



Heather Sauyaq Jean Kwamboka Gordon,

# Indigenous Culture: Protecting and Healing

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2023 National Tribal TANF  
Technical Assistance Meeting

# Agenda



- Introduction/Welcome
- Identifying our Strengths: Culture
- Taking Care of Ourselves: Self Care
- Connectedness: Relationships
- Healing Together
- Toward the Future: Solutions
- Reflection

# Meet the Presenter: Heather Sauyaq Jean Kwamboka Gordon

- Iñupiaq, Nome Eskimo Community
- PhD in Indigenous studies
- Research Scientist II at Child Trends
- Native Children's Research Exchange Scholar
- Board Member for the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States
- Committee member on the National Academy of Sciences Co-Production of Environmental Knowledge, Methods, and Approaches study
- Co-lead for the 2023 Global Indigenous Youth Climate Change Summit

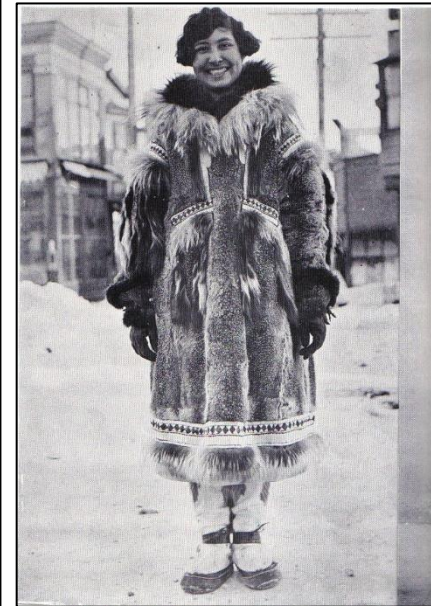
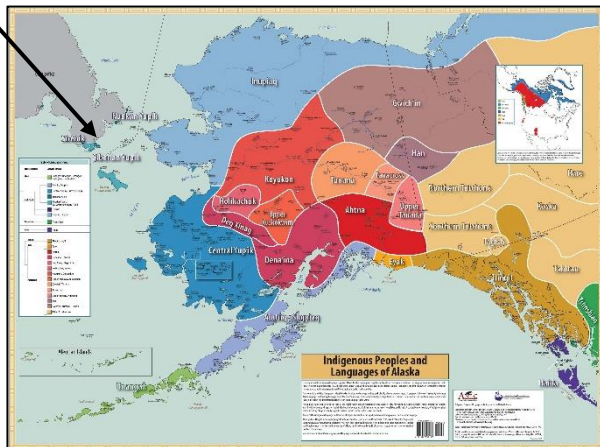


# Honoring our Ancestors and Creating Space for Generations to come...



From the left: My great great grandmother Ella Kaguna Becker, my great grandmother Margaret Cecila Becker Yenney, and my grandmother Mary Jean Kaguna Yenney.

Nome, AK



Resilience through Indigenous Knowledge, language, and culture

# Land Acknowledgements



An acknowledgement is just the beginning...

To see on whose lands you sit, visit <https://native-land.ca> and zoom in

*Learn more about Land Acknowledgements at:*  
<https://native-land.ca/about/why-it-matters/>





# A Threaded Connection: Being in Community with Partners, Programs, and Relatives



# Identifying Our Strengths: Culture is Protective



## Enculturation and Identity

Enculturation is the process through which Indigenous people learn about their own culture, identify with it, and are embedded in it.

## Traditional activities/games

Include storytelling, pow-wows, carving, canoeing, beadwork, basket weaving, sewing, and games such as lacrosse, stick games, Eskimo Indian Olympics, and others.

## Relationship to the Land

A relationship-based approach to life, believes all forms of life, including humans, the land, waters, plants, and animals, are all sacred kin.

## Social Connectedness

Accountability, responsibility for the wellbeing (reciprocal kinship) of one's self, family, friends, neighbors, Elders, community, and culture, with intergenerational connections.

## Indigenous Languages

Learning one's language helps heal the cultural disconnect people feel from colonization, resulting in enhanced health and wellbeing.

## Spirituality and Ceremony

Explains relationships with the natural world, relationships with others, transcendence, and provides meaning to the practitioner.



