

GUIDING PHILOSOPHY AND GOVERNANCE MODEL
OF BENT ARROW TRADITIONAL HEALING SOCIETY

by

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Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
TABLE OF FIGURES	3
FIRST WORDS	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
INTRODUCTION	7
OVERVIEW OF STUDY	7
RATIONALE	7
RESEARCH APPROACH.....	8
HISTORY	10
BENT ARROW PHILOSOPHY	13
THE MEDICINE WHEEL.....	13
MIYO WICEHTOWIN (GOOD RELATIONSHIP)	14
<i>Îyiniwiniwin (being human)</i>	16
<i>Ayamihewâtsowin (spirituality)</i>	19
<i>Kitimâkeyimowin (feeling passionate about a subject)</i>	20
<i>Cikâstepekisin (her/his reflection can be seen in the water)</i>	23
NATURAL LAWS	26
<i>Kisewâtisiwin (love/kindness)</i>	27
<i>Kweyaskwatesowin (honesty)</i>	29
<i>Wicîhtowin (sharing)</i>	32
<i>Maskawisiwin (determination/strength)</i>	37
BENT ARROW GOVERNANCE	40
TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE.....	41
<i>Nîkânîwin (Leadership)</i>	42
<i>Iskweskâw Mâmawinitowin (Women’s Society)</i>	43
<i>Mâcîwak (Hunters)</i>	45
<i>Kihthaya (Elders)</i>	45
<i>Maskihkîwiyiniwak (Medicine Persons)</i>	46
<i>Omeyopayihcikewak (Peacemakers)</i>	47
<i>Mâwasakonewak (Gatherers)</i>	48
<i>Opîkiskwestamâkew (Crier)</i>	48
CLANS (PROGRAMS)	49
BENT ARROW GOVERNANCE MODEL	53
APPENDIXES	55
I - REFERENCES	55
II - BENT ARROW PROGRAMS	56
III - NATURAL LAWS RESPONSE	60
IV – GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE RESPONSE	63

Table of Figures

Figure 1 - Relationship Based Practice.....	15
Figure 2 - Bent Arrow Philosophy	26
Figure 3 - Medicine Wheel Configurations found in Alberta	40
Figure 4 - Traditional Governance Structure	41
Figure 5 - Bent Arrow Programs	50
Figure 6 - Bent Arrow Governance Model.....	53

First Words

As a young boy growing up on the reservation in south-western Ontario, I spent a lot of time with my grandparents. My grandfather and grandmother were very traditional people or as I have learned to understand now lived as our people have always lived for thousands of years. They did not live in wigwams but we did not eat store bought food either, my mishom (grandfather) always hunted. In our way of learning as young people, their way was to teach us young ones through storytelling.

Many times in the evening after supper we would learn about the way things used to be before Waubishkizih (he is white) came. Also I spent a lot of time with my mishom fishing, hunting, going with him to check traps in the winter and collecting firewood. He was always telling stories about the way things use to be when he was a boy or the way things were as told to him by his osse (father).

I was about 10 or 11 years old when he told me a story as we sat fishing on a hot Saturday sunny afternoon on the banks of the Thames River in south-western Ontario. He said "you know grandson things were much different thousands of years ago for our people when they hunted and fished. Back then there were no rifles to hunt. Today the animal that gives up its life can be shot from a long distance away".

“Thousands of years ago the warrior designed his bow and arrows with near perfection for straightness because in the old days a warrior had to sneak up to within a few feet of the animal. He did this so that when he struck the animal with his bow and arrows or spear he would be able to bring the animal down with one arrow. If his arrows or spears were bent they would not find their mark and his family would go hungry for another day or more. So the warrior spent many days praying to the Kitchi – Manitou and to Nanbush to help him find the right wood and feathers to make his arrows straight and near perfection”.

So when we were trying to find a name for a youth program that was working with youth from many broken homes and families I remembered the story my grandfather told me of the hunter and warrior. These youth who had ventured off their path or journey in life were not lost or broken, but like the warrior if he did not take time in preparation of his arrows he would miss his target and his family would suffer because of his hurriedness. I seen these youth not as broken but like the arrow that was slightly bent. The warrior could fix the problem of his arrow by making a new one. We could help the youth with their problems so they could learn to walk a straighter path and hit their target also. They were not broken just a little bent. This is the reason for the name BENT ARROW TRADITIONAL HEALING SOCIETY.

Brad Seneca,
Co-Executive Director

Acknowledgements

I want to offer my heartfelt *nanâskomew* (thanks) to many people who provided their support throughout this project. First off I would like to thank the Indigenous Governance program at the University of Victoria in having the foresight to allow students to complete a Community Governance Project; this is a project of benefit to a community and is an alternative to a traditional thesis. This enables students to achieve practical experience while volunteering for a community organization. I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and wisdom of my professors and committee members, Dr. Jeff Corntassel (Supervisor) and Dr. Gerald Taiaiake Alfred. I owe a tremendous appreciation to Donna Leask, Cheryl Whiskeyjack, Brad and Shauna Seneca for being part of the advisory group, and a special thank you to John Morgan for his insight and feedback. I would like to acknowledge the staff and community members of Bent Arrow for sharing their traditional knowledge, experiences, and stories with me; I have felt so honoured to get to know you better. This project would not have been possible without the tireless support of Shauna Seneca, thanks for believing in me.

Kitatamihin,

Shalene Jobin

Introduction

Overview of Study

Indigenous peoples are increasingly migrating to urban centers where they are faced with social, economic, and political disadvantages while continuing to battle with stereotypes in society. Currently Edmonton has the second highest municipal Indigenous population in Canada, at 40,930 (CMA, Stats Canada, 2001) and is projected to have the largest urban Indigenous population in Canada by 2014 (RCAP). Increasingly urban Indigenous peoples have become proactive in the fight for recognition, cultural identity, and development of appropriate services. An illustration of this is Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society in Edmonton, Alberta, which provides wholistic social services based on traditional Indigenous teachings. The objective of this project is to study and document the governance structure and philosophy behind Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.

Rationale

As a non-profit, urban-based, Indigenous organization, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society is:

“Committed to building on the strengths of Aboriginal children, youth and their families to enable them to develop spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally so they can walk proudly in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities” (<http://www.bentarrow.ca>).

Bent Arrow was established in 1994 as a non-profit charitable organization. Since that time they have grown from two employees to over ninety Indigenous employees. Bent Arrow is unique in that they offer programs based on traditional teachings. Bent Arrow administers over fifteen different programs that focus on

the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of the community. These programs range from services such as the Rites of Passage school (combining academics, spirituality, culture, and life skills) to Circle of Hope (providing wholistic support for survivors and their families of the residential school system). As this society has grown so rapidly Bent Arrow has seen the need to describe the philosophy and governance model of their organization in written form. This will be useful to raise awareness of the society as well as provide information to new employees, Bent Arrow members, Bent Arrow supporters, and the community. The information in this report is focussed on the governance, guiding principles, and values which make Bent Arrow unique. The purpose of this research is not to describe the day-to-day operations or provide an in depth analysis of the programs. This report will provide the background information needed to support a thorough evaluation of Bent Arrow to be completed in the future. This project is about communicating the high-level vision and philosophy that permeates all the work of the Society. The day to day programming may vary, however the gift of Bent Arrow lies in the people, its traditional knowledge, vision and guiding principles. It is my desire that this report portrays the philosophy and governance of this Society.

Research Approach

The research design was completed in three stages and included a literature review, organizational study, two questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews. A committee made up of Shauna Seneca (Community member), Jeff Corntassel (Supervisor, University of Victoria), and Taiaiake Alfred (University of Victoria)

provided insight and direction throughout the process. In order to provide local information and guidance to the researcher while gathering and writing, an advisory committee from Bent Arrow comprised of board members, staff, and the Executive Directors was developed.

The research approach was qualitative in nature and focussed on the experiences and perceptions of the participants. In this three-stage research process the first stage was to gather information on traditional Indigenous societies and child rearing practices. The second stage was an internal document review of information from Bent Arrow from its inception to the present day. The final stage entailed gathering primary information from the board, staff, and members through two questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. The first questionnaire was given to all Bent Arrow staff allowing them to provide input on the underlying philosophy of Bent Arrow. This information and examples given demonstrated that the stated philosophy of Bent Arrow, based on the Natural Laws and Medicine Wheel teachings were carried out in all the programming and work of the society. The second exercise enabled the staff to reflect on their program and how they incorporate traditional Indigenous roles and responsibilities in their daily work. Focus groups and interviews were completed with staff and members of the Bent Arrow community to provide supplementary information.

History

The history of Edmonton is rich deep-rooted in culture, the land and the sacredness of place. Edmonton is better known to some as *Amiskwâciwaskahikan* which means Beaver Hills House in *Nêhiyawewein* (the Cree language). Historical evidence has shown that there have been many Indigenous peoples that have inhabited the Edmonton area for over 12,000 years (Goyette: 11) whether in intervals, in a village, for a seasonal camp, or for ceremonies. *Amiskwâciwaskahikan* has also been known to Indigenous peoples for thousands of years as a meeting place for hunting, trading, medicine lodges, feasts, sundance ceremonies and other events. The area of the city now called Rosedale flats was once referred to as *Pehonan* which in Cree means “the waiting place” or “the gathering place”. This was considered sacred land and functioned as a meeting place for many nations including the Cree, Chipewyan, Beaver, Nakoda, and Blackfoot (Goyette: 22). Later the Métis along with other fur-traders became introduced to this area in the bend of the North Saskatchewan River.

Today the city of Edmonton has the second highest municipal Indigenous population in Canada with 30,365 people and 40,930 people in the broader Census Metropolitan Area (2001 Federal Census). Edmonton is still a gathering place for many First Nations including the Cree (63%), Stoney-Dakota (10%), Ojibwa (9.7%), Chippewya (3.5%) and Slavey (1.7%) and other First Nations (12.1 %) (1991 Federal Census). Urban Indigenous peoples have become

increasingly vocal in the need for culturally appropriate services. In response to this need Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society was developed to build on the strengths of the Indigenous peoples in Edmonton while providing wholistic services based on traditional Indigenous principles.

Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (Bent Arrow) is a non-profit, charitable organization that was incorporated in November 1994. In 1993, the Co-Directors, Brad and Shauna Seneca recognized a need in Edmonton for culturally relevant social services. Initially they received funding from a federal program called Pathways to provide a program to youth between the ages of 15 and 24 who wanted to return to school, enter training or find work. This program was successful and with the encouragement of the community and Elders, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society was established. Since the establishment of Bent Arrow the Society has grown to over ninety employees. The Society currently serves more than 2,000 children, youth, adults, and families through fifteen different programs offering supports and services in the areas of education, health, housing, and employment (Appendix II). The programs that the Society operates have been created and developed specifically for Indigenous people. Our programs include the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental aspects of a person's life, their family and their community. The growth and development of Bent Arrow reflects the needs of the people served. People who are involved with Bent Arrow become part of the Bent Arrow Family and community.

