

***Revitalizing Anishinaabe Inaakonigewin (Law): Aadizokaanag Biboon 2016-17***

**Interim and Final Report**

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Report of Aaron Mills

## **Project Summary**

The project consisted of bi-weekly sharing circles held at Couchiching First Nation from late November 2016 through the first week of April 2017. All circles were held in the gymnasium of Couchiching's Multi-Use Centre in the evenings, so that community members who have school or day time jobs could attend. Planning meetings took place in multiple locations, but usually in Council Chambers at the Couchiching First Nation Administration Building.

Having not grown up at Couchiching, I ensured that I had an advisory group to direct and support me in meeting the community's needs, in conducting the project respectfully, and in helping to lead it. We met often in the months leading up to the project, and only as needed (much less frequently) once it was running. It was rarely the case that everyone in the advisory group was present, but rotating members included elder Bessie Mainville (my grandmother), Chief Brian Perrault, and community members Debbie Fairbanks, Alan Yerxa, Les Morrisseau, Diana Singleton, Sandy Bruyere, and Johnna Bruyere, most of whom are involved in some aspect of band governance or service provision.

Without the vision and support of elder Bessie Mainville, this project would not have happened. Bessie advised me often and encouraged me along. She reflected through challenges, and led almost every one of our circles. The assistance of Johnna Bruyere in organizing each of the circles must also be noted. Johnna is Couchiching's Director of Recreation, and thus has responsibility for the Multi-Use Centre. However her support for the project went well beyond the minimum required of her. Her exceptional efforts and amazing attitude had a significant impact on the project's success and frankly, there were moments where I would have been at a loss without her.

My report briefly summarizes my experience of the project, and then reflects at greater length on project outcomes and lessons learned. It will be clear that while in many respects the project proceeded as predicted, in other ways it required ongoing adjustment. Given the nature of community-based research and other pertinent factors I go on to explain, this is not surprising. This report should be of some use in thinking through similar projects with other First Nations, and of considerable help for designing any future project with Couchiching First Nation.

## **Research Experience**

The *Revitalizing Anishinaabe Inaakonigewin (Law): Aadizokaanag Biboon 2016-17* project ("the aadizokaanan project") was characterized by significant variability in many respects. I offer only a high level view of this fact here, as it will be discussed at length in the lessons learned section. In brief, the pulse of the project shifted with multiple factors, creating a "hills and valleys" experience. Because of this, although a great deal was accomplished, the project did not settle into a consistent rhythm, which meant it required an extraordinary effort on my part to continually steer it forward and considerable support from others.

Because of all that effort, as noted below the aadizokaanan project achieved numerous important outcomes. This must be celebrated! It was amazing to learn from and work with so many community members, and to watch both individuals and a shared sense of purpose grow.

With respect to challenges, perhaps the biggest factor is the overarching reality that Couchiching First Nation, for all its beauty and tremendous gifts, is a community under stress. While I have a strong aversion to the frequent media descriptions of First Nations in the language of pathology, it is true that because of colonialism, we experience pressure in ways that others in Canada do not, with very real impacts. In one way or another, these impacts colour the lives of all the community members I know. This has obvious ramifications for projects like this one and consistency is a clear pressure point. On our smallest week a single person showed up, and on our biggest, we had 27 attendees including youth and elders from different communities. Sometimes there were no youth, sometimes youth sat with us, and other times youth played tag or ball games in the background. Although our community is under stress, kids are still kids.

Probably the next most significant factor responsible for sustaining a high degree of variability in the project is the methodological approach used. This project was not only community-based, but also community-led. It began with my grandmother and I envisioning what we might create for the community, and it grew from there, with the gifts of the academic team, the community project advisors and the project's many participants who helped shape it. People frequently disagree with one another, and so the direction of community-led work in some respect will turn on who shows up as a particular decision is being made. Given that this creates inefficiencies, in the planning stage not all of the academics sought a community-led approach, preferring the greater degree of control associated with research that is only community-based. Others (I was among them) insisted on the value of community-led research, despite admittedly considerable tradeoffs. Ultimately, as the one most familiar with views in Couchiching, I determined that if the project was not community-led, the community likely would choose not to proceed with it.

There was almost no variation in the format of our gatherings, because the sharing circle was an intentional and well-proven Anishinaabe method of knowledge sharing, especially for our subject matter. On the one occasion that we changed our format for part of an evening, an elder had brought in an amazing power point presentation she had produced on aadizookaanan. Each circle broke for food halfway through the evening, allowing for smaller conversations in which people could pick up topics of unique interest, move about, and have fun together.