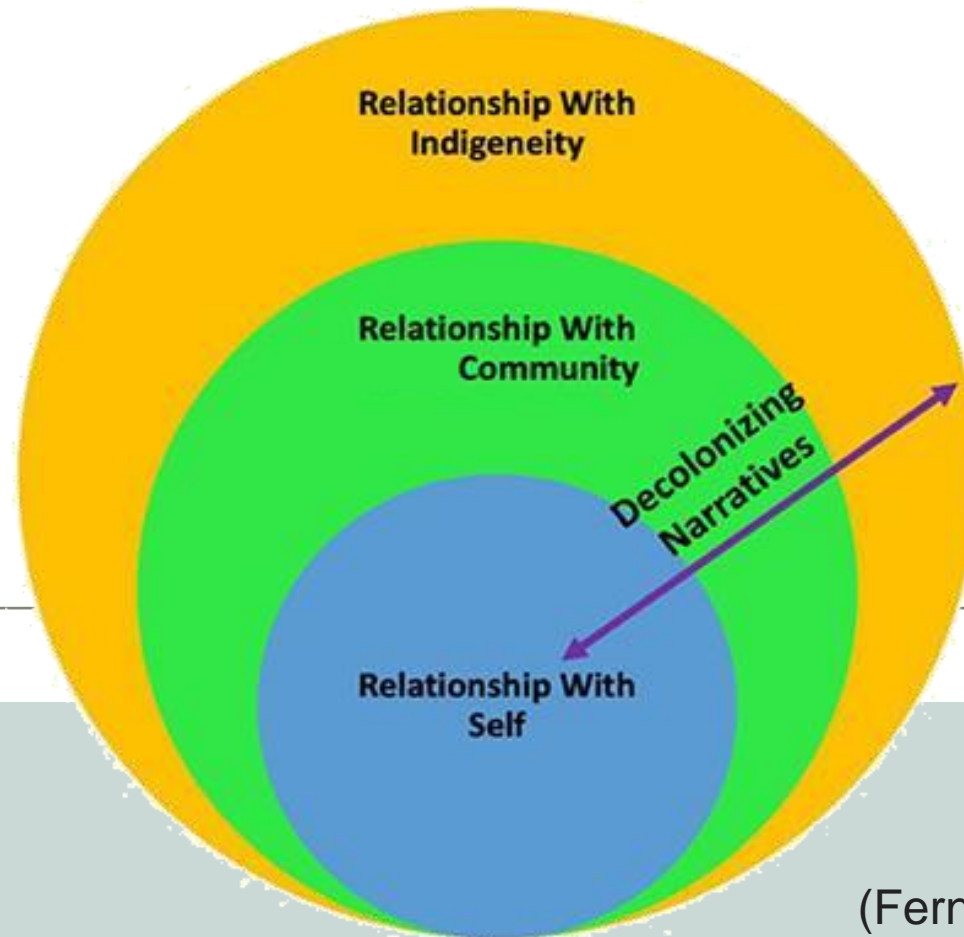
Connecting to our Cultures is an ACTION  
that Gives us Strength and Wellbeing, but  
an ACTION we must choose to take.







