporary workplace as this wisdom and way of being reflect "wise practices of purpose driven individuals, communities and organizations". Karen is a member of the Edmonton Police Commission and the Circle of Elders for Edmonton Catholic Schools. Karen is an advocate for the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She is a Senior Advisor to the Indigenous Women in Community Leadership, Coady Institute, St. Francis Xavier University. Karen was an inaugural member of the Homeless Commission for the city of Edmonton. She is a past board member for the Alberta Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) and is a member of the Advisory Council.



## module summary

*It's all about relationship!  
This module explores the  
wide variety of relationships  
we each have. How culture,  
worldview and personal  
experiences form our  
ideas about relationships.  
And how understanding  
ourselves and our place in  
the world provides a solid  
foundation for building  
relationships with others.*



## key concepts

- Kinship system to Land, Animals, Creator, Ancestors, Others, and Ourselves
- Recognizing and Honouring Our Own and Others' Humanity
- Foundations of Personal Approaches to Relationships
- Principles of Relationship Building with Others
- Tawow – welcome; there is room
- Relationships as a Cycle/Circle
- Elders and Knowledge Keepers as Resources
- Building Connection through Story, Language
- Becoming Part of Community
- Genuine Cultural Exchange

How we see the adults behaving teaches us from an early age how to be in relationship with those around us. We learn if the world is a safe place or not. When the world is not perceived as safe by children, they often internalize their distress and begin to blame themselves. The internal messages often heard is, "I'm not good enough. The world is not safe. Adults can't be trusted." When children are raised in homes full of chaos and family violence, they learn very quickly to build some survival skills, often those skills involve not telling the truth, especially to those that sit in positions of power. Children learn that they can't depend on others and that others are only here to hurt them. These messages from childhood stay with us as we grow and they stop many people, including many of the women in shelters, from applying for a job or even thinking it is possible to succeed in school or life. But, as helpers it is essential to focus on and support resilience, remembering that relational trauma is healed through relationships.

## The Circle of Courage



### **Belonging:**

In traditional Indigenous teachings, significance is nurtured in communities of belonging. Treating others as kin forges powerful social bonds that draw everyone into relationships of respect.

### **Mastery:**

Competence within traditional Indigenous communities develops naturally. Children are taught to carefully observe and listen to those with more experience. A person with greater ability is seen as a model for learning, not as a rival.

### **Independence:**

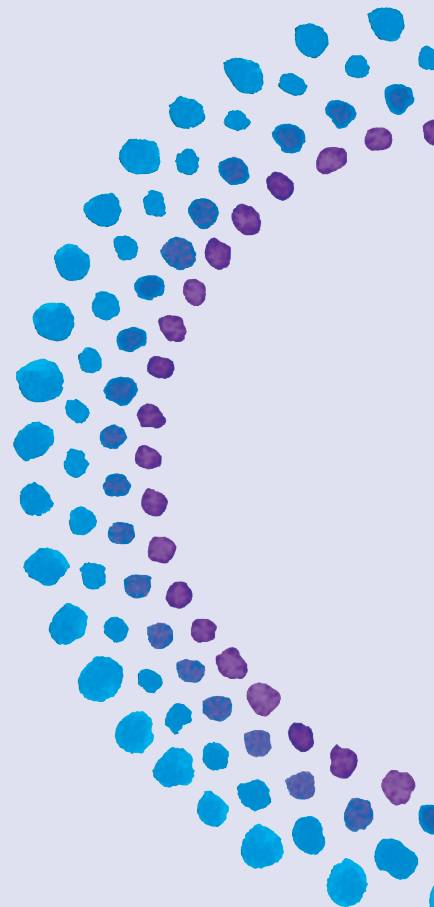
In tribal traditions, power means respecting the right for independence. In contrast to obedience models of discipline, Indigenous traditional teachings are designed to build respect and teach inner discipline.

### **Generosity:**

Finally, virtue is reflected in the pre-eminent value of generosity. The central goal in Indigenous child-rearing is to teach the importance of being generous and unselfish. In helping others, children create their own proof of worthiness as they make a positive contribution to another human life (Reclaiming Youth Network, 2007).

From [www.reclaimingyouthatrisk.com](http://www.reclaimingyouthatrisk.com)

The Circle of Courage is a model of positive child and youth development first described in the book *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our hope for the Future*, (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Bockern, 1990/2002). The model integrates Indigenous philosophies of child-rearing and new resilience research. The Circle of Courage is based on four universal needs of all children (and all people): belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity.





“Elders are so important and valuable in any given community that one cannot stress enough to use their expertise. That are eth keepers, the comforters, the counsellors, the herbalists, the medicine man or woman. They have earned their keep through actual sacrifice of their time...Especially for a person who is hurting (victims of violence) it would ne advisable to seek an Elder for a better understanding of the different ceremonies - where one could choose what would help. Once gained, it is a road to healing.”