Finally, for all of the foregoing reasons, the outcomes and lessons learned will both reflect considerable variability in the scale of the project. We did less, with less people involved, and consequently used substantially less of our budget, than intended. We did not purchase audio or video equipment and did not produce any such materials. We had planned to do so, but the conditions in our plan regarding an elder dialogue on this issue were not met. Some on the advisory group wanted to bring in elders from further away and who expect larger honorariums, but this did not come to pass as these advisors ended up being less involved than they anticipated. Two of the big ticket items in terms of scale (and cost) did not come to pass: the academics' camp and the academics' community visits (with one exception: John Borrows came but owing to his schedule, left the day he arrived). Because the academics were generally not involved with Couchiching, it was determined not to bring them in for our pow wow. Finally, after an extended discussion, Couchiching decided not to proceed with construction of a teaching lodge, which again reduced the scale of this project in outcomes and in costs. In the end, other than costs associated with John Borrows' visit to the community, all costs pertained to the effective running of our sharing circles: elder and knowledge-keeper honoraria, gas reimbursement for elders travelling from other communities, food/catering (we sourced in-community), and gifts. I did not charge for my own gas when I visited elders in other

communities to invite them to come, as I tried to arrange these visits when I would be passing by their communities anyhow.

In sum, the project was challenging but immensely rewarding. I appreciate the struggle and am grateful for the project's considerable accomplishments. I am proud of the community members who came to share with future generations of Couchiching people. We are all busy and facing challenges, yet so many managed to prioritize this work anyhow. Some of the most meaningful highlights for me included witnessing older elders mentoring younger ones to assert a larger role in community governance; a couple of younger community members particularly hungry for traditional knowledge finding a safe space to ask questions about Anishinaabe culture and law which in other spaces they felt unavailable to ask; hearing my grandmother explain to others the significance of the various pieces of my bundle laid out on the blanket in the middle of our circle, and why we proceed the way we do; finally, witnessing elders share legends with youth and others who never got to learn growing up.

At the end of it all, my last thought is that proceeding as this project did (being community-led and allowing for the reality of community stress) is, despite all inefficiency and constrained outcome, the best way forward. Projects with a different focus may have flashier and more immediately obvious impacts, but the cost of focussing on the appearance of a large impact is a lessened focus and thus impact on the reality of colonialism, which is the deep, disempowering, structural problem communities like Couchiching face. And this is the problem that needs to be addressed if indigenous communities are to revitalize their law and governance: the central goal this project aimed to contribute towards. Community members need to be empowered by directing academics and partner institutions in specific ways, which are always mindful of where the community is at. Any confidence, knowledge and strength gained from being empowered to decide and communicate projects for themselves, no matter how small the outcomes may seem to an outsider, will always outweigh a seemingly larger but ultimately fleeting impact. To my mind, the difference is that the former kind of project targets outcomes in the service of community-building, whereas the latter seeks outcomes in the service of external research or policy agendas. My central lesson learned is that in future I would build this reality more expressly into the project.

## **Outcomes**

### 1) Internal community-building

The project served to build community at Couchiching, in multiple ways. Most importantly, it allowed for knowledge transmission from elders and knowledge-carriers to youth and interested community members. Through the sharing circles, an enormous amount of information was shared about Anishinaabe thought, governance, law, history, relationships, and ways of being and knowing. Elders repeatedly voiced delight at having a space to reflect on past times, and to share that knowledge with younger generations, and felt valued for the opportunity to do so. Middle-aged folks and younger parents eagerly sought that knowledge. Some folks came every circle looking forward to what would be shared, and occasionally got quite emotional as important information was offered or as they were able to share something important.

At the outset, Bessie Mainville explained that any other elders who wanted to lead could do so; that they could take turns. She would have done this anyhow, but from our many conversations, I know she was actively trying to make space for elders who are grounded in

other traditions (like Christianity), so that they would also feel at the centre of the project. Towards the end of the project, some other elders stepped forward and took on more leadership in leading, in sharing, and in translating.

The form of our gatherings also helped to build community. We normalized the notion of circle sharing, an ancient and contemporary Anishinaabe tradition, and through it many had the sense of working together on a shared endeavour—of building together. Although this is obviously not possible within the life of this project, my grandmother indicated clearly that she wanted the circles to continue into the future.

## 2) External community-building

The elders decided to open our circles to folks from outside Couchiching. We had elders and guests from nearby First Nations sit and share with us. Now when I see those elders at other events, I always speak with them. We had a knowledge-keeper from Grassy Narrows who worked at the Indian Friendship Centre in Fort Frances, the town 4 km away, visit us often and share a great deal. We had a Métis guest visit while he was in our area. We also had one of the workers from the Museum in town come every week and really connect with our space.