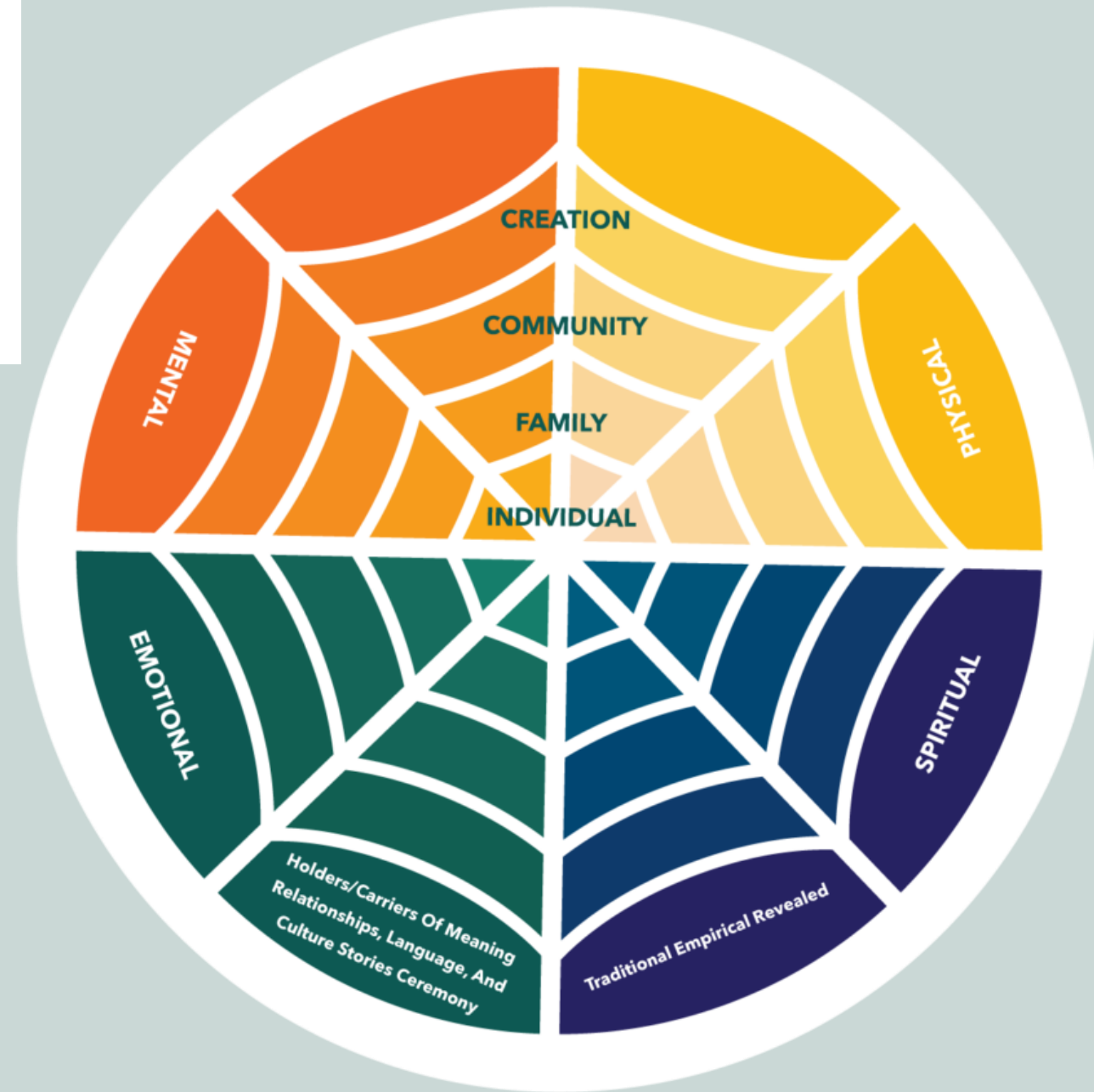
# Self Care = Community Care



(Fernandez & Beltrán, 2022)

# Building on our Cultural Strengths

Take care of yourself so you can take care of your community.





“ Strong communities are born out of individuals being their best selves. ”

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg)



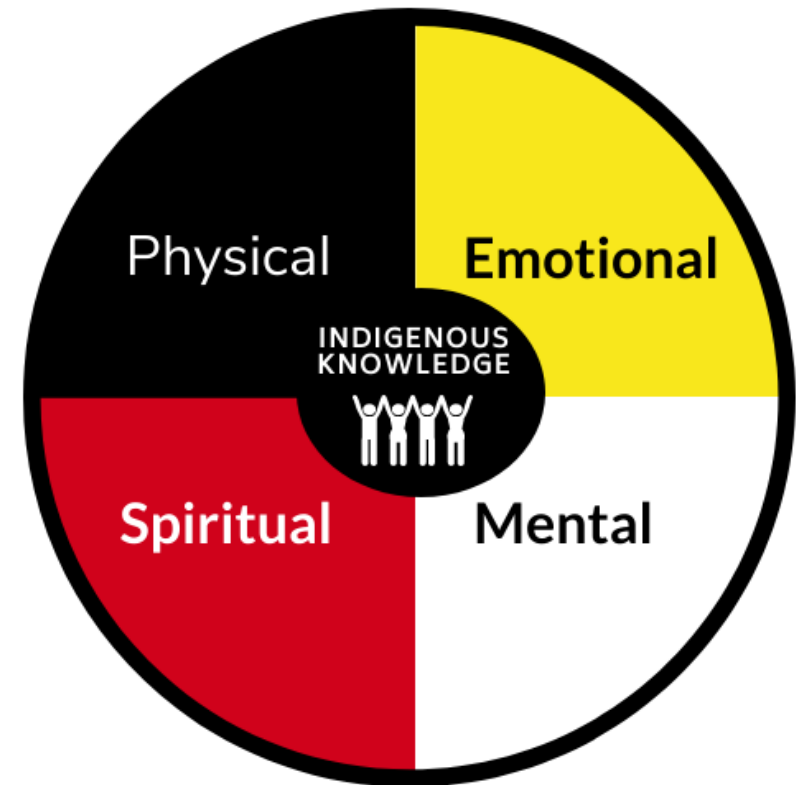
# Taking ACTION: Self Care



Remember that incorporating a new routine will not happen overnight, and an important component of self-care is to show yourself compassion and grace.



Indigenous Knowledge tells us that: Self-care means taking care of the whole self – physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.