“Miracles happen here every day. Every day, I am honoured by someone who shares with me what they’ve accomplished... what they’ve achieved. That’s the gift of this place.”

- Shauna Seneca

“Before Bent Arrow, there weren’t any programs offering traditional teachings. It seemed like people were afraid to go there. We said, ‘we’ll start a program based on the teachings of our ancestors, the teachings of the Medicine Wheel’”.

- Brad Seneca

Bent Arrow Philosophy

To understand the values and beliefs that guide Bent Arrow requires one appreciate the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. In this section, I will examine the natural laws and 'good relationships' that inform a Bent Arrow Philosophy.

The Medicine Wheel

Although each Indigenous nation has its own language and cultural practices there are some ceremonies, symbols, and beliefs that permeate many different Indigenous nations. One teaching that is common to many First Nations is that of the Medicine Wheel or four directions teachings. The number four is sacred to many Indigenous peoples. A Cree Elder explains how our language is interconnected to the wisdom of the medicine wheel:

“We are called *iyiniwak*. That is the foundation of who we are, our identity. We are supposed to heal ourselves and others and *iyiniwaskamkaw*, that is our relationship to our land, our connection here. *Nehiyaw* [a First Nation’s person] is the four directions, *newoyak*. There are four parts, and those are our four directions, and that is in our language. Additionally, ‘*Newoyak ehoci pikisweyan.*’ I speak from the four directions, so you are always honouring your four directions. That is the philosophy of it. The four directions are, we have to be caring, sharing, we have to be honest, and we have to pray daily for our strength. Continued strength of our people and our land – our very existence. Yes, we are part of the land. That is how our connection is to the land, we are *iyiniwak*. *Iyiniwaskamkohk*, you hear those terms when the Elders speak to all of you. It means that it is a healing land, the land itself, they call Turtle Island and the turtle is part of healing. That is all [encompassing], it is almost like spiritual direction, you are honouring that direction” (Makokis 90).

First Nations’ languages tell the story of the sacred laws, how we are to live, and our purpose as a people. The ways we speak come from the teachings of the four directions. To honour these teachings is essentially to have an awareness

and connection with the Creator and all of creation. The teachings of the four directions provide the values, beliefs, and characteristics for many Indigenous cultures.

The Medicine Wheel is utilized for various purposes including ceremonial, astronomical, and symbolic teachings. There are ancient Medicine Wheels still evident that date back thousands of years. The majority of Medicine Wheels found on Turtle Island are located in what is now known as Alberta. One of the uses of the Medicine Wheel is to assist us in understanding Indigenous philosophy and beliefs.

“This is an ancient symbol used by almost all the Native people of North and South America. There are many different ways that this basic concept is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four cardinal directions, and many other relationships that can be expressed in sets of four. Just like a mirror can be used to see things not normally visible (e.g. behind us or around a corner), the medicine wheel can be used to help us see or understand things we can't quite see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects” (Bopp: 9).

The teachings of the Medicine Wheel encompass the values and beliefs of Bent Arrow. The physical structure of Medicine Wheels found on the Plains is a good representation of the governance structure of this society.

Miyo Wicehtowin (good relationship)

At Bent Arrow there is the awareness of the need for balance within the self as well as in relationship to others. Figure 1 shows how the relationships practiced by Bent Arrow are represented in the Medicine Wheel teachings and the key elements of *Miyo Wicehtowin* (good relationship): Îyiniwiniwin (being human),

Ayamihewâtsowin (spirituality), Kitimâkeyimowin (feeling passionate about a subject) and Cikâstepekisin (her/his reflection can be seen in the water).

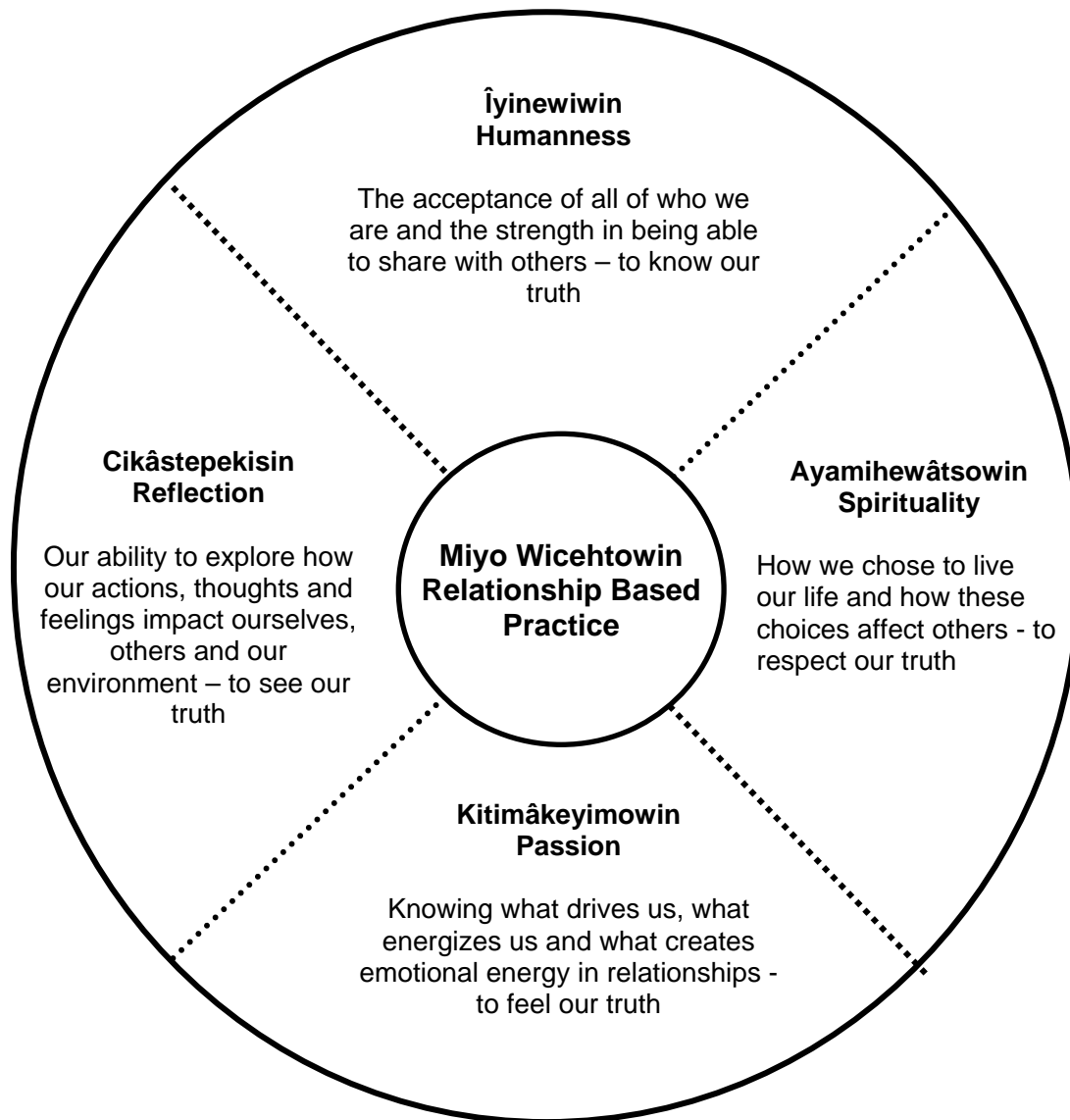


Figure 1 - Relationship Based Practice (Seneca, Shauna).

At Bent Arrow there is the understanding of the need to reflect on our own values and how these beliefs affect others.

“Values are the way human beings pattern and use their energy. If there is not a balance between our values concerning ourselves and our values concerning others, we cannot continue to develop our true potential as

human beings. Indeed, if there is an imbalance, individuals, and whole communities suffer and even die” (Bopp: 18).

This understanding and the realization that this reflective practice is severely lacking in many western based helping professions motivated the founders of Bent Arrow to look at the things that were missing in western approaches, go back to the teachings of the Medicine Wheel, and articulate the values and beliefs of Bent Arrow through Relationship Based Practice and the Natural Laws. *Miyo Wicehtowin* (good relationship), or Relationship Based Practice is a philosophy which allows the helpers to achieve balance between their own values as well as their values concerning others. *Miyo wicehtowin* is the Cree phrase for a good relationship and can also refer to having a partnership, being in unity, or living in harmony with each other. The root of *wicehtowin* is *wiceht* which means to come along side or to support. At Bent Arrow the focus on the four practices of humanness, spirituality, passion, and reflection nurture balance and create an environment where we can be in *miyo wicehtowin* with each other as well as to come along side and support others in the community.

Îyinewiwin (being human)

Humanness: The acceptance of all of who we are and the strength in being able to share with others – to know our truth

When examining western social service practice the first observation that many have, including families, is how inhuman the system and interaction is. There seems to be this misconception in mainstream practice that to somehow be professional in your work means that you cannot be human, that you cannot

connect with your families on a human level. The people that were receiving help have stated that at Bent Arrow they experience something different in that they felt equality and that they weren't being judged, no one was putting them down. When talking more about it, humanness was the word that kept coming up – they were treating me as a human being. One of the teachings that the founders of Bent Arrow were often hearing from the Elders was that the one thing that connects everyone on this planet is that we are all human beings. At one level we are the same. There are many other things that are different but there is one thing that keeps us connected no matter who we are and that is our humanness. This understanding made the 'helpers' realize that in this profession sometimes you must deliberately find ways for people to be human; to naturally share with each other and build those connections that are so important in relationships. At Bent Arrow we use the term helpers to describe the role of staff in their relationships to families. Shauna Seneca, Co-Executive Director of Bent Arrow explains the importance of humanness at Bent Arrow:

“One of the things we do at Bent Arrow is that we encourage people to be able to connect from their humanness. When people come we suggest they sit at the kitchen table and simply talk to people, to know who's here – to have that opportunity to engage. In some cases we really had to teach people how to be human in their ability to be helpers. This is because the institutions have taken the humanness out of them; the institutions' focus is always on doing it right, doing it better, being smarter, knowing all the answers. Of course that doesn't fix people; nobody does that, that's the Creators job.”

Dominant western society does not value humanness; they want to judge people and put them in segregated, isolated boxes. Unfortunately, all too often it's about making people separate, different and not thinking about community. Therefore

at Bent Arrow humanity is really important – it leads into the words of humbleness, humility and being grateful. It leads us to a place of being able to talk about our values and our beliefs which is often how we get to know each other and why we trust each other. The importance of trust and sharing in strengthening the community has been well articulated by the *Healthy Families'* helpers. Healthy Families is a long-term, intensive, voluntary home visitation program, which provides services to pregnant women and first time parenting families. The helpers in this program explain the importance of sharing and being human in creating a safe environment which fosters positive change:

“The mothers that we work with have never had an honest relationship with anyone, some not even with their own mothers. This is why they don't trust and they don't share. Some of these moms also carry shame. In our approach with families and in using the natural laws, the moms begin to talk with us and we begin to share and a trusting relationship begins to form. The moms realize there are people out there that can help them heal. The women get strength from who they are, and then they become more gentler and kinder to themselves and others. That effects who you are, but in using and living the natural laws these families make a full circle within the natural laws. The natural laws all closely tie into each other”.