– Agnes Littlechild, Elder



*Honouring the Spirit by Christi Belcourt retrieved from <http://christibelcourt.com/>*

*When thinking about our foundational relationships it is important to always be mindful of our place in the world and how as humans, we all need air, water and all the other things the Earth provides for us.*

As Elder Betty Letendre says, “we are all human beings, nothing else.” We cannot forget the relationship we have with the Earth, it is one of the most important relationships we have. There are many ways to be in good relationship with the land, from going to pick berries to walking barefoot on the ground or taking part in a community garden. There are many ways to become environmentally friendly. Teaching children, parents and grandparents how to plant a garden or pick medicine and berries are ways to build a family’s relationship to the Earth when other important relationships are strained or even dangerous.

Communication is the foundation to any relationship we have, including the one we have with ourselves. Karen MacKenize touches on how being healthy within ourselves, makes it easier for us to be in healthy relationships with others. When we feel confident in ourselves and the gifts we bring, we learn to trust ourselves and our ways of knowing. Mindfulness teaches how to calm our brains so we can better hear what it is saying. Praying is a form of mediation as are many Indigenous Ceremonies, it allows for introspection and creates an opportunity to move from a state of reaction to intentional action. When we can learn to communicate what it we are feeling and feel safe enough to do so we are moving towards self-determination. For many families that have experienced family violence this is a skill that must be learned and can be supported by the work of shelters.

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## Individual Self-Reflection Questions for Stories From Community

Who were the people that first taught you about relationships? What are some influential teachings about relationships, positive or negative, you have received from the Elders in your life?

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What are some of your fears and challenges you face when building relationships? How might you overcome them?

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How do you move beyond surface connections, the “beads and bannock” as Elder Betty says, to meaningful cultural exchange and experiences in your work?

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What can get in the way of “thinking with your heart” when building relationships with the women, children, families and seniors you serve? How do you balance being genuine with your professional role?

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Lewis, Karen and Elder Betty mention principles of relationship building that are important to them including respect, reciprocity, Circular/non-hierarchical, and the concept of tatawaw, “welcome, there is room”. How are these like or not like principles you consider important in building relationships? Are there any you would add?

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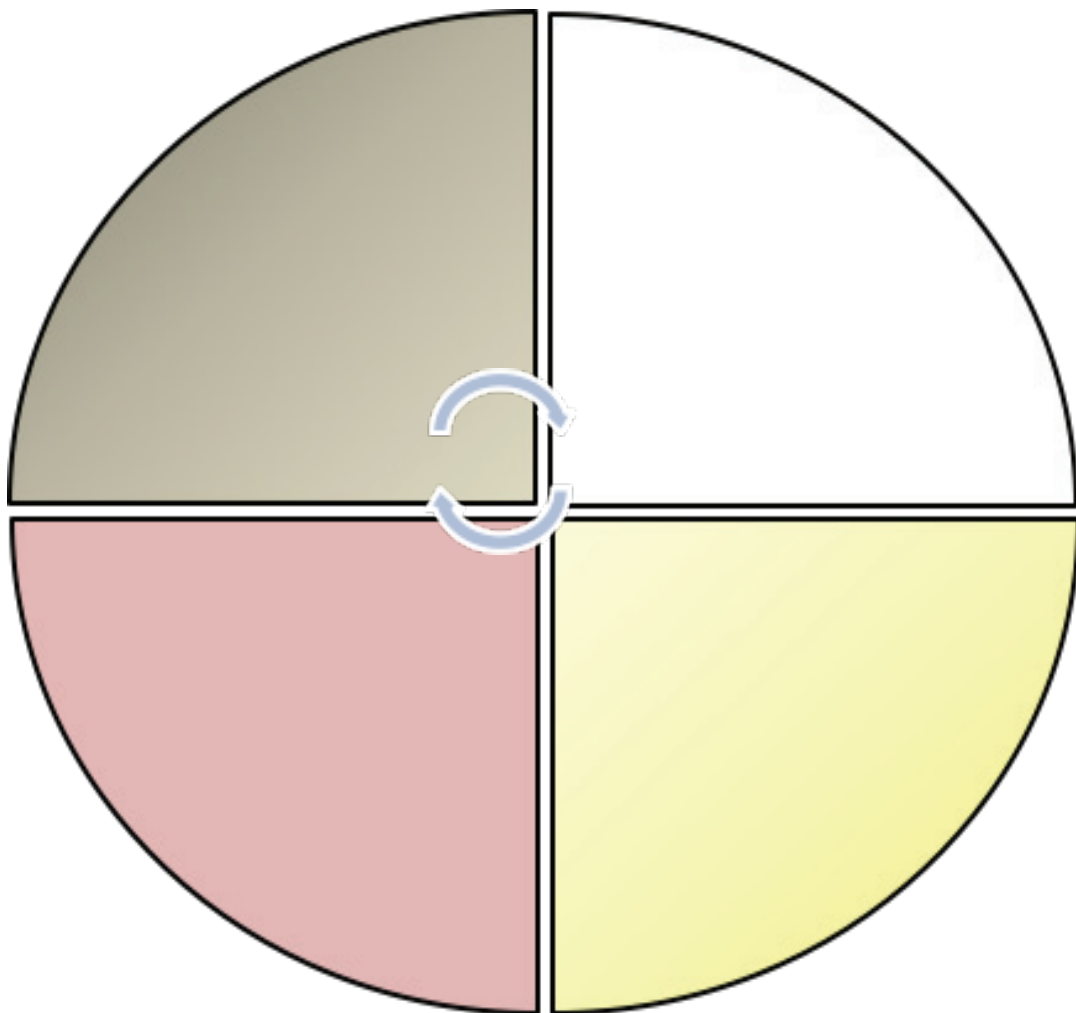
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Using the Circle of Courage below identify the ways you build relationships of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity in the work you do with women, children, families or seniors. Write those on the inside of the circle. Now think about what you would like to do more of and write those on the outside of the circle. This can be a reminder of how you would like to grow your circle of practice. How do you share power in your work?