# Decolonizing and Indigenizing Self-Care

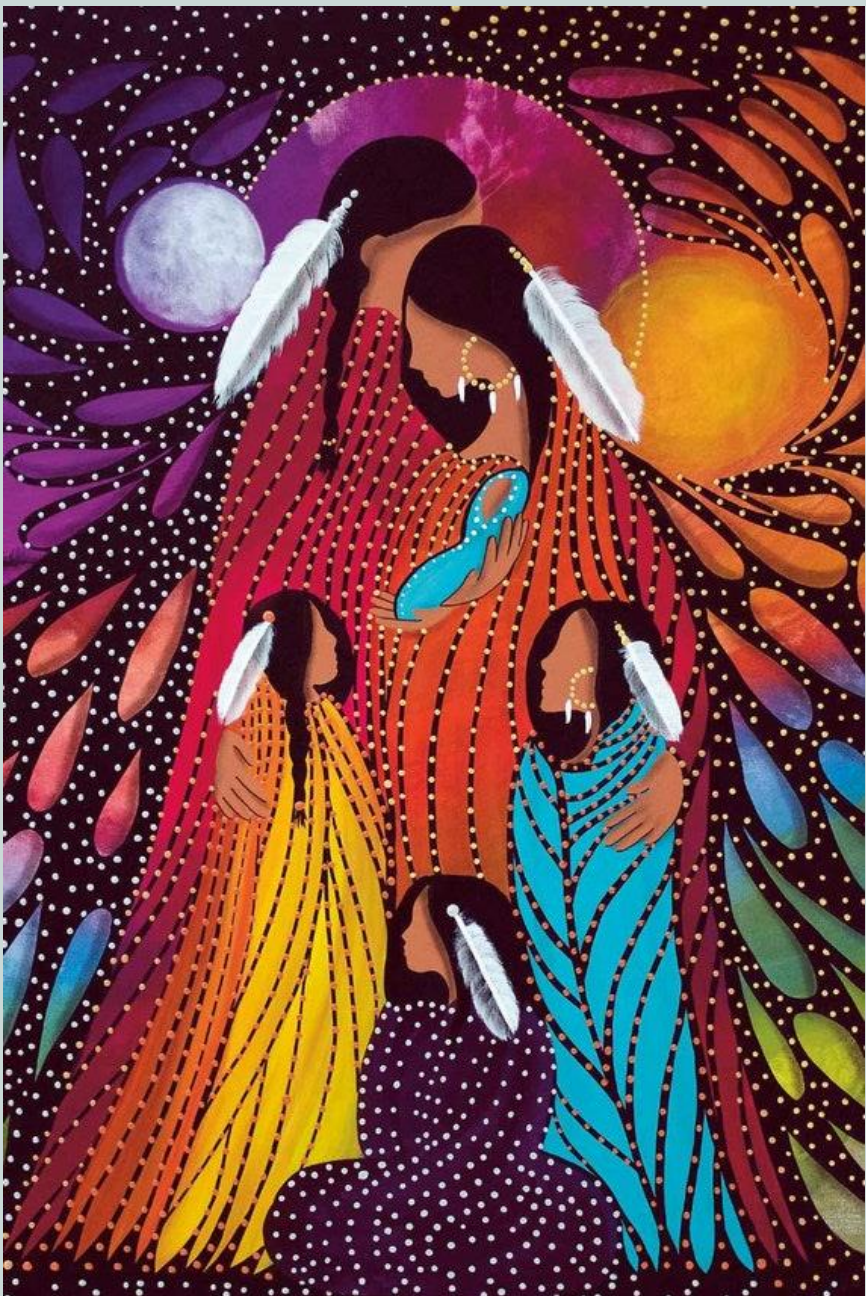
- Without identifying our needs and honoring them, we may feel drained
- Practicing self-care and self-compassion can grow our resilience
- Indigenous self-care draws on our cultures as they are protective
- Indigenous self-care may involve more than the self: family, intergenerational connectedness, and community





# Connectedness: Building Relationships





Artist: Betty Albert-Licenz, Cree

"If you ask me what is the most important thing that I have learned about being a Haudenosaunee, it's the idea that we are connected to a community, but a community that transcends time...

We're connected to the first Indians who walked on this earth, the very first ones, however long ago that was. But we're also connected to those Indians who aren't even born yet, who are going to walk this earth.

And our job in the middle is to bridge that gap...We inherit a duty, we inherit a responsibility. -Rick Hill Sr. (Tuscarora)

# Building Relationships

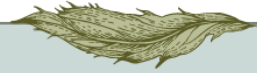


Artist: Eloy Bida (Indigenous Brazilian)

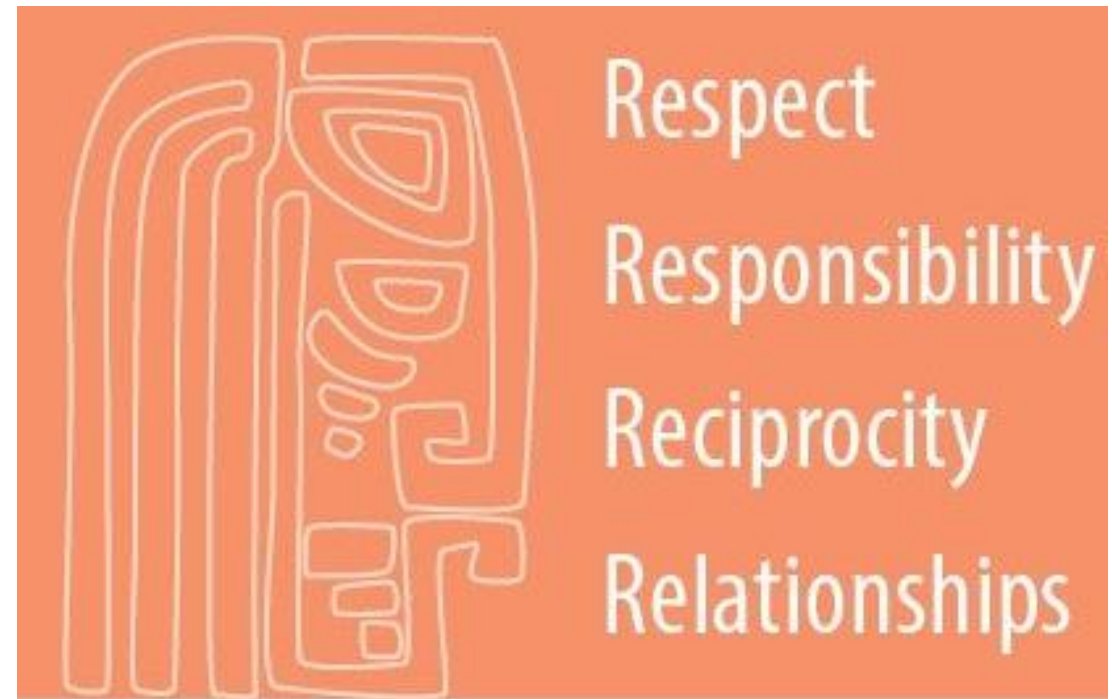
(Gordon, 2014; 2017)