With a focus on humanness, real relationships are developed where the helpers and the families have a *miyo wicehtowin* (good relationship) and the helpers can come along side and support the families in a healthy way.

The other aspect of *îyiniwîwin* (humanness) is knowing what our personal truth is. In social work we are often judging a circumstance based on our experiences or our own truth. As helpers we need to know our truth and how this impacts others. This approach is about being in tune with ourselves physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually and being able to be truthful without fear of

judgement – this is about us being human. Shauna Seneca explains the importance of knowing and accepting our truth and being able to respect that in others.

“I get better as a helper when I’m more conscious of what the truth is from my perspective. I think sometimes the Creator works through us and it’s our ability to take those risks and to be open and honest about that. Sometimes the truth isn’t what people want to hear. How do we think about that from our own perspective in our role as a helper? Why can someone tell you a story and you figure it out differently; you see a different truth in it, you see a different insight. Wanting to value the principle of truth that’s in the wheel became another important part for me when I thought about the people who come to Bent Arrow. People tell you a story and they tell you for a reason and in that moment in time that’s the truth. Truth isn’t about judgement, it just is”.

Storytelling is an important aspect of Indigenous cultures where morals and teachings come through the interaction with a story. What you need to learn is often the wisdom that comes from the words although another listener will likely draw a different lesson from the same story. At Bent Arrow there is acceptance of people, and a respect for the wisdom of others. Helpers also learn from the stories shared by people and families in the community.

Ayamihewâtsowin (spirituality)

*Spirituality – How we chose to live our life and how these choices affect others -
to respect our truth*

In the Medicine Wheel the East reflects the spiritual aspect of all things. At Bent Arrow we see spirituality as how you live your life; we also see the importance of spirituality in healing. It’s not solely about a certain cultural practice but incorporating those teachings and values in daily interactions and the way you exist in the world. It’s important to encourage people as helpers or in

programming to include spirituality for themselves and to find ways to encourage that in other people. Looking at how people are living their lives, what their values and beliefs are, being able to talk, explore, and be honest about this, is part of our job as helpers in our work with others. In conventional western helping, spirituality is not usually included. It was often seen as unimportant and ineffective. Shauna Seneca disagrees with this belief and explains that at Bent Arrow “our experience has often been that when we go through a spiritual moment with someone, whether that’s in ceremony or when we’re just that open and vulnerable to each other, that often binds us in a way that all the therapy and work would never do”. Spirituality is embraced at Bent Arrow in a very wholistic and practical way. Every morning the people at Bent Arrow come together to smudge and pray. This practice fosters *miyo wicehtowin* (good relationships), acknowledges the Creator and our spiritual self, and is done in a way to respect our own truth and the truth of others. With these teachings there is a focus on the need to be respectful of other practices and beliefs while also having others reciprocate this respect. At Bent Arrow not everyone smudges but people still feel comfortable to come and pray. Our view is that we don’t all have to share the same beliefs or do things in the same way but we can value each others’ beliefs and learn from each other – this is a way of helping our humanness as well as connecting on a deeper level.

Kitimâkeyimowin (feeling passionate about a subject)

*Passion – Knowing what drives us, what energizes us and what creates
emotional energy in relationships - to feel our truth*

The South is where we reflect on the importance of passion. In the South the Medicine Wheel refers to the emotional aspect of self; this is a place of innocence – the pureness of energy that creates passion. The teachers in the book, The Sacred Tree explain that “the focussed concentration learned in the East... becomes in the South, a passionate involvement with the world. In the South the traveller learns the idealism that makes all causes possible” (Bopp: 50). In the work that Bent Arrow does it is essential that we have something that drives and energizes us. If you’re going to be healthy you have to feel good about what you’re doing; passion is the energy driver in the work that we do. In the *Circle of Hope* program, the helpers draw upon the strength of this teaching. *Circle of Hope* is a wholistic support program for families that are the survivors and descendents of the residential school system. Through sharing circles with Elders and other programs, survivors are supported in a safe environment. In the following quote, *Circle of Hope* helpers articulate the importance of having passion in caring for people and how this supports their work:

“In order to properly work with our people, we as outreach workers must be able to love the work and the families that we provide the service to. In showing our love the people will know and feel that our intentions to assist them are truly from the heart. Our kindness and understanding towards our people, paves the way to a better and more open relationship with the people we serve.”

Through their passion for people the community responds by allowing the helpers into their lives to see their pain, hear their stories, and share in the road to healing. Passionate people are often good listeners because they are emotionally engaged in the conversation. In the western helping profession passion is often discouraged. At Bent Arrow when a person shares a story and the listener is

affected, it is all right to show that you are emotionally impacted, therefore affirming that person and building *miyo wicehtowin* (good relationships). If our goal is to provide opportunity for people to make change then we have to invite them into the community and help them feel safe and supported.

At Bent Arrow we strive to encourage people to understand what motivates us, to encourage people with what their passions are. In our training and development with staff we spend time in exploring those elements that get their blood moving, spend some time there, and see how we can take that passion and apply it in other areas. There is the understanding that we will not be passionate in everything we do but how to nurture the passion that we do have. In relationships with the community as helpers we're trying to see the passions that the family has, what gets them going, makes them feel good, and helps them have the motivation to take that next risk. This teaching is really about giving people permission to be passionate and then helping them give this gift to others. Another principle in the direction of the South is that when you are passionately engaged in a relationship to be able to acknowledge how you are feeling, honouring where you are at, therefore being able to feel our truth. It is said that the most difficult and valuable gift of the South of the Medicine Wheel is "the capacity to express feelings openly and freely in ways that do not hurt other beings" (Bopp: 51). When working with families in *miyo wicehtowin* (good relationship) it is natural that a helper might at times feel disappointed. This is healthy and the important part is to be able to acknowledge this feeling and be

able to move past without having it interfere in the work with the families and community.

Cikâstepekisin (her/his reflection can be seen in the water)

Reflection – Our ability to explore how our actions, thoughts and feelings impact ourselves, others and our environment – to see our truth

The Medicine Wheel teaches that the West is the place of introspection where we have the ability to truly know ourselves. It is said that the greatest lesson from the West is to be able to accept ourselves as we really are. One of the things Bent Arrow noticed was that people began to blame others in the work they were doing without consideration to their own role in the relationship. What they started to notice was that people were not able to reflect, they could only look at feedback as a judgement. Shauna Seneca explains that they realized that in their work they “needed to teach people how to be reflective. Reflective practice is like a mirror in being able to look at something and being able to see what is reflected back to us based on our own values and beliefs”. There was the realization that to be reflective in the work with families we first had to be reflective with ourselves. In The Sacred Tree it explains that “no two people will see exactly the same things when they look into the mirror of the medicine wheel. Yet everyone who looks deeply will see the tree of their unique lives with its roots buried deep in the soil of universal truths” (Bopp: 35). To begin to teach this practice, Shauna developed an exercise where people involved would take a mirror and stare at themselves for three minutes without talking. At the end of that time she asked them to write down what they saw when they looked in the mirror – which could

be physical attributes, resemblances to family, or other observances. The second element is to picture that someone were looking over their shoulder into their mirror – what would the person hope was observed? The third element which delves even deeper is to have them write down what they hope no one ever sees in the mirror. The intention is to start to be reflective with your self without judgement. It's not right or wrong, it just is. Reflection is reflection. This exercise has been very powerful in allowing people to be introspective about themselves and the work they do, and how that impacts the world around them and their relationships.

The teachings of the Wheel are about becoming a balanced human being that is grounded in its self and therefore able to be in a healthy *miyo wicehtowin* (good relationship) with others. The intention of Bent Arrow is to increasingly foster this growth in all of the members of Bent Arrow. Mary initially became part of Bent Arrow as a participant in the Four Arrows Adult Employment program. After this program she eventually came to work at Bent Arrow, starting as a part-time dish washer in the kitchen. From this position Mary was nurtured into a clerical role. Mary notices that at Bent Arrow people are passionate about their work and helping others, “my supervisor is really good to work with, and she is supportive. The people I work with are tremendous, soft spoken and easy to get along with”. Mary was given the opportunity to reflect on her skills and abilities and then encouraged to apply them at Bent Arrow. For Mary she noticed a big difference at Bent Arrow in that people were treated as human beings, being respected.

“Everyone’s equal here, they don’t judge people here. Things are also confidential, they are professional. They don’t turn people away here, no one is turned away. Everyone does their job. No one is discriminated against here” (Mary, staff member). By practicing the principle of humanness the community at Bent Arrow is able to receive support and services in a safe, caring environment. The practice of humanness, spirituality, passion, and reflection create an environment of *miyo wicehtowin* (good relationships) where community strengthening is achieved.

“Everyone knows everyone here. People are friendly and introduce themselves. The more you find out [about Bent Arrow] the easier it is. Everyone is close. We’ll joke around with each other, people say good-morning. There isn’t a feeling of tension here. When I come here even if I had a hard day the night before, I get here and it’s a big relief - it is peaceful here” (Mary, staff member)

The Bent Arrow community is strong and healthy because of its underlying values and the incorporation of the guiding principles in all of our work.

“Although this agency has over 90 staff in different programs we are still all connected. This is different then the non-Native agency I worked for where everything was separate. Here it is all about families. Bent Arrow is a family and very welcoming. Here you get ten hellos when walking through the building. The atmosphere is amazing, you feel like family here.”

- Shannon Ghostkeeper,
Four Arrows

The principles of Relationship Based Practice enable us to understand our own values and balance them with the values of others. Through knowing, respecting, feeling, and truly seeing our truth we are able to actively engage in Relationship Based Practice honouring our spirit, engaging our passion, allowing

reflection, and embracing our humanness.

Natural Laws

The Medicine Wheel symbolically portrays the holistic epistemology guiding Indigenous peoples including the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental dimensions of human nature in a perfect balance. There is a continuous movement through the Medicine Wheel teachings where new insights are continuously revealed.

