

# What About the Men?

Northern Men's Research Project



Summary and Recommendations | May 2015

# What About the Men?

## Northern Men's Research Project

**Summary and Recommendations | May 2015**

**Researchers:**

Bob Patles, Steven Kormendy, Allie Winton, Mike Nitsiza,  
Helen Kitekudlak, Noel Kaludjak, Byron Hamel

**Report prepared by:**

Shelley Tulloch, Research Guide





## Northern Men's Research Project Summary

The Northern Men's Research Project was a community-based exploration of the factors that support or block Northern Indigenous men's participation in learning and work. This document summarizes the research process and results, and makes recommendations for more effective support of Northern Indigenous men in work and school. Further details can be found in the full research report available at [ilitaqsinic.ca](http://ilitaqsinic.ca).

### Why did we do this research?

Self-government movements, land claims, Indigenous control of education, and economic development have led to increased opportunities for Indigenous Canadians to participate in society on their own terms, including learning and work. Despite these positive developments, we too often hear deficit discourses, that Indigenous Canadians have the highest rates of suicide, addiction, and incarceration, and the lowest rates of education and employment. Such characterizations miss the richness of many Indigenous people's lives, and can be troubling in carrying on negative stereotypes. Still, they raise red flags of injustice in our country. The slow movement to overcome the damage done by decades of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic oppression, and to positively engage in changing learning and work opportunities, appears unequally shared. Increasingly, statistics, research, media, and community perceptions suggest that Indigenous men are less likely than Indigenous women to complete high school or hold jobs, and significantly more at risk for suicide and jail. In this research, we asked, "Why are the men apparently worse off than Indigenous women in these seemingly improving times? What supports Indigenous men to carve out the lives they aspire to?"

### How did we do this research?

Iilitaqsinic, the Nunavut Literacy Council (NLC), in partnership with the Yukon Literacy Coalition, the Northwest Territories Literacy Council, and Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador, initiated the Northern Men's Research Project. Employment and Skills Development Canada provided primary funding. Northern Indigenous men led this project within a team of community-based researchers, who were supported by literacy council staff and an academic research guide. Through open-ended interviews (33 participants), closed questionnaires (166), and a workshop with the community-based researchers and identified Indigenous male role models (11) from communities across the North, we documented men's stories about learning, work, and well being. We asked men about what is important to them, what they hope for themselves and their sons, and what helps them get there or blocks them. We also asked about examples of programming and policy that have supported them toward their goals. In our reporting, we bring to light some specific challenges that men face, while highlighting positive examples of men overcoming barriers to reach their desired goals.

This research is exploratory. The number of men in this study does not necessarily reflect the diversity of men in the North and greater dialogue is needed to bring breadth and depth to our understandings. Still, given the gap in research specifically addressing northern Indigenous men's experiences, we contribute to dialogue by raising questions and identifying paths of further inquiry and action for those who are concerned with supporting the engagement of northern Indigenous men in learning, work, and well-being.

## What did we find out?

### What do northern Indigenous men see as “success”?

**Freedom to self-define.** As part of our research, we needed to define “success” in the men's own terms in order to avoid framing men's experiences in terms of non-Indigenous, or non-male driven visions of what is important. In the stories we collected, common themes emerge, but no single set of criteria for what constitutes success for northern Indigenous men. The success northern Indigenous men talked about in this study is multi-dimensional. In the big picture, men's descriptions of success reflected the importance of what one does and is able to do; how one's actions impact the community; and how these reflect who one is.

**“Strong like two men.”** A common theme in men's definitions of success was what the T'licho call being “strong like two men”: able to function in and positively draw from the so-called “modern” life, including schooling and paid work, as well as more traditional sides of life, associated with culture and the land-based economy. Both schooling and work are framed around the need for money. Schooling (high school, college, job-training) is valued because it is seen as necessary to get a job, and paid work is necessary in order to have a home, keep food in the cupboards, support family members, and—if one is lucky—pay for things that one wants. If one can enjoy one's schooling and job, all the better, but school achievement and jobs were not described by the men in this study as status symbols, expressions of identity, or means to self-realization the way they have been described to be for certain sectors of men in Euro-Canadian cultures.

The practical and symbolic importance of participating in cultural and subsistence practices was consistently mentioned. In many northern communities, traditional practices are part of a second, land<sup>1</sup>-based economy. Men's ability and activity in fishing, hunting, collecting wood, etc., reflects and brings a wealth that does not show up in dollar amounts. Learning and practicing land skills are tied to survival. Being on the land, and all that entails, is also where men say they develop the characteristics that are important for being a complete person, where they find their identity and well-being.