# Connecting Through The Four Rs



- Connectedness is an aspect of our wellbeing
- Reciprocity is a principle guiding connectedness. It is based on an understanding of social, ecological, and spiritual interconnectedness and broad kinship that supports the vitality of communities.





# Healing Together

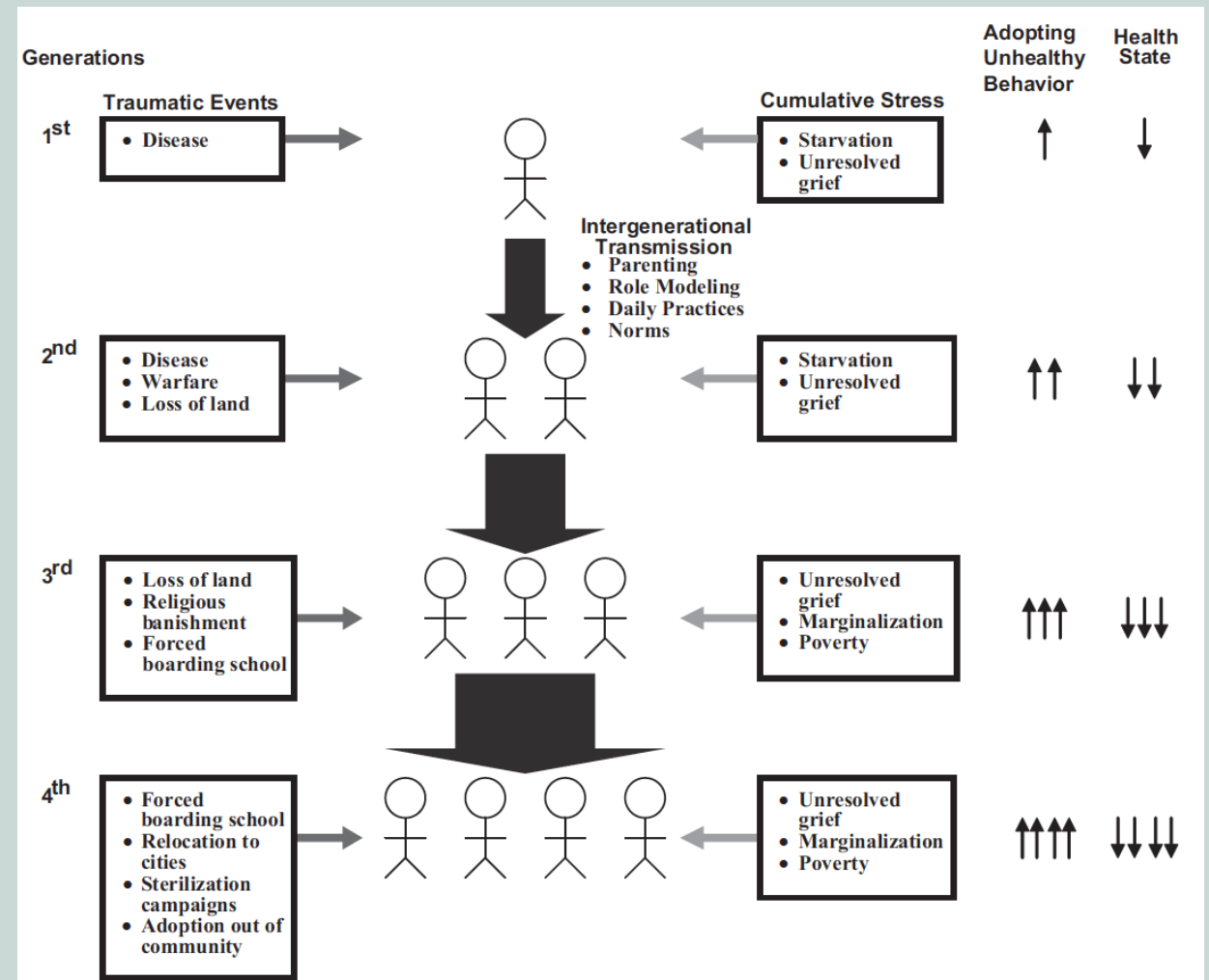


Artist: Eloy Bida  
(Indigenous Brazilian)