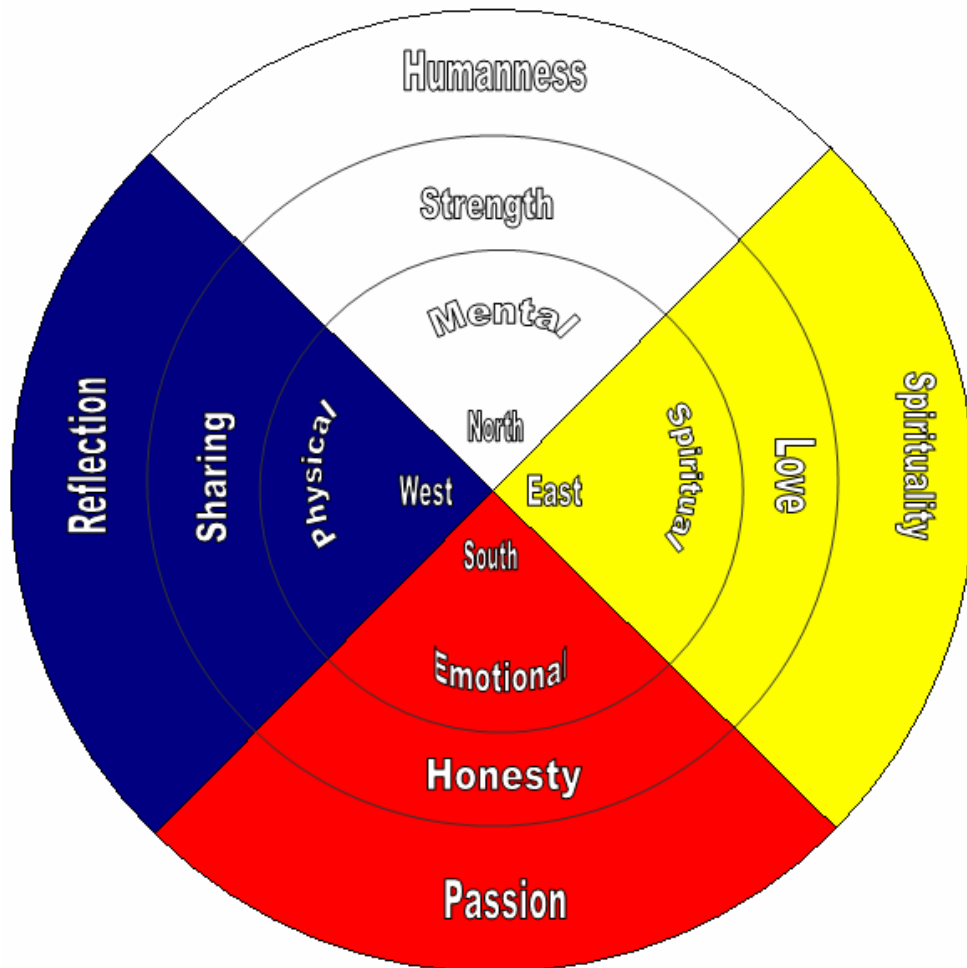


Figure 2 - Bent Arrow Philosophy

The natural laws encompass love, honesty, sharing, and strength. Elder George Courchene explains how the Creator gave these natural laws to humans:

“When the Creator made two people at the beginning of time the Creator gave them Indian law to follow. He gave them four directions. He gave them sweetgrass, the tree, the animal and the rock. The sweetgrass represents kindness; the tree represents honesty; the animal, sharing; and the rock is strength (RCAP I: 654).

These principles are not separated or segregated elements but aspects of a complete whole. To understand the teachings of the medicine wheel requires the knowledge of the totality of the wheel and the relationships between the elements.

“Balance involves more than just paying attention to each and every part of the medicine wheel. If it did, one could take a reductionistic view of only giving time to each part so that balance could be achieved. Balance includes giving equal time to each part so that balance could be achieved. Balance includes giving attention to what connects each part of the medicine wheel; in other words, the relationships between all the parts” (Hart: 237).

The objective for Bent Arrow is to encourage the people of Bent Arrow to achieve the balance of the wheel so that the society as a whole will operate in this balance. At Bent Arrow the natural laws are the basis to guide us in all our relationships.

Kisewâtisiwin (love/kindness)

Beginning in the East, is the first sacred teaching from the Medicine Wheel is love and kindness. In Leona Makokis’ dissertation a Cree Elder named Skywoman explains how being humble, kind, and loving are all interrelated. “You can never be humble if you are not kind”. In Cree, *Kisewâtisiwin* means the spirit of kindness and generosity. “Kindness precedes love and humility cradles both of

these dispositions” (Makokis 95). This law teaches about the importance of showing kindness to all of creation. *Sacred Circle* is a home support program through Bent Arrow that provides family support, family aide and youth work to families involved with child welfare. In their work as helpers they believe showing kindness and love is central to developing healthy relationships.

“In our program it is essential to have a genuine spirit and approach with the families we work with. Our philosophy is that everyone is valued and everyone has something they can contribute. We work from a strengths perspective and offer our support with kindness, and a caring attitude. We use a reflective practice approach to encourage the families into making healthy choices and lifestyle changes” (Sacred Circle Helpers).

By the helpers showing love and a caring attitude families feel comfortable in sharing their strengths as well as challenges. The helpers are able to support the families in building on their strengths in a kind hearted way.

To be able show love to one another requires an acceptance of who you are - to be able to love and accept yourself. Mike, a teacher in Cree ceremonies from Saddle Lake explains that we all come here with a gift and purpose from the Creator.

“When we come here, we almost plead and beg to be here, and we have this experience because we are all spiritual beings. One of the first reasons we come here is that we are going to love, we are going to love each other. That is the Creator’s first law, to love ourselves so that we can love each other” (Makokis 92).

This teaching shows that it is innate in all of us to need to feel loved and to show love to others. Many of the programs at Bent Arrow build a healthy sense of self by assisting families in developing spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. *Wind Dancers* is a pre-employment program for youth to build

necessary skills, knowledge and experience to become successful leaders in the community. The coordinator of *Wind Dancers* explains that they focus on “building self-esteem and confidence including knowing the strengths and challenges inside and outside of the classroom”. By building a healthy sense of worth, youth are able to fully accept themselves and share this gift with others. *White Cloud Head Start* is another Bent Arrow program that provides Indigenous pre-school children with a positive sense of themselves and an opportunity to learn various skills to be successful in the school system. The teachers and helpers in the program see the value and importance in showing love to the children.

“Our program is based on believing that children are gifts from the Creator. We believe that we are given the privilege of raising and caring for them. Since they are a gift, children are sacred and must be treated with dignity and respect. We approach each child with genuine love, care, concern and attention. Each child is valued and it is recognized that each one can contribute regardless of their young age” (White Cloud Head Start Staff).

By receiving love and attention, children are able to feel their inherent value as “gifts from the Creator”. By showing love to people at an early age we are more easily able to fulfill the Creator’s first law in our lives.

Kweyaskwatesowin (honesty)

In the South we find the second sacred teaching from the Medicine Wheel is about honesty. Leona Makokis explains how the Cree word for honesty is *Kweyaskwatesowin*; the root *Kweyask* refers to being aligned and straight. Attached to *Kweyask* is *itatisowin* which refers to a having a certain behaviour in life (Makokis 97). In a community one must begin with being honest to him or

herself, a journey to realize who you are and to be true to this authentically in everything you do. Honesty begins with an acceptance of all of who we are and an ability to reflect on how our actions, thoughts, and feelings affect ourselves and others. From this point, community members show their honest behaviour externally in their relationships. *Orenda House* is an apartment building for homeless families which assists in transitioning the families into sustainable independent living. Cheryl Bridges, Manager of *Orenda House* explains the importance of honesty in the community:

“At *Orenda* everyone was homeless, they share that as families. That is humbling... they say that you have to be kind to be humble. In the intake process we are starting from a place of honesty where the families are starting with saying that they need help. We ask people to talk about their goals and to be honest. At *Orenda* we live closely together and see how important honesty is to a healthy living environment. Sometimes the families learn the importance of these principles by learning from mistakes. I am honest and straight with families and they respect that, by consistently upholding Bent Arrow’s values they begin to trust me through the building of a relationship”.

At *Orenda* the families see the value of honesty from the time they are introduced to Bent Arrow; this teaching is also modelled by the helpers at Bent Arrow. By consistently being honest Cheryl has been able to build a trusting relationship with the families. One of the guiding beliefs of Bent Arrow is that “always being told what to do and how to do things is not necessarily the best way. We must also learn through our mistakes. Many times we will be given options and we will be responsible to make decisions and deal with the consequences” (Policies and Procedures Manuel). At *Orenda House* the families are given the opportunity to make mistakes and see the importance of the natural laws through working through the effects of choices. Living in close proximity and being dependent on

each other requires that the community hold the value of honesty in the highest regard.

Kokomish House is another branch of the Bent Arrow community that lives together and are challenged to display honesty in their relationships. Kokomish is a long term residential housing facility for Indigenous youth, 12- 17 years old who are in the care of Child Welfare. There is a *kokomish* (grandmother) at the residence that provides cultural teachings, wisdom, and care. At *Kokomish* we:

- Encourage youth to be honest with their peers and housemates
- Give honest explanations even when the truth is hard to take or tough to explain
- Encourage youth to be honest with staff even if it is the last thing we want to hear
- Create an open environment where the staff are able to honestly admit their faults with youth
- And be conscious of not setting kids up – never getting their hopes up when there is doubt.

By living out honesty, openness, and integrity the youth are able to observe and model the behaviour and values of their culture.

Symbolically, honesty is represented by the tree; the trunk of a tree is straight and points to the Creator and that is why the ceremonial pipe is made from the tree. The ceremonial pipe was given to the people as a way to communicate with the Creator. Through the virtue of honesty *Rites of Passage* (ROP) school is able to provide students with a trusting, safe environment ideal for learning in a culturally appropriate way. ROP is an alternative full time junior high school for Indigenous youth, a partnership between Bent Arrow, Edmonton Public Schools

and Amiskwaciy Academy. ROP focuses on educational success through academics, cultural awareness, and life management skills.

“We have to be honest and be consistent in our honesty so that we can ask for honesty from the students. We stress that honesty is the best policy, it is best for the students to be truthful upfront. At ROP we are in communication with the parents and so the youth know that we will talk with the parents. The kids have a hard time trusting others so it is important that we show consistency in our behaviour. We work as a team which allows all of us to all be on the same page” (ROP Staff Member).

At ROP honesty is a value expected from staff and students. This creates a trustworthy relationship where students know we will listen. The natural law of honesty involves choosing to live a life of honor by being true to who we are and displaying that truth in our words and actions with others.

Wícihtowin (sharing)

In the West we find the sacred teaching about sharing. Wícihtowin refers to helping one another. Indigenous people believe that animals are teachers and that their behaviour when observed gives insights into the way we should live.

Bernie, a Cree man, explains how the buffalo symbolizes the essence of sharing:

“The most important factor is that in order to live, we have to depend on the animals for our survival. In our teachings about sharing, our grandfathers would tell us that the buffalo represented the concept of sharing. The buffalo gave up its life so that we could have food, medicine, clothing, and shelter. This is the ultimate in sharing” (Makokis 99).

In the egalitarian societies of the plains Indigenous peoples, sharing is foundational to our belief systems. A leader was not known for how much they accumulated but for how much they gave away. Sharing of food and material wealth is important to the physical well being of a community but sharing also has

to do with time, energy, and knowledge. *Wícihikoesiw* is a Cree word which means to give spiritual help to another. Being a role model and mentor to others in your community is one important aspect of building the community from within.

“Brad and Shauna walk their talk. I’ve now been here since 2000 and I’ve seen consistency through this time. Bent Arrow abides by values and traditions. It’s a family here. Bent Arrow is very good at nurturing.”

