We Carry Our History with Us
Indigenous Wellness & Roots of Trauma

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Coast Salish Homelands
Vancouver, BC

Presented by Sandra Martin Harris
Adapted presentation of AFOT Shirley Turcotte
Honoring our ancestors

- It's important to recognize our homelands, to come together here in Coast Salish territory, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, close to the mouth of the Fraser River, a source of life, foods & strength for many indigenous Nations and communities in this large watershed.
- Acknowledge the ancestors for their guidance and love, and to watch over us as we do this important work.
Full weight is rarely given to the complexity and significance of contact and colonization in Canada and here in BC

Many indigenous people today carry intergenerational traumas from colonial histories of their families, villages and Nations

Indigenous people were decimated by disease alone brought by European settlers;

As Indigenous Nations were destabilized by disease relative in scope to the black plague of Europe, Wars were fought over the territories of the “New World” and Canada proclaimed itself a Nation.
Doctrine of Discovery, terra nullius and papal bulls after in 1493 for the ‘New World’
No one lived here, the lands were empty, proceed with colonial developments
seen as the “other” if seen at all
We often started with commercial relations with the ‘visitors’; they tapped in our extensive trade systems
Some treaties signed in BC
Waves of sickness quickly followed
Significant LOSS of families, elders and children from waves of epidemics; small pox, influenza, measles, TB, some ceremony, cultural practices and many healers lost too

Disconnect from land, from spirit, epidemics, segregation, loss of family, grandparents, our governing system/decision making ways were challenged; so much trauma in the early days (mid 1860’s onward)

Video installation still of ‘There’s Blood in the Rocks’ by artist Marianne Nicolson. (Marianne Nicholson/University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries);
Indigenous systems of governance, law and relationship to land were being displaced by settler ways
Sedentary living and wage labor; push for agricultural development
Imposed decision making processes/ Band Councils
The oneness, life’s breath, sacred balance to be replaced with focus on Christian religion, values and practices;
Epidemics & then close behind the reserve system (often as a form of quarantine; segregation)

1857, 1861 the first Indian schools in BC, Nanaimo, Fort Simpson, St. Mary’s & Coqualeetza...

In BC, a total of 22 schools over 100+ years in BC
- BCTF; Project Heart map
Indian Residential Schools

- Indigenous children and youth were required to attend involuntary Indian residential schooling, where they were not only isolated from their families and communities, but from wider Canadian society as well.
- In this forced isolation Indigenous children and youth were subject to what amounted to attempted cultural genocide.
- Close to 40% of the students who attended these institutions literally did not survive them. The majority of those who did survive carried extensive trauma with them;
- At least four generations of children attended IRS.
Residential schooling nearly succeeded in the goal of eradicating Indigenous languages. Indigenous children were prohibited from speaking their language or engaging in their cultural practices or protocols. Punishment was swift and cruel. Siblings were often split up, and children were sent to attend residential school in different Indigenous Nations where they spoke a different Indigenous language.
The Indigenous Nations were disenfranchised from their land and reduced to marginalized territories known as ‘reserves’ where their people were confined; pass system

Indigenous Nations were forced to adopt a band system of governance, and were prohibited from prospering from the commercial use of resources

Indigenous Nations were segregated, impoverished, and it was fully expected that they would expire; so there was need for further treaty making in BC; denial of aboriginal rights and title continues
Resistance and Adaptation

- Indigenous peoples did not simply fade into existence, we did operate solely live on reserves; many practices went underground.
- During the Indian Wars, Indigenous Nations across North America struggled for a co-existence on terms other than assimilation, integration or extermination; many served in the Wars to come back home and not recognized for their immense contributes and further mistreated.
- Indigenous people could not enter establishments that served alcohol, attend university;
- all status Indians had the right to vote in BC elections in 1949;
- Status Indian women received the right to vote in federal elections in 1960; women could vote in Band Council elections as of 1951.
After the decline of the Indian Residential School system came the emergence and rise of the child welfare system in Canada.

The “60s Scoop,” continued maltreatment, neglect and less funding for Indigenous children and youth in care.

Indigenous children today make up some 6% of Canada’s population, yet Aboriginal children and youth represent an estimated 40% of children living in foster care (Farris-Manning and Zandstra 2003).

Highest number of children in care; even higher than IRS over 4+ generations; state oppression continues

Child welfare models need to be based upon indigenous family development models; we are one
Since 2006, the Aboriginal population has grown by 42.5%—more than four times the growth rate of the non-Aboriginal population over the same period.

In BC, a 38% growth rate since 2006.

The Aboriginal population is young. The average age of the Aboriginal population was 32.1 years in 2016—almost a decade younger than the non-Aboriginal population (40.9 years).

Close to 44% of Aboriginals in Canada now live on reserve, and 56% of Aboriginals live in urban areas (Statistics Canada 2017). Regions vary.

All stats are Statistics Canada 2017.

Between 2001 and 2026, the population of Aboriginals between 15 and 29 is projected to grow by 37% compared with 6% for the general Canadian population (Hull, 2008).

The social determinants measure many things – shares our illnesses
Social determinants of health

Some things are measured:

- Diabetes, childhood sickness & mortality
- Chronic disease
- Over use of prescription drugs
- Our people leave – death by suicide, self harm, addictions
- Smoking
- Hospitalization
- Some Others...?
Intergenerational Trauma

- Many Indigenous people today carry traumas from our diverse histories.
- Despite the diversity of histories, Indigenous people share common histories of the epidemics of contact, the disenfranchisement of Indigenous nations from their ancestral territories, the imposed reserve and band systems, residential schooling, missionization and bans on Indigenous culture, the child welfare system, health, education and the continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples and nations.
Our big hurt

- Our big hurt – we carry it with us
- It sits in our bodies
- Trauma impacts everyone differently
- We need to learn what it is and how we can take care of this big hurt, to not carry this shame and have more wellbeing, more indigenous wellness in our lives; let's consider that too
- There are different kinds of trauma – we have what people consider complex trauma
- Let's learn a little more about trauma
Awit zah, that’s all. Sne cel yegh, with thanks!