# Past/Present Colonization Results in Trauma and Illbeing of Individuals and Communities



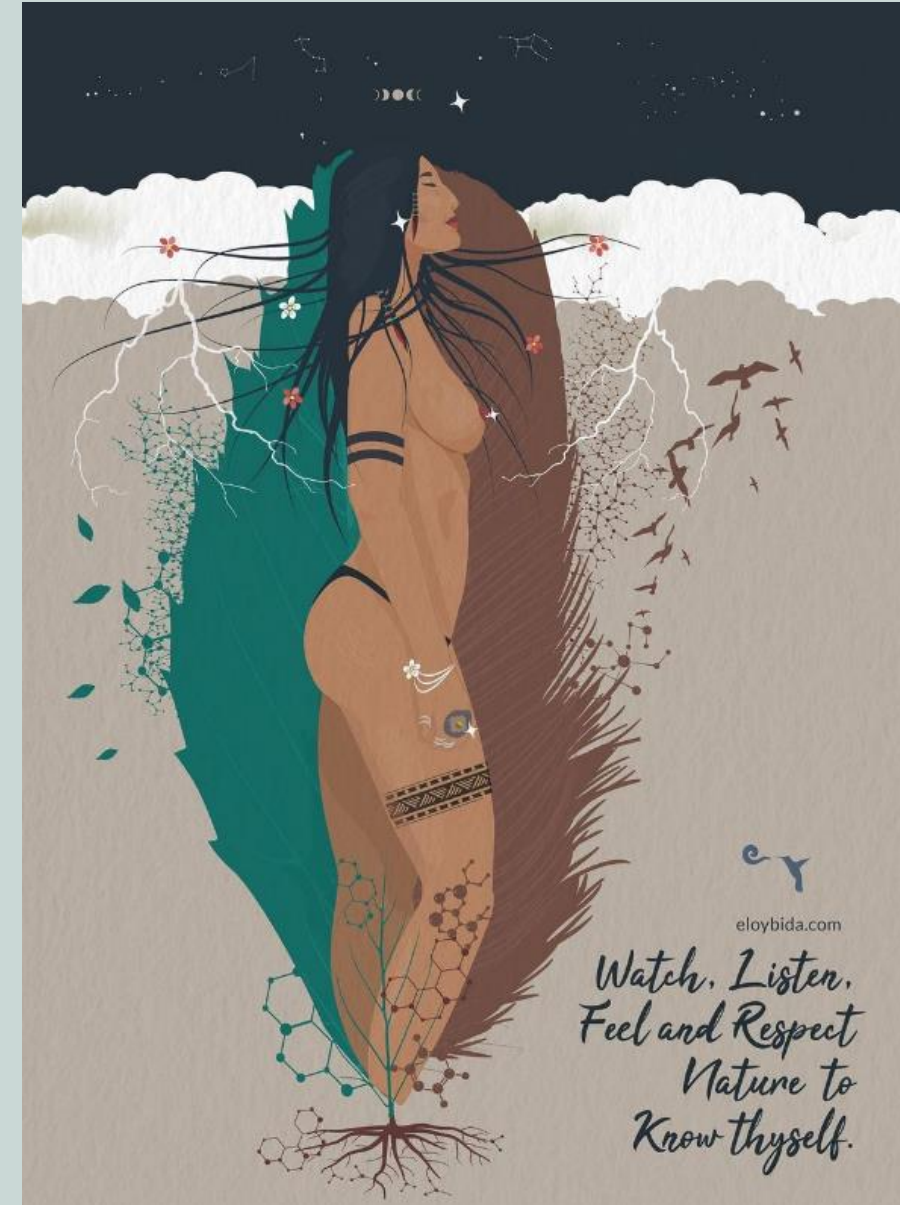
Artist: Eloy Bida (Indigenous Brazilian)



(Palacios & Portillo, 2009; Braveheart et al, 2011)

# Know Who You Are

- **Positionality:** The social and political context that creates your identity and includes your biases.
- **Reflexivity:** The examination of one's own beliefs, judgments and practices and how these may influence relations with others.
- **Relationality:** People, including their actions and meanings, can be understood in terms of diverse and continuous relationships.



# Meet People Where They Are

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## Federal Partners

- Large bureaucracy
- Federal Indian Law/Treaties
- TANF requirements
- Lack of studies on Tribal TANF
- Employees may be non-Indigenous and lack understanding of our history and cultures
- Employees likely not based on Tribal lands or in Tribal communities and lack context

## Tribal TANF Programs/Staff

- Can be bureaucratic
- May be overworked
- Lack community data
- Held accountable to ACF on work participation
- Diverse approaches to implementation of TANF and program philosophy (education, employment, family connectedness)
- Some name their TANF program an asset-based name
- Cultural activities as part of client engagement

## Relatives (Clients)

May be experiencing:

- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Lack of education
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of financial literacy
- Lack of child care
- Lack of parenting knowledge
- Mental/physical/emotional challenges