- Cheryl Bridges, Orenda House

Bent Arrow is very dedicated to having role models as well as being mentors to others in the community.

Coyote Pride is an in-school mentoring program for Indigenous

children, in grades 4-6. The children and mentors participate in cultural activities and teachings that build positive relationships with each other. *Coyote Kids* is a weekly culture program for Indigenous children from the ages of 6 to 12 years. The children participate and learn about cultural activities, teachings, and ceremonies through hands-on learning, storytelling, art and crafts, Elders and other fun activities. The motto that defines *Coyote Kids* is “Respect, Kindness, Sharing”. In the following the Program Coordinator describes how this natural law is encompassed in the activities:

“One of the biggest aspects of *Coyote Kids* is sharing. The children of the troop are taught to share their experiences, life, and ideas in a sharing circle. This is important for them to learn as sharing is a big part of the Aboriginal community; not only sharing material things but sharing your history, your views, and your gifts.”

There are natural role models that the staff and community at Bent Arrow recognize. One staff member explains how she likes to bring young people to Bent Arrow to see the role models in the community.

“Bringing families to Bent Arrow to see the employees as positive Aboriginal role models also brings a determination to want to grow into

that. Some of the young boys have really connected to Brad Seneca (Co-Executive Director) and see him as a role model. Seeing how he and Shauna Seneca have been able to accomplish things gives them determination to try themselves” (Bent Arrow Staff Member).

There is a lot of power in seeing how one of your own has been able to overcome obstacles and achieve their vision. Having the natural leaders and role models in Brad and Shauna Seneca creates in the staff and community members a sense of healthy pride as well a desire to emulate the qualities they admire.

The natural law of sharing relates to the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects of life. In a Native community one who is aware of their gifts and is generous in using them for the benefit of their people is greatly respected. Bent Arrow believes that children are gifts from the creator and that their healthy development is the responsibility of the whole community. For that reason Bent Arrow is committed to building bridges with Children’s Services, where services to Indigenous children and families are culturally appropriate and in the best interests of the child. The *Seven Generations Family Enhancement Unit* is a part of the Children’s Services branch of the provincial government. In partnership with Bent Arrow, *Seven Generations* moved from their government building into Bent Arrow’s main office in the West end of the city to provide better service to the community. The team has seen a positive shift in practice since physically relocating, everyone sees tremendous benefit from Bent Arrow sharing their knowledge, space and inviting them into the community. The following is how the team incorporates the value of sharing into their practice:

“We share information both ways; we have a lot to learn from families. There is also sharing workload with co-workers. The whole reason we moved into this office is to share with Bent Arrow; sharing culture, values and teachings. Families are more trusting now that we are at Bent Arrow. We need to respect that families share sensitive issues in their lives. Sharing personal time is also important – for example, we are willing to work evenings. It is important to share successes personally and with the family – sharing stories with families. When a family thanks you for helping they share appreciation.”

This project model that was created here has been very successful. It has now been duplicated in other co-location initiatives. Sharing is a significant part of all of Bent Arrow’s activities. *Rites of Passage* has described how their team all cares for each other where they incorporate “sharing a sense of humour, where laughter is key”. *Kokomish* also communicated the importance of “sharing positive experiences and laughter”. *Wind Dancers* explains how “sharing information, insight, stories and skills is always encouraged, as well as volunteering time in the program and the community”. At *Circle of Hope* there is a lot of happiness in seeing community members open up and share for the first time.

“Being a positive role model and having the ability to share our time, our values and beliefs with the participants is so important in our field of work. Sharing most often shows our participants that we are dedicated and interested in whatever service we are providing. Also the sharing of knowledge, stories and teachings from Elders furthers the education of all involved. The Elders will at times use teasing and humour to help us take a look at our behaviours. For example, the joy of seeing a participant open up, laugh and take part in the group discussions.”

Teasing and humour is a very common and entertaining way that our culture directs proper conduct and norms. *Healthy Families* also feels very privileged to be a part of the community: “since we are connected with families for many years

they really get to know us, they know what is true and real. These families are sharing their lives with us – we are honoured to be part of their lives”.

Black Elk, a Lakota visionary and healer has explained the traditional roles and responsibilities of each member in the community and how the value of sharing was especially honoured. In this society everyone was provided for through a system of sharing where the head man ensured the welfare of all. Black Elk explains this process as occurred in a buffalo hunt:

“Then the head man of the advisers went around picking out the best hunters with the fastest horses, and to these he said: “Good young warriors, my relatives, your work I know is good. What you do is good always; so today you shall feed the helpless. Perhaps there are some old and feeble people without sons, or some who have little children and no man. You shall help these, and whatever you kill shall be theirs.” This was a great honor for young men” (Neihardt: 43).

For the Lakota warriors it was considered a privilege to provide for others showing how important the value of generosity was to the Lakota people. This process ensured that all in the community were provided for and well looked after. Stephanie Moosewah, the Supervisor of *Four Arrows*, the adult employment program, explains that “at Bent Arrow you’re always walking away with something and knowing that you have gotten somewhere with the services provided. You’re acknowledged here”. The food bank that is located at Bent Arrow provides food for community members in need, there is also an open door policy where community members can come into the Bent Arrow kitchen and

“The thing that is different about Bent Arrow is that there is a community here... a family. We are all here to do our part.”

- Richard Woodman, Wind Dancers

grab a free coffee and some food. The last week of the month is a soup and bannock lunch where staff members rotate volunteering to prepare and serve a lunch to the community. The natural law of sharing enables us to generously use our gifts for the benefit of the community.

Maskawisiwin (determination/strength)

In the North we find the fourth sacred teaching from the Medicine Wheel of determination and strength. *Maskawisiwin* is to have strength of character. Turtle teachings are based on the Sweat lodge ceremonies and provide guidance on how to live in a strong way. A Cree Elder explains one aspect of the turtle teachings:

“Before the sun rose, the turtle existed. It was huge then but generally they are small now. The turtle is the oldest of all animals. The turtle was given maskawisiywen ‘strength’, that is why some people have Turtle Sweat Lodges. The turtle is kind and is a healer. Another important factor about the turtle is that it does not sway from its path, nothing stops it, it keeps on the same path and stays in balance” (Makokis 100).

Similar to the turtle, Indigenous people must use strength in a good way. Many people at Bent Arrow go to the Elders in the community to get strength and wisdom. The helpers in the *Coyote Pride* program explain that: “the Elders of the program attend and teach the mentoring groups. They build strength in the Coordinator and Mentors, encouraging them to share their stories and experiences with the children in a safe, comfortable and spiritual way.” Elders are a valuable resource for the Bent Arrow community to go to for spiritual guidance and wisdom. The community members that come to Bent Arrow are full of

determination and strength to persevere through challenges. The *Healthy Families'* workers honour the women in their program for their strength:

“The moms we work with are determined everyday just to live life for their child. The changes that these parents make in their lives is to better their life and their child’s life – they are determined, especially when there is many issues and barriers they need to walk through. As a family visitor we are determined to help families discover and reach their individual goals, so with that we need to be creative in helping” (Healthy Families).

At Bent Arrow there is also an acknowledgement that strength also “comes from your beliefs, prayers, ceremonies, drumming, and Elders. Prayers for assistance can really be the difference in a day when you don’t know what to say or do in a situation but there is strength through those beliefs” (Cheryl Bridges, Orenda House). One of the teachings from the turtle is the importance of staying on a straight path, being determined and not swaying from your values, teachings, and visions. With all things it is essential to live in a balanced way. For the helpers at Bent Arrow it is essential that they stay balanced and incorporate the turtle teachings into their work:

“Our workers need to develop their strength and determination to be committed to each child in the program. They use this strength and determination to help each child develop in his/her own personal growth and journey. They need to have enough determination and strength to draw on during those times when they need to advocate for a child’s right to education and to any assistance they may need to aide them” (White Cloud Head Start).

The community at Bent Arrow receives strength from the Creator, from personal beliefs, as well as from working together as a community.

The Natural Laws and all the teachings of the Medicine Wheel are completely wholistic; to truly grasp the teachings means that you can’t see the elements as

separate parts but as a whole thing - understanding the relationship between all parts:

“All things are interrelated. Everything in the universe is part of a single whole. Everything is connected in some way to everything else. It is therefore possible to understand something only if we can understand how it is connected to everything else” (Bopp 26).

The *Four Arrows*’ helps illuminate the interconnection between the natural laws encompassed at Bent Arrow:

We approach every person we meet with love/kindness which opens the door to honesty, through that comes the ability to share, allowing us to seek determination, building on strengths which results in maintaining a safe environment and success for both participants and the program.

These natural laws and the principles of *miyo wicehtowin* (good relationship) found in the medicine wheel teachings provide the philosophy that guides Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.

Bent Arrow Governance

Governance in a traditional Indigenous way begins with the values and beliefs that ground us and lead us on the right path. After understanding the guiding principles in our society and using them as the framework, the next aspect is to be aware of the roles and responsibilities that we have. In traditional Indigenous societies every member had a role to play where all functions were necessary and validated. Researching traditional governance structures of Indigenous peoples showed that there were many formalized societies and functions that operated within a community. For the Cree a traditional governing structure appears very similar to the ancient medicine wheels still prominent on this territory.

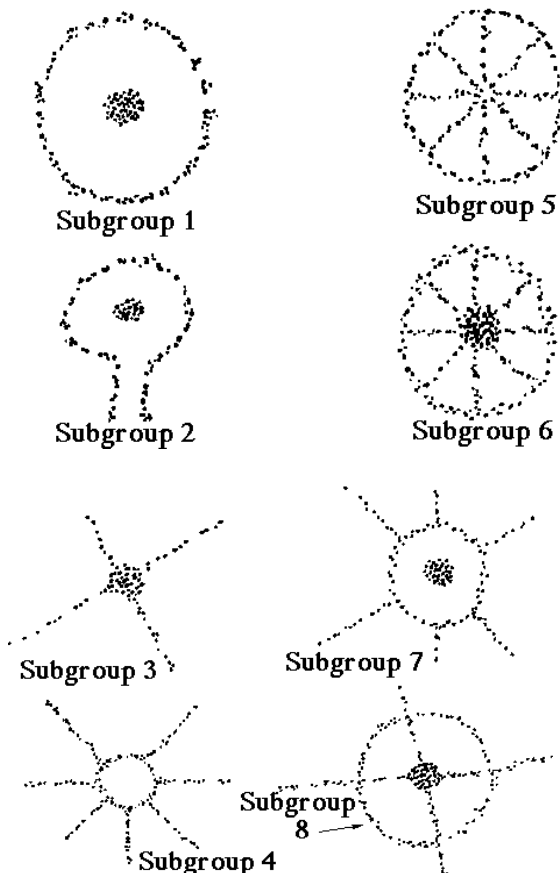


Figure 3 - Medicine Wheel Configurations found in Alberta (Barnett, D.)