**Helping. Providing.** An overlapping theme in men's descriptions of what they aspire to or admire is being in a position to help others: providing for basic needs, having something to share, helping others to get ahead, knowing what to do, and passing on knowledge and wisdom. Men

---

<sup>1</sup> “Land” is used here in its broadest sense here to include land, water, and ice.

spoke of valuing their roles as father and husband, including for the legacy they leave through their children's continued contribution to society. Men's vision of success was not about individualized goals or achievement but rather about contributing to the well-being of the family and community.

**“Being a good human being.”** Many men expressed the key aspect of success as “being a good human being.” Men aspired to develop, enact, and pass on core values such as being respected and respectful, being grateful and generous, being a good listener, forgiving, overcoming mistreatment, working hard, and being one's best. Humility and equality were valued, where the goal is not to get ahead, but to be “normal.” For centuries prior to contact with Europeans, each Indigenous group had its own economic, political, and social structures and these continue to be reflected in northern Indigenous men's aspirations and visions of the good life, even as they take on additional roles that are considered necessary for surviving or thriving within the systems introduced by Euro-Canadians.

**Implications of the research, when considering the extent to which northern Indigenous men are thriving in the range of roles available to them are:**

1. Avoid assuming a single vision of success for all northern Indigenous men.
2. Acknowledge and support each man's freedom in designing a desired future within a changing context.
3. Evaluate needed and desired support in terms of men's own identified goals.

## **How are northern Indigenous men engaging in learning and work?**

**Myth of the disengaged man.** In light of the awareness that federally collected statistics did not necessarily reflect northern Indigenous men's values or realities relating to their level of engagement, we also asked men to describe their daily lives and life pathways. Participants agreed that northern Indigenous men appear under-represented in formal schooling (schools, colleges, graduation rates) and in many workplaces, notably the self-government offices and related jobs. However, findings also pointed to learning and work that is happening outside of school and jobs. Participants said that their most useful learning, in terms of doing their current job, came from self-teaching or learning on-the-job. While men tended to undervalue their unpaid work (child and Elder care, subsistence, helping family members, fixing things), findings show it to be an important part of their economic activity (Condon, Collings, & Wenzel, 1995). Also, men's stories show engagement in learning and work as cyclical, reflecting seasons in men's lives (literally and figuratively). Our findings call into question the “myth of the disengaged male,” showing northern Indigenous men as more actively involved in learning and work than narrow definitions of such concepts and national statistics would suggest. Our findings nonetheless pointed to areas where men wished for but had difficulty accessing greater growth opportunities. We found that men's stories focused on gaps in well-being as the primary cause of disengagement.

### Implications for policy and program developers include:

4. Broaden the sense of “learning” to reflect the range of pathways in northern Indigenous men’s learning.
5. Broaden the sense of “work” to valorize the range of men’s contributions and more accurately reflect engagement.
6. Acknowledge well-being as a fundamental predictor of engagement in learning and work.
7. Develop policy and programming to reflect the priority of supporting well-being, including as a means to support learning and work engagement.

## What barriers do men face in engaging with learning and work?

In order to move toward better supporting northern Indigenous men, we asked what seemed to be holding them back. Men expressed a wide range of barriers specific to their goals and contexts. Many of the barriers men mentioned were related to the northern context of small, geographically isolated communities in which school and paid work opportunities are limited or unpredictable. Men also frequently referenced the rapidly changing intercultural context and related trauma in their lives. The common thread in diverse barriers mentioned was a sense of futility and frustration in contexts where one’s own and others’ expectations of oneself could not be met due to conflicting goals, which cannot be filled at the same time, and a lack of resources and support to reach any of the goals. The resulting disconnect between what men want and value, what they feel is expected of them and what they are actually doing, contributed to shame, followed by disengagement and negative life choices, which in turn perpetuates barriers to learning, work, and well-being.