# Celebrate Differences to Learn from Each Other



- While we are all different, we are all human
- We learn from each other to better understand one another through communication
- Indigenous past/ongoing colonization and traumas are important for all involved to understand
- For all those involved with Tribal TANF, it is vital we see our client/customers as our relatives
- An asset-based cultural approach is central for our programs and wellbeing



“

**We are on Earth  
to take care of  
life. We are on  
Earth to take care  
of each other.**

– XIYE BASTIDA



Xiye Bastida Patrick is a Mexican climate activist and member of the Indigenous Otomi community



# Toward the Future: Creative Solutions



*Keep the flame of self-knowledge burning*



# Indigenous Cultures as Protection/Prevention to Address Colonization/Trauma

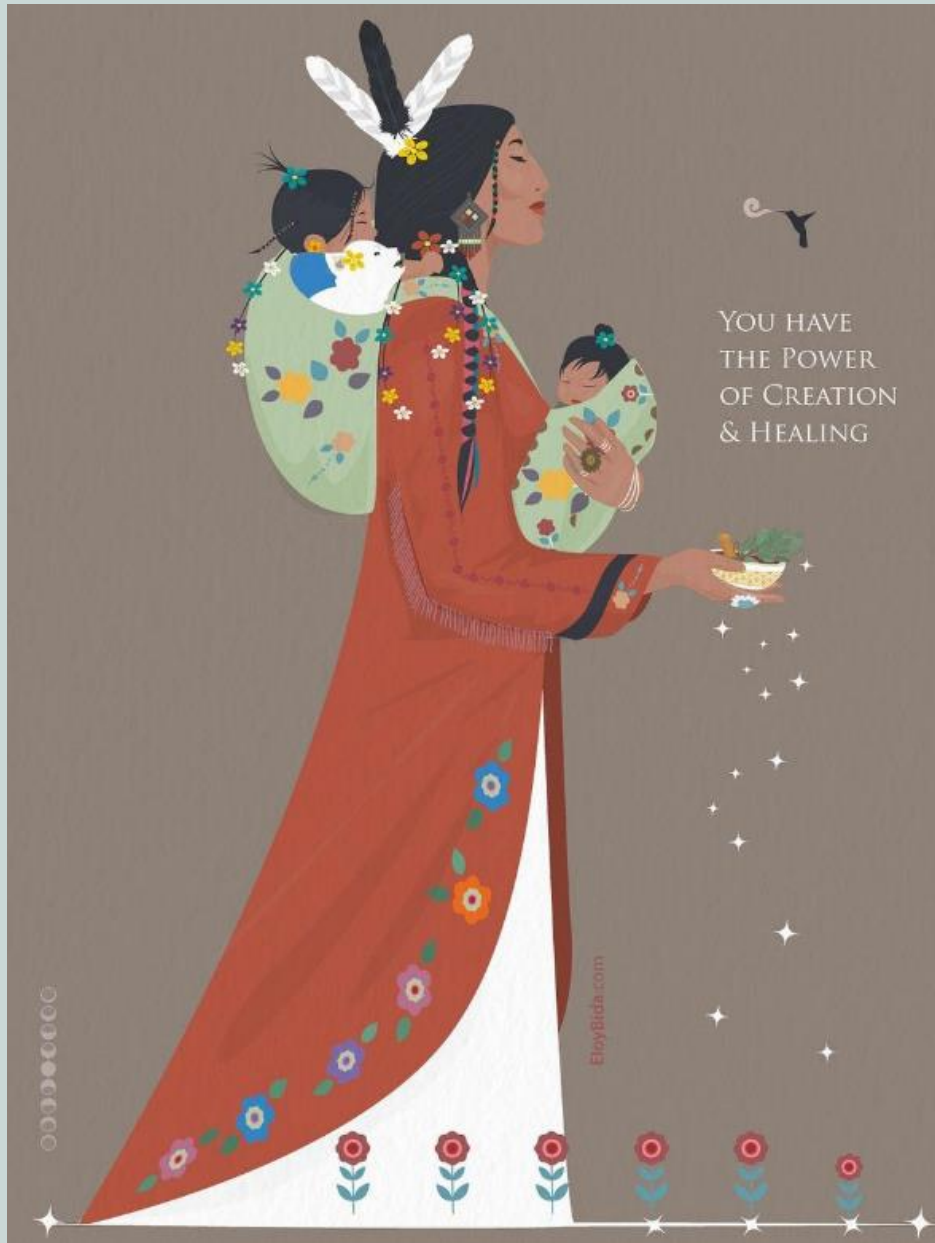
**Indigenous Knowledge and a growing body of research tells us the following are important:**

- Enculturation and Indigenous identity formation
- Traditional activities and games
- Relationships with the land including subsistence and traditional foods
- Social connectedness: Family, intergenerational, Elders, and the community
- Native languages
- Spirituality and ceremony