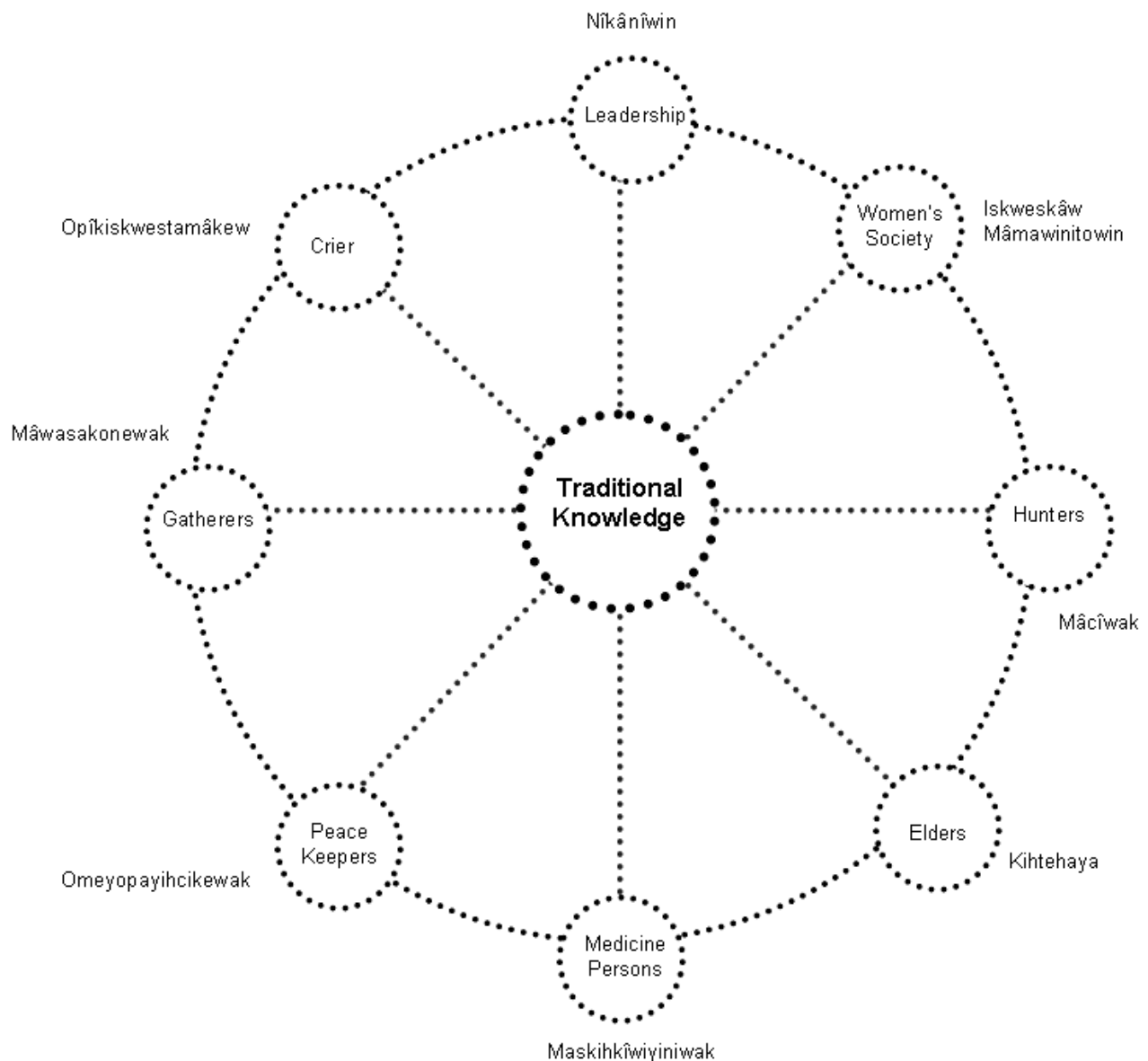
Medicine Wheel Formations

These sketches represent a few of the historic formations (subgroups) of Medicine Wheels that are publicly known of on the Plains territory. For Bent Arrow our governance structure is modelled after the Medicine Wheel formation, similar to that shown in Subgroup 6.

Traditional Governance

The diagram below shows the governance structure of a traditional Cree society (adapted from Makokis). Leona Makokis explains that “the first important principle is that everybody was considered as a part of the circle. No single being was better, more eminent, or such to any other” (122).

Figure 4 - Traditional Governance Structure (adapted from Makokis)



The center of the structure is traditional knowledge, which was received from ceremonies as well as passed down through the generations. The Elders were given much respect for their wisdom as well as sound advice; they would determine what types of leaders were needed in the community. The other spokes of this circle include Medicine Persons, Peacekeepers, Gatherers, Crier, Leadership, Women's Society, and the Hunters. Through this structure all people were given a role to play in the functioning of the community.

Although these roles are based on a traditional society, the principles and values underlying each role are still applicable today. Bent Arrow believes that the roles in our society are very much like that of the roles in a traditional Indigenous society. A quote by an unknown author really encapsulates Bent Arrow's vision:

"The Indigenous way is about teaching how to be, not what to do."

It is easy to teach someone the tasks related to a job but in an Indigenous way the society's responsibility is to actually teach about how to be that person; the essence of being a leader, for example. The specific tasks will easily follow after.

Nîkânîwin (Leadership)

Leadership is very different in Indigenous thought than in contemporary western society. In Cree *nîkânîwin* is the term for leadership and refers to walking ahead or being in front; it also is related to *nîkâneyimiwew*, which means a person who thinks of people first. *Nîkâneyimiw* refers to a person who thinks ahead, who has foresight or vision. *Nîkânahâw* is a person who is put ahead or in front. This portrays how a leader is someone recognized by others and placed in that

position by the people. In our way being a leader is being of the people and for the people. Using the grass as a metaphor, a Cree Elder teaches about humility and shows the qualities that leaders should have:

“You have to know from the grassroots. The term refers to the life path and from where you start. You have to be a part of the grass to be a grassroots person, [to have] Indian understanding, respect, thought, [and] responsibility of the sacredness of life itself. You have to be, above all, even [level] with the knowledge and power. You have to be even with the ground and not like the blade itself that dances with the wind. Grassroots is the people of the soil, people of the land. Before you can be humble, you have to be kind. You feel with your heart, and not your mind. It takes a real balance before you can get that. Everything is in balance because we care about each other” (Makokis 96).

Using the grassroots as a teacher we can see the principles that make a good leader. At the forefront is the need to be grounded in your Indigenous beliefs and values and the responsibilities you have to all of creation. An Indigenous leader is also someone who is grassroots, of the people. Humility and kindness are important features where the person is also able to be balanced within self as well as in relationship to others. Shauna Seneca explains that leadership is about “your generosity, your ability to give to others. It is also about being a good role model – being a healthy person – not a perfect person but being a healthy person in balance and willing to grow”. Being respectful of everything, being clothed in humility and kindness and realizing how everything is connected is the spirit of *nîkânîwin*.

Iskweskâw Mâmawinitowin (Women’s Society)

The principles behind the Women’s Society really have to do with *iskwewowin* which refers to being a woman or womanhood. The root of the word has reference to *iskotew* (fire), which is a part of the traditional responsibilities of

iskwewowin, to provide emotional and physical warmth to the family and community (Makokis: 129). There is a need for the role of women to again become valued and respected by Indigenous peoples. A Cheyenne proverb communicates how essential it is that women in a community are healthy and well supported.

"A nation is not conquered
Until the hearts of its women are on the ground.
Then it is finished,
No matter how brave its warriors
Or how strong their weapons."
- Cheyenne proverb

This is a time when we need to respect the role of women in healing and value their role as givers of life. To understand the teachings of the Women's Society is to understand the teachings of the teepee. Leona Makokis explains "the tepee is the basis of our home; it is also the basis of our society. It shapes our worldview in relations and in relationship to how we have to pattern and work together as a community. The teepee teaching is the basis for the role of woman and her teaching" (127-128). Skywoman goes on to say that:

"Due to the communal significance of woman, as symbolized in the tepee teaching, if the women do not have the responsibility and respect in the community, then that community is not going to be solid or strong. Thus, we have to acknowledge the communal power of the women, their duties, and responsibilities so our communities continue to be the good place they were intended to be" (Makokis: 131-132).

As in all the teachings of the medicine wheel there is a need for balance in all the roles of a society. For the health of Indigenous communities we need to show the worth of *iskwewowin* in words and in action.

Mâcîwak (Hunters)

Mâcîwak is the Cree word for hunters, the people who are the provisioners or the providers for the community. When discussing the principles of being a hunter its important to remember that in an Indigenous way people are taught how to be ‘a hunter’, not simply how to hunt – to understand the values underlying that role.

Larry Littlebird, a Pueblo Indian illuminates the essence of a hunter:

“My people were given hunting by the Creator as a way to remember. Hunters journey by faith. Sounds call to them. At first, only a faint sound, distantly recalled. Later, maybe it becomes a song, sound-song from some long-ago time. The song’s language instructs and begins to guide. It becomes a steady rhythm, a steady beat, much like the tapping of a cane leads a blind person to travel with faith in the direction of the tapping.

A hunter knows life is all around, abundant. It’s what is hunted. He knows life will be sustained through correct action. Because he knows this, he begins to receive his life through becoming increasingly aware of each breath he takes. In the simple action of song, breathing in and then the breath coming forth into being, is held the knowledge for gaining life. Each breath, each moment can call the hunter further awake in the memory and act of creation. This knowledge is the hunter’s heart.

Hunting requires perseverance, total commitment for each day of hunting from beginning until the end. Hunting teaches appreciation for each new day” (Littlebird: 17-18).

In the above excerpt Littlebird speaks about the nature of a hunter. A *mâcîw* (hunter) is one who is aware of the natural laws governing the universe and therefore the proper way to do things. Hunting requires determination and whole-hearted commitment to providing for the physical needs of the society.

Kihtehaya (Elders)

Kihtehaya is the Cree word for Elder. The role of an Elder in traditional society is very much the same as the role of an Elder today. They are the keepers of the traditional knowledge ensuring that this is passed on to future generations. Elders

also conduct ceremonies and give advice to ensure the people stay on their path.

It is said that Elders in Indigenous communities are those people who are:

“...Recognized and respected for knowing, living and teaching the traditional knowledge. They see the world through the eyes of the ancestors and interpret the contemporary world through lessons passed down through the generations. Their wisdom is transferred to young people who seek their teachings. The elders are a living bridge between the past and the present. They also provide a vision for the future, a vision grounded in tradition and informed by the experience of living on the land, safeguarding and disseminating knowledge gained over centuries” (RCAP IV: 3).

Elders often have the gift of insight and can use humour and storytelling to teach morals, beliefs, and proper behaviour. Elders have been an essential part of the Bent Arrow society since its inception through to today.