**Conflicting goals and values (Double bind).** The men we spoke to have multiple visions of who they should be and want to be, some coming from themselves and some imposed on them by others: students who are graduating and getting certified, workers who are bringing home pay checks, hunters who are on the land, husbands and fathers who are spending time with their families, men who are healing. In some ways, these goals can be mutually reinforcing. For example, schooling helps one to get a job and then make the money that is needed to go on the land and to support one’s family. However, they are also experienced as mutually exclusive, where pursuing one goal seems to mean abandoning another. Men may want to stay in school, but have to leave school to support their families (childcare or paid work). Pursuing higher education or taking available job opportunities often means separation from valued family and community involvement. School, jobs, and speaking English are good, but associated with past trauma and the abandonment of Indigenous identity. Working in natural resource extraction brings money but destroys the treasured land. Rigid work schedules bring in money, but conflict with the flexibility hunters need to adapt to weather and presence of animals. At times, men are left feeling like no matter what they do, they cannot concurrently live out all of their values and fill others’ expectations. This feeling of a double bind, in which all choices feel like they mean giving up

something that is too valued to give up, can block men from moving forward in any of their valued areas.

**Trauma.** The double bind of conflicting goals with limited resources for reaching them is experienced as hidden oppression and trauma. It compounds other forms of oppression and trauma that men have faced and continue to face. The legacy of residential schools—being separated from families, treated as less than human, abused, forced to assimilate into English language and culture—continues to plague men who attended the schools as well as those who were left behind and those who were not yet born. The trauma, for past students, led to ongoing difficulty concentrating and thinking clearly, as well as to an unwillingness to be visible and speak up. The traumatic associations that many Indigenous men still have with schooling make it more challenging to return to school and/or to support and motivate their sons to attend and continue in a schooling system that is still foreign and that they mistrust.

**Racial Bias.** Racial bias is still entrenched in the colonizing institutions—schools, workplaces, policing—and acted out by some of the people who work in them, despite positive efforts to make these institutions more reflective and welcoming of Indigenous people and the good intentions of many who work there. Schools and workplaces can feel unwelcoming when men do not see themselves reflected in them and when they encounter a lack of understanding of the barriers they face to attend and thrive in those environments. Men feel a lack of support when teachers, colleagues, and bosses come from a different cultural and language background and have difficulty understanding where they are coming from. Culturally and linguistically irrelevant testing makes it difficult for men to show what they know. Indigenous men continue to hear negative messaging of who they are (“less than”, “incapable”, “not good enough”), or messages that do not line up with how they see themselves (including negativity toward values of their Indigenous culture or their generation). The shame of trauma (of victims and witnesses) and ongoing racism further block men from attaining and holding on to what they consider to be the good life.

**Social Isolation.** Many northern Indigenous men face a serious lack of support. Families may be the primary support system, and yet many parents are struggling themselves, and are not able to provide sons with the practical or emotional support, safety, and role modelling they need. Even where families are very supportive, men need to leave this safety net far behind to pursue school and work opportunities that are not available in the community. Overtly unsupportive practices men face include favouritism, unfair hiring/promotion practices and pay structures, bullying, negative peer pressure, and punitive rather than rehabilitative justice. Lack of support in its more insidious forms includes the absence or closing down of programs that could have helped or were helping. In all, many men indicated that they did not know where to find support, and that support systems were hard to access.

**Lack of resources.** Issues of poverty, lack of housing, food insecurity, and limited health care make daily life hard and present additional challenges to how men are able to engage with learning and work. Going away to school, or changing employers, can mean losing your house, for example, making it more difficult to take the associated risks. The unavailability or uncertainty of resources

can make the future particularly unpredictable, and thus difficult to appropriately prepare for. The ways social assistance is structured can provide a disincentive to work. In some communities, jobs and learning opportunities simply are not there. In other communities, jobs and training might be available, but men have difficulty attaining or demonstrating the necessary competencies to move into them. On a further level, then, men describe the oppression of having insufficient resources to meet any of their conflicting goals.

**Shame.** This overarching feeling of operating in an oppressive context leads to shame, which can lead to disengagement and lack of connection. Men spoke of the pain and loneliness of feeling bad about who they are, feeling unloved, and useless. They said these feelings led to negative life choices, including addictive behaviours and acting out in anger, which made it more difficult to stay in school, keep jobs, and maintain positive relationships. For example, lateness and absenteeism (maybe because of crowded housing or lack of food) leads to a loss of income or learning opportunity, and makes it even more difficult for a man to feel like he is keeping up, let alone providing for or helping others.

Discussion of these barriers runs the risk of increasing negative feelings. Our intent is not to shame or lay blame, or to paint northern Indigenous men's situation as hopeless, but rather to acknowledge the forces that pull men away from the lives they would aspire to. Men are overcoming these challenges, as evidenced in the positive stories we collected. Our objective in discussing these issues is to increase understanding of men's paths in order to better support men toward the goals they choose for themselves.