**Belonging**

**Mastery**



**Independence**

**Generosity**

What was your most important take-away from this video?

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Borrowing Karen Mackenzie's streetlight analogy, with the knowledge you've gained today, what will you stop doing? What will you start doing? What will you continue doing?

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## Staff Sharing Circle Questions for Stories From Community

What are some of your fears and challenges we face when building relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations? What strategies can we use to overcome them?

How do we move beyond surface connections, the “beads and bannock” as Karen says, to meaningful cultural exchanges and experiences in our shelter?

Draw the Circle of Courage. Identify the ways your organization, team or program builds relationships of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity in the work you do with women, children, families or seniors. Write those on the inside of the circle. Now think about what you would like to do more of and write those on the outside of the circle. This can be a reminder of how you would like to grow your circle of practice.

What can get in the way of “thinking with your heart” when building relationships with the women, children, families and seniors we serve as well as organizations and communities? How do we balance being genuine with our professional roles?

The panelists talked about their experiences working with organizations that made high-level commitments to relationship building, making it part of the organizational ‘dream’. Borrowing Karen Mackenzie’s streetlight analogy, with the knowledge we’ve gained today, what is something our organization/team/program should stop doing? What should we start doing? What should we continue doing?

What are some questions you still have? How can we find the answers?

What was your most important take-away from this video?

The panelists talk about personal commitments to relationships building. Going back to the streetlights, what is something you will stop doing? What will you start doing? What will you continue doing?



# 6

## Women's Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for Stories From Community

Who were the people that first taught you about relationships? What are some influential teachings about relationships, positive or negative, you have received from the Elders in your life?

Draw the Circle of Courage. Allow the women to identify the what gives them a sense of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity. Write those on the inside of the circle. Now think about what they would like to do more of in each category and write those on the outside of the circle. Ask what support they need, either from the shelter or elsewhere, to grow their Circle or Courage.

What are some questions you still have? How can we find the answers?

What was your most important take-way from this video?

The panelists talk about personal commitments to relationships building. Going back to the streetlights, what is something you would like to see the shelter stop doing? What would you like to see the shelter start doing? What would you like to see the shelter continue doing?



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## References

*Principles of the Circle of Courage*, (1990/2002 Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future, Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M., & Bockern, S.)  
<https://reclaimingyouthatrisk.org/>

Book for educators and youth workers detailing the roots of discouragement in today's youth, including destructive relationships, learned irresponsibility, and a loss of purpose. How to create a Circle of Courage to give youth a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. How to mend a circle that has been broken. How to reclaim youth who are troubled or lost.

*Circle of Courage Philosophy*, (2007 Reclaiming Youth Network)  
[http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/cardev/gr9\\_found/courage\\_poster.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/cardev/gr9_found/courage_poster.pdf)

Poster detailing the Circle of Courage Philosophy described by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg and Steve Van Bockern.

### Further Learning Material

*Dr Bruce Perry Born for love - why empathy is essential and endangered* (2016 Roots of Empathy) Run time: 56:19  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gU1wXbs5mc>

Dr. Bruce Perry talks about the importance of relationships on the brain and how vital they are to ensure healthy generations to come.