Maskihkîwiyiniwak (Medicine Persons)

In Cree, *maskihkîwiyiniw* is a person who treats spiritual, physical, emotional, or mental illness. These are the people who holistically care for issues affecting the people and the community. Shauna Seneca explains that at Bent Arrow we look at “being healed and not the healing. When we think about strong medicine people for us, there is no egocentrism in that. When you’re involved with that medicine person you go away knowing what that person’s gift was with you but having some responsibility for that work and what you did and how it all came to be.” When we think about medicine people we want to look at all of who a person is, their life as a whole. There is also a preventative aspect to this ensuring harmony in you and in the community. Elder Campbell Papequash explains the traditional role of Medicine Persons:

“Initially healers became herbalists, herbalists became medicine men, and medicine men became philosophers concerned not only with preserving

life and mitigating pain. From the healers came ethics. They offered guidance and principles for living the good life, whose end was to secure general wellbeing. Healing went beyond the sick. It applied to the wellbeing of the tribe. More than this, it bordered on metaphysics, psychology, ethics, morality and ceremony. It touched upon the training and education of the tribe. Committed to the belief that long life was the product of good, upright living, the medicine men and women had to discover what constituted integrity in life, and having found it, lived it out” (Waldram: 88).

Maskihkîwiyiniwak (medicine people) encompass all of the aspects of our nature in harmony. By looking at the medicine wheel teachings of our whole nature, medicine people are able to assist the people and community at becoming and sustaining mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Omeyopayihcikewak (Peacemakers)

A peacemaker is one who comes to a situation with humility to reconcile conflict and to bring peace back to a person, family or society. This is really about restoring order or balance. *Wawânaskehtamaw* means to create a peaceful life for someone, a peacekeeper. Shauna Seneca is the person at Bent Arrow who is a peacekeeper in both a formal and informal sense. She sees that a lot of her teaching came from her grandmother. Her maternal grandmother taught her an important lesson that she has taken with her since that time. Grandmother told her to look into the mirror every night and reflect on whether you have harmed anyone in that day through your words or actions and if you have been a kind and loving person (the first natural law). If you have hurt anyone then you need to restore that relationship. This reflection brings peace and allows you to be rejuvenated. Grandmother’s lesson is about creating internal peace and making peace in your relationships with others.

At Bent Arrow, one example where we have changed procedures to reflect our values is with the Grievance policy. By renaming the policy to Peacekeeping we have changed the connotation and the way of thinking about the process. The Peacekeeping approach is where we are bringing peace back to a situation and restoring relationships. This shift in terminology and understanding aligns us to our values and philosophy.

Mâwasakonewak (Gatherers)

Mâwasakonew are people who are gatherers. Traditionally this would have included providing resources for the community, such as plants, roots, supplies, water, and other provisions for the community. At Bent Arrow the *mâwasakonewak* (gatherers) are those who gather resources including people, information, and other supports for the society. Being a gatherer requires that we hold on to our beliefs and principles, making sure that whoever we bring in be of the same mind. We need to share similar values and beliefs with our partners where they respect our sacred laws.

Opîkiskwestamâkew (Crier)

The final society that we are referring to is that of the Crier. *Opîkiskwestamâkew* is the Cree word for an orator, one of the roles and qualities of a Crier. An orator is someone who speaks on behalf of others in a community. To be a Crier one must be firmly grounded in their traditions and like a turtle stay on a straight path, knowing right for wrong. They have a big role in standing up to injustices and in doing the right thing. Doing the right thing often takes courage and a thick skin. Through reflecting on the natural laws a person can advocate from a place of

love, kindness, honesty, and strength. These people give of themselves to uphold the values of the community. The other role of the Crier is to communicate with people what is happening, what the needs of people are, and what things are good. At Bent Arrow we want people to hear the good things that people are doing in our community, to be Strengths-based and change the negative stereotypes in society.

Clans (programs)

Even in daily life Cree people lived in an interdependent way through the clan system. One of the Elders, Charles stated that “in the old days our communities followed a clan system. Family units had a head spokesperson as their leader. They would form part of a large council. They worked collectively and for the common good” (Makokis 133). Another Elder named Mike said that “within those clans, there was harmony, understanding, acceptance, and healthy communities” (Makokis 133). It was also said that headman and keepers were chosen by the people to keep the four directions. With the clan system the decision-making was open to everyone in camp, where decisions that affected the whole camp were discussed in the lodges of the families. Then the leaders of the clans would have meetings with their own clan to report and discuss. In this way decisions were made by consensus (Makokis 134).



Figure 5 - Bent Arrow Programs

The above diagram is a pictorial representation of the programs currently operating through Bent Arrow. When discussing the governance structure of Bent Arrow we observed that the different programs within Bent Arrow could be seen as clans with their own leadership, medicine people, peace keepers, etc. Each

program has developed a governance structure where they describe the people and positions that take on the different traditional governance roles (see Appendix IV). There are currently fifteen programs operating through Bent Arrow:

- **Four Arrows Adult Employment Program** - An employment program for Indigenous people over the age of 18.
- **Rites of Passage** - Full time cultural, educational, life management program for Indigenous youth between the ages of 12 to 15.
- **Wind Dancers Pre-Employment Youth Program** - Enables Indigenous youth to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and experiences to become successful leaders in the community. For youth between the ages of 15 – 29.
- **Kokomish House** – Long-term residential program for Indigenous youth, 12-17 years old, who are in care of Child Welfare.
- **Esquao House** - Long term residential program for Indigenous youth who are pregnant or parenting and in the care of Child Welfare.
- **Orenda House** - A transitional housing project for homeless families ranging in the ages 15-29 years old.
- **Coyote Kids** - A weekly cultural program for Indigenous children 6-12 years of age,
- **Coyote Pride** - A cultural summer camp for children in the months of July and August.
- **Healthy Families** – A long-term intensive home visitation program, which provides services to pregnant women and first time parenting families.

- **Nitotemak Foster Care** - Foster care for Indigenous children and youth in the care of Child Welfare.
- **White Cloud Head Start** - The Bent Arrow Head Start Program is to provide Indigenous Pre-school children with an opportunity to develop and learn different skills to be successful in the school system.
- **Sacred Circle Family Intervention** - An in home family support program for families involved with Child Welfare or Family Enhancement.
- **Community Parents** - A Program to support the Natural helpers in the community in supporting other families.
- **Circle of Hope** - Wholistic support program for Indigenous survivors of residential schools.
- **7 Generations Family Enhancement Unit** – supports for people who do not have Child Welfare

Bent Arrow Governance Model

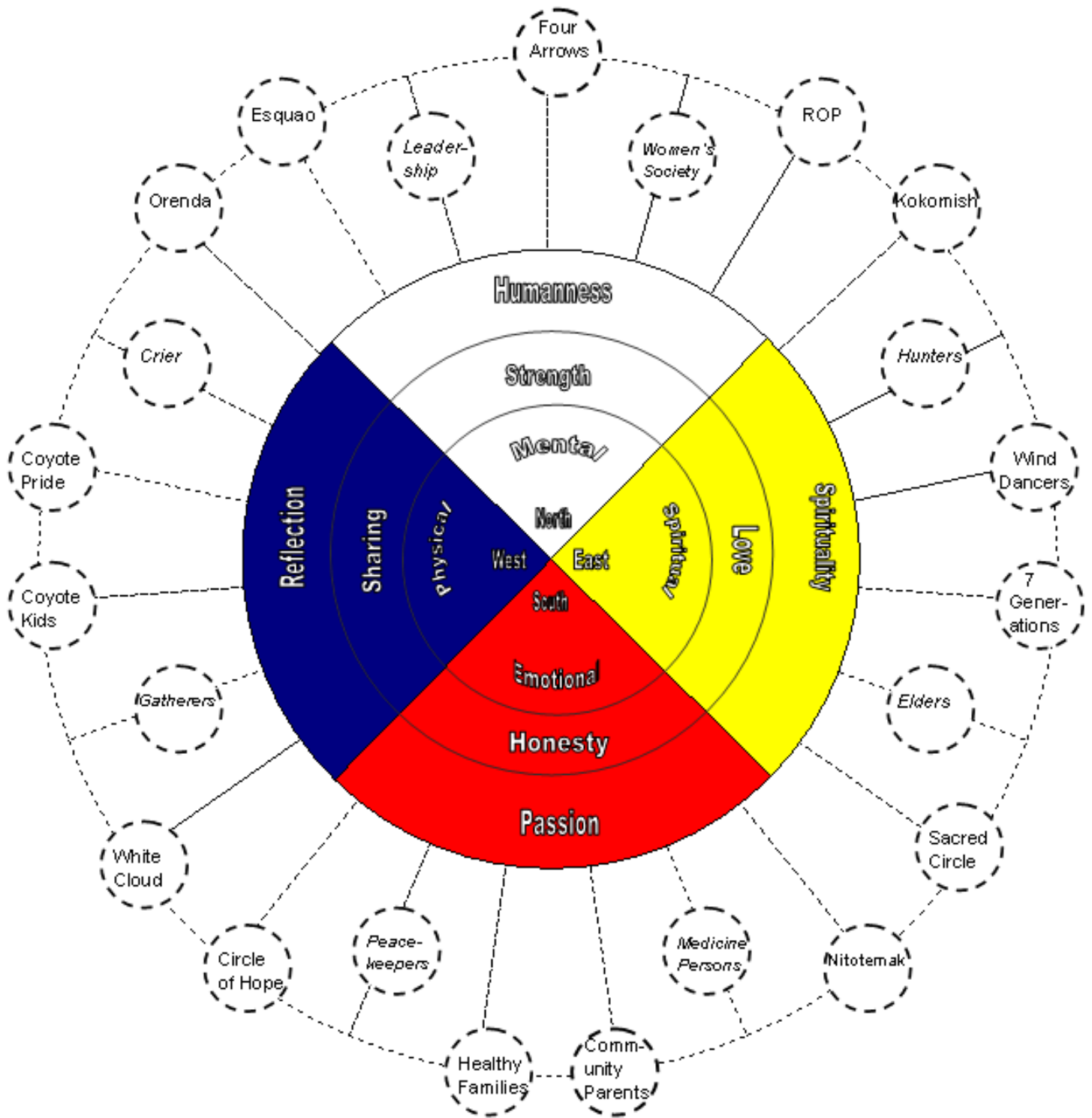


Figure 6 - Bent Arrow Governance Model

The teachings of the Medicine Wheel form the basis of the philosophy that we operate on. To more accurately portray this we would need the medicine wheel to rotate in a circle to show how each program is enclosed by the teachings. To encapsulate the governance of Bent Arrow we begin with wholistically looking at the Spiritual, Emotional, Physical, and Intellectual aspects of the Medicine Wheel teachings. The teachings of Love, Honesty, Sharing, and Strength guide us through all our relationships while the principles of Miyo Wicehtowin (good relationship) enable us to balance our own values with the values of others. This forms the philosophy of Bent Arrow. The governance structure refers to the traditional roles that the people at Bent Arrow undertake, where every person at Bent Arrow has a role with responsibilities that come with the role, that are both formal and informal. The circles are represented by dotted lines to portray that the programs and roles/responsibilities are connected, interdependent and engage together. These are not separate entities but all a part of a unified circle. Added to this is what could be referred to as a clan system where each program has their own micro governance structure with specific roles and responsibilities for each member. These clans are interconnected to each other and really form one whole community. In the Bent Arrow model there is a continuous movement through the wheel where new beginnings and growth is attained.