**These findings indicate a pressing need for policy makers and programmers to:**

8. Open wider spaces for men's voices to self-define their visions of themselves, what they wish, and how they want to get there.
9. Develop and deliver more effective and consistent cross-cultural training for teachers and employees coming into the communities.
10. Build critical awareness, among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members of the oppressive factors at work and the need for deliberately decolonizing practices.
11. Recognize and affirm the strengths and resources that northern Indigenous men bring to families, communities, schools and workplaces.
12. Continue to address social injustices such as inadequate housing and food insecurity in the North.

## **Which factors support northern Indigenous men's learning, work and well-being?**

While Indigenous men across the North are living in similarly challenging contexts, some have been more resilient than others at some point in their lives. While the negative factors seem to start from the outside and then be internalized, the supportive factors seem to come from the inside,



beginning with personal healing and transformation, which is then externalized through greater connection to family, community, culture and land and greater freedom in living according to ones' values and goals. Personal well-being and a strong support network seem to help men escape the feeling of the double bind that can hold them down.

**Vision of self.** The men who were engaged with learning, work, and well-being were looking within themselves and choosing to accept and love themselves. They were admitting ways in which they had been hurt and had hurt others. They were acknowledging that they will not be perfect but they can do better in acting out their values. They were courageously doing something about it. Personal growth is something men do for themselves, despite the context. However, healing also happens through being with other Indigenous men, sharing stories, and realizing one's normality. Men were greatly helped on the path to feeling good about themselves by seeing themselves positively reflected in others' eyes: being respected, trusted, affirmed, treated kindly, and feeling loved. It also helped to have Indigenous leaders, teachers, and counsellors who understood them and recognized the strengths in Indigenous men and communities, and to have Indigenous male role models who reflect similar values, language, culture, and life experiences and show a range of positive possibilities for Indigenous men's lives.

**Connectedness to culture, land, and community.** Men talked about connection as something that helped them toward their goals and that came as a result of greater well-being. Connection was expressed in a holistic sense, to what Inuit call "*sila*," the substance of life (Leduc, 2010), including the land, spirituality, and the knowledge and practices of the ancestors who came before. *Sila* helped the men to feel well, and to reaffirm and act according to their values. Spending time with family, Elders, and other community members, communicating, and making an effort to get along helped men to strengthen the relationships that they rely on. Sports and traditional activities were effective venues for belonging. Men found that being able to connect beyond their community and culture—through travelling and relationships with non-Indigenous people, for example—was helpful too. Northern Indigenous men learned foundational values and skills for their lives through connection with culture, land, and community, including communication, work ethic, humility, self-control, openness, forgiveness, patience, and perseverance. It is also within these connections that men see how they are valued, useful, and desired in the community.

**Support.** Without a doubt, interpersonal support is one of the strongest factors in Indigenous men's empowerment. It made a huge difference to men's lives if there was even a single person that they could rely on for support, whether a parent, grandparent, sibling, teacher, Elder, counsellor, co-worker, boss, coach, or support personnel in school, at work or in the community. It helped them to feel secure that basic needs were taken care of, to have someone who encouraged them, and someone who could help them overcome specific barriers (including navigating bureaucracy and filling in forms). Men found success through specific invitations or directions: being invited to apply for a job, run in an election, share their story; being told to get help, go to school, or to keep applying and trying again. Men's stories reflect that their involvement in school and work is mediated and sustained by connection. At the times in a man's life when he was most

engaged in learning and work, there was a sense of not doing it on his own, but that he was doing it because others believed in him and were alongside him.

**Connecting vision of self to learning and work.** Men who had a positive vision of themselves seemed to feel more freedom in choosing roles and living in ways that align with their values, and were better able to reconcile their vision of themselves with what they were doing in school and at work. While they face the same challenge of conflicting expectations and goals and limited resources to reach them, they seemed more content, feeling that what they are doing is good enough, or a good choice, within competing and limited accessible options. Outside factors help, including schooling, testing, and work environments that are culturally and linguistically relevant and treat men's range of skills and experiences (bilingualism, traditional knowledge, etc.) as assets. Specific schooling and work options, including college versus grade school, and land-based versus office work were experienced as more fulfilling. Opportunities for growth in school and work, and feeling one was being treated fairly, also helped. Despite the emphasis and value on togetherness, many men aspired to or found success in self-directed work and learning (teaching oneself, entrepreneurship, solitary work such as trucking), which may be another way in which some men escape feelings of oppression at school and work. Men who experienced less conflict between their visions of themselves and the practices and values of school and work were more motivated, enjoyed school and work more, experienced school and work as more meaningful, and were thus more resilient as evidenced by their ability to persevere.