## 3) The project helped us to connect with who we are

The project demonstrated for all participants that traditional knowledge is valued and relevant to how we live our lives today. Aadizookaanan were told at Couchiching, perhaps for the first time in a long time. This is one of our oldest traditions, and we showed that it is important here and now. We also showed how things work within our own systems of law and governance. Another way to put that point is that we modelled the very thing we were discussing, so that form mirrored content. We not only told, but showed. Some of the younger folks learned how to engage with elders, how to ask questions, and what work different sacred objects do. Terrific questions on these topics were offered, and fortunately, Bessie Mainville is an elder with a very open and inviting orientation. She was always looking to encourage youth and younger people, and thus made time for all questions. Perhaps one of the highlights for others was when she explained what every single thing in my bundle (that she could speak to) was for. Because she did this, participants not only saw the objects being used, but were allowed to understand the work they do. They were no longer “just” culture, but rather part of the analytics of how things function. In this way we learned an enormous amount about our own system of law.

## 4) A personal outcome

An important outcome for me on a personal level was that the project allowed me to give something back to the community from which I have received so much. I think this is so important for indigenous-engaged research. I try to support chief and council when called on to do so, but I wanted to do something more significant, as the support I have received from folks at Couchiching has certainly been significant. The project significantly developed my knowledge and the knowledge of others, empowering the community.

## **Lessons learned**

## 1) Tone and spirit

I observed three key aspects of tone which contributed to the project's success. The first was having the right leadership. This always matters, but it has a unique significance where cultural sensitivities loom large in the research. I am certain that other elders involved with the project would also have done a terrific job of leading it, but the elder who led, Bessie Mainville, was perfect for this job. Young and older folks accepted her as an authority on our culture and on ceremony, and her teachings were valued. Her manner did so much work: she was kind and inviting. She made space for everyone and set a clear tone of open sharing, where everyone mattered. She took time to explain things, and to honour young persons' questions. There was no scolding when mistakes were made and there was no shaming for not already knowing something; on the contrary, she seemed happy to be asked.

A second aspect to setting the right tone with this kind of research was opening each circle in ceremony. We called in the spirit to be with us and support our work together. We acknowledged our many helpers and expressed our gratitude for all that we have been given. Speaking for myself, it helped to take me out of the ordinary rhythm of daily life and locate me somewhere more enduring. It was a great help for the folks who were not as connected to their Anishinaabe roots that Bessie explained why she did things in ceremony. It meant that we were never just asked to accept traditions as unchanging and given, but were made an active part of living traditions.

Third, community-led research has particular needs in terms of pacing. It is slow and iterative. We had to make time for disagreement and messiness. At the same time, as the facilitator, I think I learned important lessons about where I ought to have exercised more leadership where disagreement persisted. For instance, we got caught up too many weeks on whether it was okay to learn legends from written sources, and that was my fault. It took time, but our elders eventually gave clear direction on this, saying that it is fine to do so. That being said, unsurprisingly they were not willing to directly engage when someone disagreed with their view, and I ought to have done so (when our own system of law was dominant, we tended strongly towards avoiding open contention; this orientation remains strong in many elders today).

## 2) Comfort with tension, including conflict

When I experience conflict not of my choosing, I usually want to ask what I ought to have done differently. But such a perspective does not work well with a project like this. On the contrary, I learned that I need to be comfortable with a certain level of conflict most of the time, as conflict was there as often as not, from planning through the project's end.

It appears in all sorts of ways. Different elders have different ideas about when and how legends can be shared, and find subtle and indirect ways to express their views. Other community members, too, have very different ideas about what it means to engage respectfully with our traditions, from our current standpoints. Some want to take lots of risks, some are open only to few risks, and others offer a different conception of risk altogether. Some think much and say little, while others always want to be heard. Some folks had strong expectations of me, even if they chose not to come to relevant planning sessions when issues they are invested in were under discussion. Rarely, rather than voicing their thoughts and inviting dialogue, some folks will just take unilateral action, for instance retracting something they had offered.

Sometimes, folks who had committed to something are only partially able to follow through because there are many demands on their time, as they have unique skills our community needs. Occasionally someone may experience violence and need support, which of course may impact their role within the project. As with anywhere else, sometimes folks say they will come and do not show up. There were also larger community tensions to balance that cannot be taken up here. Finally, in terms of basic logistics, on more than one occasion I had to advocate for physical space I had already reserved. Instead of entering into dialogue with me about changing existing arrangements to meet changing or unexpected needs, occasionally someone would try to simply take this project's physical space and let me figure it out after.