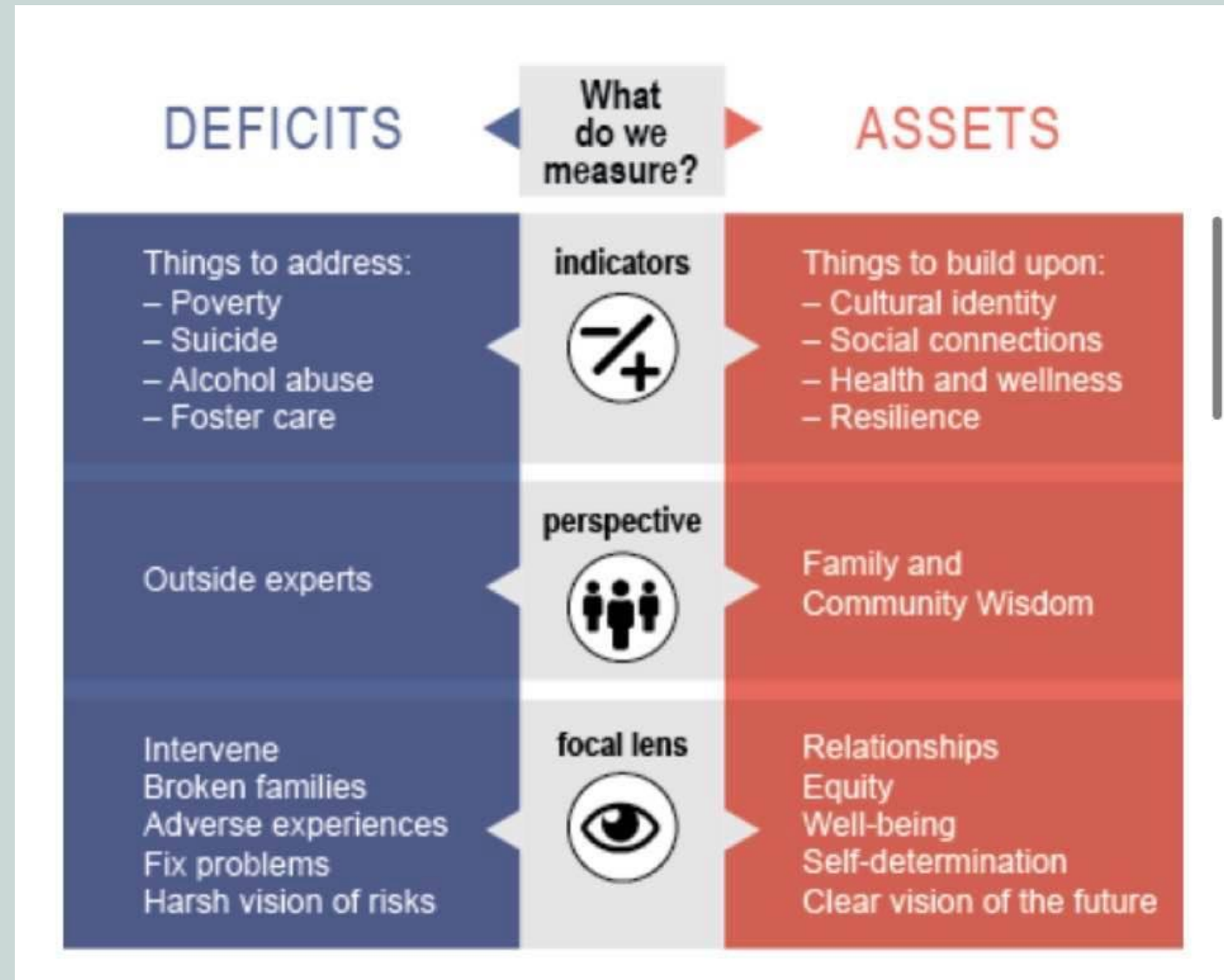


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# Asset-Based Approaches



Artist: Eloy Bida (Indigenous Brazilian)



(Hyett et al. 2019; Tuck 2009; Chase 2019)

# Future Scenarios



## There are Many Possible Futures

- Our decisions can lead us in many directions
- Scenarios of the future are possibilities that can happen
- Scenarios help us to use our imagination, hypothesis, learn, and identify strategies to reach different outcomes



# Orienting Yourself in the Future



**OPTIMISM**



**pessimism**



**Most  
Likely**




# Achieving the Optimistic Future Together



- How can the community achieve the optimistic scenario ?
- What are the actions that must be taken? What must be avoided?
- What is your role, as an individual, in making the optimistic future a reality?
- What specifically will you do?
- There can be individual actions and collective actions that work to achieve the optimistic future



# Heather Sauyaq Jean Kwamboka Gordon



Quyana  
(Thank you)



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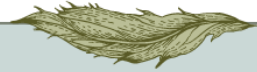
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Linkedin: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/hjgordon/>

Threads: @Sauyaq

# Indigenous Resources on Self Care from WeRNative



- Check out these six tips to work on your self-care routine.
- Everyone should practice self-care! Take a look at what loveisrespect has to say on the topic.
- Managing your mental health is also an important part of self-care. Want to learn more? Visit Managing Our Mental Health.
- Heal Yourself. Sometimes past traumas impact our ability to care for ourselves. Learn more about trauma and how to heal from it here.
- Sometimes self-care involves Indigenizing your movement.