**Availability of resources.** It probably goes without saying that greater access to resources and availability of a wider range of opportunities helps. Being able to access schooling, training, work, and healing programs within one's community removes the barrier of having to leave one's family and gives more visibility to role models who are pursuing these options. Having jobs predictably available protects against the disillusionment of training for work that is not there. Reliable housing options make it more possible to take the risk of leaving one's community. Travel opportunities increase openness to the world. Having transportation and cabins make it easier to spend time on the land and experience its healing. Availability of funding, alongside support in writing proposals, makes it more possible for men to develop and deliver programs for their own people, in their own community. However, our findings show that Indigenous men are drawing on internal strength, which supports them to live well even in contexts where resources and opportunities are limited.

**The stories of what men have found most helpful opens pathways for directions in policy and programming that will more effectively support men as they pursue learning, work, and well-being. These pathways include:**

- 13.** Incorporate healing components in learning programs and workplaces.
- 14.** Train community members to locally fill counselling and support-related jobs.
- 15.** Increase visibility and accessibility of supportive people and programs.
- 16.** Equip supportive individuals and organizations to more effectively fulfill their respective roles.

17. Profile northern Indigenous male role models.
18. Develop and deliver parenting workshops for men.
19. Facilitate opportunities for northern Indigenous men to mentor each other and gather to share stories and experiences.
20. Build infrastructure (e.g., cabins) to support delivery of land-based men's retreats and healing programs.
21. Share and adapt promising practices in local and culturally relevant schooling and training.
22. Develop innovative non-formal, community-based learning programs in which literacy and essential skills are embedded within traditional skills programs.
23. Affirm the importance of traditional values and knowledge in workplaces.
24. Provide greater access to funding for community-driven initiatives by northern Indigenous men for northern Indigenous men.

## **How are the identified factors specific to northern Indigenous men?**

Certainly the factors we have identified in the northern Indigenous men's stories are experienced by other Indigenous people as well. Still, when we line up the prevalence of these particular themes within the men's stories with other accounts of the experiences of Indigenous men and women, boys and girls, in the literature, patterns emerge that suggest why these specific challenges may be particularly pressing for males. Women, too, experience multiple and conflicting roles. However, rites of passage and a key aspect of womanhood in pre-contact times—bearing children—continues to be accessible to most northern Indigenous women whereas the traditional role of hunter and provider is decreasingly accessible to men due to limited access to and depletion of natural resources (partly due to settlement in communities, larger groups depending on the same resources, and conflicts with governments over land and resource use) (Hensel, 1996). Also, during the period of most intensive contact and cultural and economic change in the North (post-Second World War), women across Canada were redefining gender roles and this may have created a wider space within which Indigenous women could self-define goals and roles. In contrast, the primordially of the hunter-male in northern Indigenous societies and of the working-male in Euro-Canadian society may have left men with less breadth in possible roles, and feeling more trapped between conflicting goals, neither of which they have satisfactory resources to attain.

Ethnographers and participants in our study suggest that the switch from the nomadic lifestyle to more sedentary lives in the communities may have been less traumatic for women, and they were quicker to attend school regularly and to take on regular jobs. Ethnographic accounts of child socialization in northern Indigenous communities over the period of rapid cultural change suggest that parents, over decades, encouraged their daughters to take on these new roles relating to schooling and work, but encouraged or allowed their sons to prioritize subsistence practices (McElroy, 1975). In this way, parental support and modeling of schooling and work engagement

may also have been more targeted to girls than to boys, aggravating barriers to men embracing school and job opportunities.

While colonizing and racist attitudes and systems affect both women and men, research suggests that men may have been particularly impacted and for a longer time. Lomawaima and McCarty (2006), for example, argued that across North America, tolerance and eventual embracing of Indigenous cultural practices was first extended to the aspects of Indigenous culture that least threatened the national status quo, and these were largely within women's domains: handiwork, sewing, beading, etc. They show that traditional practices relating to land and resource use, which are arguably more anchored in the men's domains, have continued to be sources of tension (for example federal government-First Nation disputes about subsistence rights) and, as a result, positive imaging of Indigenous males may be slower to reach public attitudes and school textbooks. Hensel (1996) further argued that marriage patterns across the North disadvantage and show greater racial bias against Indigenous males than females.