“All things are interrelated. Everything in the universe is part of a single whole. Everything is connected in some way to everything else. It is therefore possible to understand something only if we can understand how it is connected to everything else”

- The Sacred Tree

Appendixes

I - References

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II - Bent Arrow Programs

Four Arrows

Adult pre-employment/employment program for Indigenous people over 18 who have multiple barriers to securing and/or maintaining employment. Students receive life management skill development, career preparation and planning, job preparation, job placement, and specific skill training including WHMIS, First Aid/CPR, Chain saw safety, working in confined space, transporting dangerous goods, flag person training, etc.

Wind Dancers

Youth pre-employment/employment program for Indigenous youth 15-24 who are committed to making positive lifestyle changes. The youth receive many of the same services as they do in the Four Arrows programs.

Healthy Families

Long term intensive home visitation program for first time families. Families can be involved in the program until the child is five.

White Cloud Head Start Program

30 spaces for Indigenous children 3-5 focuses on preparing children for a successful start in life. The program operates out of the Sherwood School in the west end.

Circle of Hope

Provides information, resources and supports for people directly or indirectly impacted by residential schools through presentations, groups and outreach.

Rites of Passage

Full time school program for Indigenous youth or are at risk of not succeeding in the regular school system.

Coyote Kids

Weekly program for children 6-12 where they learn about culture, traditions, ceremonies as well as building self esteem, confidence, working with others and being part of a team.

Coyote Pride

Cultural wilderness camps for children in the months of July and August.

Esquao House

Residential program for pregnant and parenting teens who have child welfare status. The focus of the programs to prepare young women to successfully parent their child and live successfully and independently in the community.

Kokomish House

Residential program for Indigenous youth 12-18 who have child welfare status.

Orenda House Family Housing Project

Transitional housing for young Indigenous homeless families that provides the necessary support services to successfully transition to independence. The project is a collaboration between Edmonton City Police, Alberta Children's Services, Alberta Human Resources and Employment and Bent Arrow. Families can live at Orenda House for at least two years.

Sacred Circle West, Southwest, Central and Energy Square

Provides family support, family aide and youth workers to families involved with child welfare at the three neighbourhood centres.

Community Parents

Provides peer support for families through natural helpers and other supports for families.

Foster Care

Provides foster care support to eight youth with child welfare status in foster homes in the community.

7 Generations

A unit of Child and Family Services workers who provide Family Enhancement Services to voluntary families served under Child Welfare. The unit is located at Bent Arrow.

Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society also provides the following supports to the people we serve.

Collective Kitchens
Health For Two
Advocacy

Clothing Bank
Food Bank
Community Referral

III - Natural Laws Response

Each program within Bent Arrow took the time to express how they draw on the Natural Laws in their daily work with each other and the families that they work with. Here is one example from the *Healthy Families* program:

	Love/Kindness	Honesty	Sharing	Determination/Strength
Healthy Families	<p>This is how we approach our families, with a very open and kind attitude, we are accepting of who they are. Giving words of encouragement.</p> <p>We are gentle and kind with the words that we use with families. If we do not have the words at that time, we go back and reflect, discuss with co-workers and find kind words to get our message across for the next home visit.</p> <p>Families can be involved for</p>	<p>We need to be honest with families to build a relationship.</p> <p>We explain the program and are honest about obligations we have – having to report if we see or suspect a child is being harmed... (some staff are worried that the family might not become involved knowing requirements). In 7 years of being part of HF I have only seen 2 families not become a part of our program because of us being upfront about</p>	<p>We share in the family's life; you share in your own life and other families lives. This helps as it shows the families that they are not alone in their experiences.</p> <p>Since we are connected with families for many years they really get to know us, they know what is true and real. These families are sharing their lives with us – we are honoured to be part of their lives.</p> <p>We share information and knowledge with families,</p>	<p>After 3-5 yrs of being involved in a program there is a pretty strong relationship between the family visitor and the family. The family visitor has to have the ability to find the strengths that families have – so they can build on them.</p> <p>Unsolicited feedback – family visitors' comments – we need to recognize what the families have done. Family visitors need to keep their cup full – need a lot of strength to do this job.</p>

	<p>3-5 years; there is a strong relationship that is developed between family visitor and family members – we do love the families, we do love the children and you can see the love given back by families.</p> <p>Stepping outside the box: a mother has had a video camera for 7 years but has not used because she does not know how. Family visitor plans to go over manual with the mom on the next visit to capture precious moments of the baby.</p> <p>When we begin working with a family it is important that we do not walk in acting like we know it all and are going to fix them. We are there to build a trusting relationship with them and find out where they are at, their strengths, so they can feel supported.</p> <p>When a baby you are working with first says your name, it is like being called</p>	<p>obligations.</p> <p>We are honest about not knowing an answer but finding out for them. Honesty also hurts, we share with families what we are observing and seeing. There also has to be proof of honesty, follow-up on what we say we're going to do. The program and family visitor have nothing to hide. Honesty has to be both ways – you need to be honest and clear with what you are saying. You do not want to make assumptions on what you think it might be, in case you find out you are wrong, so it is best to always be honest.</p>	<p>and as time goes on they share their knowledge and info with us. As family visitors we share our time and energy with families, they want to know about us: do we have any children?</p>	<p>The moms we work with are determined everyday just to live life for their child. The changes that these parents make in their lives is to better their life and their child's life – they are determined, especially when there is many issues and barriers they need to walk through.</p> <p>As a family visitor we are determined to help families discover and reach their individual goals, so with that we need to be creative in helping.</p>
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	mom for the first time.			
	<p>The mothers that we work with have never had an honest relationship with anyone, some not even with their own mothers. This is why they don't trust and they don't share. Some of these moms also carry shame. In our approach with families and in using the natural laws, the moms begin to talk with us and we begin to share and a trusting relationship begins to form. The moms realize there are people out there that can help them heal. The women get strength from who they are, then they become more gentler and kinder to themselves and others. That effects who you are, but in using and living the natural laws these families make a full circle within the natural laws. The natural laws all closely tie into each other.</p>			

IV – Governance Structure Response

Each program at Bent Arrow took part in an exercise to examine the roles and responsibilities that a traditional Indigenous society had and how the essence of these roles is being done in their program. This is one response from the *Sacred Circle* program:

Sacred Circle –

Governance Model explanation

As an agency that is geared towards helping and healing Aboriginal families and individuals, it is very important that the approach we use is wholistic. In our work we try to be sensitive to each individual's needs and strengths based on the medicine wheel; mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually and by using the natural laws of kindness, honesty, sharing and determination/strength. At Sacred Circle we not only look after our families but also look after ourselves by practicing these laws in our daily lives and within the office. For example: Having a smudge and prayer before staff meetings and sharing with each other the problems we may be having on a personal and or professional level thus supporting each other so we can be a support for our clients.

With the use of the Traditional model of the community, Sacred Circle and Bent Arrow functions as a community with each section playing a role to maintain harmony. We discovered, while going through the model that many of the roles overlap and that we each play a role in some way, whether it's for the families we work with or for the staff we work with. We used the model to see how we fit into it.

In the *Center* of the "community" we thought it appropriate that Bent Arrow's philosophy be central. Also included in the center are the families, since they are the focus of the work we do and who we are trying to help.

For *Leadership*, we defined that as those who are the decision makers/chiefs and spokespersons or those who meet with other leaders and report back to the members of the community. So for this position we included the Executive Directors, Brad and Shauna Seneca as well as Senior Manager, Cheryl Whiskeyjack for Sacred Circle. Also included are the supervisors of Sacred Circle who are leaders for the front-line workers. The front-line workers are also leaders to the families that they work with. They take the leading role in helping effect change within the families and to lead them to make healthier choices, etc.

For *Women's Society*, we thought that since in the old days the woman took care of the home. So for this we included the Administration and custodians. They help to keep things running smoothly by organizing things, ordering supplies and keeping the place clean etc. There was also a lot of sharing and communication within the woman's society so we felt it right to say that our staff meetings would be included in this. Since at staff meetings we share, discuss and talk about things concerning our "community" etc. Also the front-line workers all fall into this category when working with families by sharing, organizing and doing things that help the family to run smoothly.

Hunters: In the past the hunters were the people who provided for the community and were also the protectors of the community. So for this we included all front-line workers because they hunt for resources and gather information that will help the families and support them. Also in some cases they help to protect either the family from separating by giving support and feedback etc. or protecting the children, i.e. supervised visits. We also decided to include the administration because they also gather resources and information which will be useful for the workers. We can include those people who hunt for money to keep the programs running.

Elders: The elders are the ones who have wisdom and knowledge. They have the final say and are those who people turn to for guidance and council. So included here we think that the Board of Directors fit here. They give council and guidance

to all programs within Bent Arrow and have the ultimate say and final decision. Again here we include the front-line workers for the families because the workers have the wisdom and knowledge of resources and ways in which the families can be helped. Their recommendations carry weight when dealing with social workers etc.

Medicine Persons: The medicine persons, we thought, are those who take care of the health of the people; they are the healers. So in here we included the nurse for the physical aspect. Also we saw the medicine people as keepers of the culture and traditions so we also include traditional Elders that work with Bent Arrow and Brad (Executive Director) because he runs the sweats etc. We also included the front-line workers because they help to heal the clients by offering resources, wisdom, a listening ear, kindness, honesty etc.

Peace Keepers: The Peace Keepers are the mediators and they help to maintain unity and peace within the community; whether it is within the agency or with the families/clients. So here we include the supervisors and the leaders who keep the peace within the program. If there is a problem, the supervisors are the ones to talk to, to help maintain the peace. If there is a grievance the supervisors are the ones to keep the peace and to mediate between those involved. The supervisors also keep peace between the workers and the child welfare acting as mediators between when necessary. Also included here are those who do public relations and mediate between the community and Bent Arrow. Of course the

front-line workers are again included as they act as peace keepers for the families, whether adversity comes from inside the client's family or outside the family i.e. child welfare.

Gatherers: In the past, the gatherers were those who gather medicine, roots, plants etc. So we saw this as the gatherer's of information and resources that will be useful for our clients. So included in here are all the front-line staff, administration and supervisors. For example: some resources that have been gathered are things like the food bank, finding furniture for clients, finding free resources for the youth and families to access etc.

Criers: The criers, in the past, were those people who made announcements about the activities in the community. They signalled when to move, when to get up and what activities were about to take place etc. So for this position we included the supervisors, we they inform the staff, at meetings, what activities will be taking place and what to prepare for. For example: Informing staff when fun day is, or what upcoming functions staff need to attend and if there has been a new RFS etc. Also included is the finance department as they inform when cheques will be out, if we are over on our minutes for our cell phones etc. The administration is also included as they inform staff about client hours, if they are over, relay messages from CFSW's, supervisors and clients etc. Also other linked agencies can be considered criers as well as they share information about upcoming events and other information.