Finally, international movements focusing on women's issues have brought women's needs to the forefront, and the North is no exception. Men across the North commented on the number of organizations, policies and programs specifically aimed at supporting women. Poignantly, men commented, "Women have all these programs. Men have jail." The value on humility and putting others first may have made it harder for men in this context to bring their specific needs to the forefront, resulting in a sense, across Canada's North, that Indigenous men and their needs are invisible (Ball, 2009).

We affirm the commonality of many of Indigenous men and women's experiences, and we do not intend to belittle or ignore the specific challenges women continue to face. In light of a gap in research into men's specific barriers and success factors, our goal is to raise questions, awareness, and understanding of the difficult context men, specifically, are navigating in their efforts to secure a positive future for themselves, their sons, and their grandsons. Taking care of men is ultimately about taking care of families—wives, sisters, daughters, mothers—and communities. As Inuit female activists have stated, "If we are going to help women, we also need to help their boyfriends, husbands, and common-law partners" (Adams, 2011, p. 22) and "our culture can only be whole and rich when both the man and the woman are working together in all aspects of life" (Evic, 2011, pp. 56-57).

## **How do these factors relate to literacy and essential skills?**

When the northern literacy councils and coalition launched this research, we were particularly interested in the link between northern Indigenous men's acquisition and practice of literacy and essential skills (LES) and their engagement in learning and school. Because we are committed to empowering, community-driven research, we adapted the project based on the community-based researchers' insights. They recommended that the project would be best framed as an



investigation of men's broader experiences with learning and work, situated in a context of overall well-being.

Our research methodology thus asked for broad experiences with learning and work, without specifically asking about LES. Literacy and essential skills did not emerge as an organizing theme in our analysis of men's stories. However, we saw reflections of LES in the themes men mentioned regarding what has helped and blocked them. Many of the recommendations coming out of the research have links to men's acquisition and practice of LES. Findings can be effectively applied to providing more meaningful LES programming, as well as to incorporating LES into other types of programming for maximum impact.

In the men's stories, disengagement from employment and education emerged as co-symptoms of destructive colonizing practices, along with dislocation from families, land, culture, traditional livelihoods, ancestral languages, and other treasures linked to well-being. The most promising programs are those that address this disinheritance holistically, combining healing, culture, tradition, ancestral language, and connectedness to the land, family, and community, along with literacy and job readiness.

One promising approach involves embedding literacy in traditional skills programs. Embedded literacy programs recognize and draw out the literacy practices that are inherent in a particular activity. They allow for task-based learning where situated literacy practices are taught alongside other content. Traditional skills programs with embedded literacy have had outstanding results for Inuit women (cf., Nunavut Literacy Council, 2014). Offering traditional skills programs with embedded literacy that are relevant and appealing to men specifically, and that anchor literacy within men's domains, would address men's felt needs and desires, such as learning from Elders, and learning traditional skills. They would also provide learning contexts where the men find congruence between what they are doing and their visions of themselves.

Relationally-based learning and approaches that support connections to family and community are also promising. These include family literacy, parenting programs, and programs that link parents to schools.

Another promising approach would be to offer programs in which literacy practices are taught or supported as tools toward men achieving other self-identified goals. An example could be holding workshops for grant-writing, thus supporting the goal of northern Indigenous men running programs for other men. Another example could be creative arts programming in which song-writing, story-telling, drama, and other expressive arts are practiced as vehicles for healing, as well as learning and connecting.

Such approaches address literacy development in ways that support the broader issues that men brought up. They lead to healing, connectedness, congruence, and other core supportive factors, while also addressing a need for lifelong learning and enhanced literacy and essential skills. Specific applications of the research to LES programming are developed in Appendix F of the final report.

## **How can these findings be used to improve lives in the North?**

Throughout this research summary, we have included suggestions of how research findings can be used to improve lives in the North. The full research report includes examples of specific programs—land camps, Uncles retreats, men’s groups and gatherings, industry liaison, and work training programs—that have been developed and effectively implemented in different regions of the North. These provide examples of the kinds of programs men have found helpful, and that could be adapted in other regions and communities. The full report also includes short life stories from eight northern Indigenous men whose lives reflect the diversity of challenges and personal resilience documented in our research. We hope these will be widely shared, and that other men will continue to come forward and share their stories of everyday life and successes. This report is not intended as the definitive word on men’s barriers and success factors. Our hope is to contribute to dialogue, prioritizing men’s voices about their own experiences, in order to support everyone in the North to make the most of, and create new, opportunities for shaping the life paths they desire to walk on.