While existing relationships within the academic team are strong, I also occasionally experienced some tension with the academic team. While I expected to take a leading role given the project is based in my community, I thought it would be a shared project with shared responsibility. I learned very quickly that instead this was my project and I had almost all of the responsibility. The fact became momentarily pointed in respect of the budget, where I carved out an exception, insisting that I needed a great deal of direction and thus that others were also responsible. Next time I would seek clarity from academic partners as to what sort of role they see themselves taking on within the project, and I would divide the names between lead and support researchers, even where the administrative framework does not require this. Second, like the Couchiching community members, the academics sometimes had quite different ideas about how an issue might best proceed. That is of course to be expected, but I had not previously found myself as the one who had to manage the differences and come to a conclusion. To be clear, these situations were never openly disagreeable—we were all already friends with great rapport and everyone wanted me to succeed and to feel good—but where folks took a gentle position, or asserted a strong position indirectly, in the end I still had to prefer one view over another. I tended to favour the views of folks I felt were most transparent about their reasoning and their goals and who (once I accepted that this was essentially my project) voiced the best understanding of what I was hoping to accomplish.

I had to accept all of this, not take any of it personally, and find ways to keep the project going as challenges emerged. I certainly did not get it perfect in either the means or the ends. In terms of the means, I carried far too much tension throughout the project, afraid of making a mistake in the face of conflict. Next time that will be different: I'll be much more confident in leading. I learned a great deal about working with people in research and community-building contexts while carrying leadership responsibilities.

### 3) Maintaining adequate supports

It was essential that I had my grandmother to turn to for advice and support when I was (often) unsure on how best to proceed with something. It was also very important to acknowledge the supports that existed, and I let the advisory group know how much I appreciated the time they put into guiding me along. The academics, too, gave terrific advice when I needed it. At one point or another, I had lengthy conversations with all of them and got great direction. I was fortunate to work with folks who understand the issues so well.

Gratitude was so important to me, because although I was the lead, the success of the project was largely dependent on the will and the effort of others.

### 4) Labour-intensive



At the risk of stating the obvious, anyone taking on a project like this one should be advised of just how labour intensive it will be. In addition to the periods of knowledge-gathering, tasks included administration, communications with community, the academics and the PETF, developing agendas for and leading meetings, repeatedly explaining the broader PETF framework to community members, planning and obtaining foodstuffs, preparing materials, seeking guidance, picking up and dropping off elders for circle gatherings, producing and disseminating posters, travelling to other communities to invite elders to come, purchasing gifts and preparing tobacco bundles, and in my case, driving 350 km to Couchiching from Thunder Bay for each circle. Folks considering taking on responsibility for a community-led project like this will want to plan accordingly.

5) The paramount importance of understanding what it means to work with and in a community under stress

Acceptance that the reality of community stress will govern much of how the project proceeds is absolutely essential. Few things will go precisely as planned. You have to understand, not take it personally, and move forward with the community in mind.

Many institutions and many individual researchers I know do not have much sense of this and thus could not effectively conduct research in many First Nations. They would have to first commit to learning about us and our circumstances, and through that process adjust their expectations. There is no question that projects such as this one must be treated differently in order to be treated equally. If they were held to the ordinary standards of efficiency, proposals like mine would be systematically unapproved.

It also requires great sensitivity. You cannot assume what any given community member knows, or how they understand themselves. Some folks are steeped in their culture and others may just be learning. If you want everyone to feel welcome and thus to benefit from everyone's gifts, you cannot structure a project so as to favour certain subject positions.

Often the folks who have the most relevant gifts to give are the most overworked and have the least time. Despite sincere intentions and genuine support, they may be unable to follow through on certain commitments, depending on what comes up. This has to be understood and allowed for. Sometimes, the lack of human resources means aspects of a project get rejected or delayed—such as the teaching lodge and the academics camp. As an aside here, I can say from my articling year that this is also frequently the case in *Canadian* law projects, where indigenous communities often cannot keep up with all of the proponent requests for consultation and accommodation that come across a resource officer's desk.

6) The necessity of flexibility

Implicit in the foregoing lessons learned is the premium placed on flexibility. Considerable flexibility is necessary in multiple respects. First, in planning: community members who elect to take strong views may be present only intermittently yet may maintain their expectations. Also, perspectives vary across community members as to what good community-led research looks like. I had to listen to everyone and do my best to accommodate everyone's perspectives. In so doing, I also had to stay true to the initial vision for the project.

Second, flexibility was important in the circles. Different elders have different ways of doing things, but some are quite strict that things be done a certain way. If at a previous meeting a different elder gave different instructions, an adjustment will be required. I was not infrequently publicly corrected for this, and needed to just roll with it. I would never talk back to the elder or try to explain my reasoning in that moment. Another critical aspect was to identify and to make the most of the gifts which are present, rather than to focus on the ones which were supposed to be present. Maybe someone important did not show up; that is okay: this other person did come and she has amazing things to share. Directly connected, this means that sometimes our focus shifted for awhile from legends to something else, for instance the Anishinaabe lunar calendar (although our general focus on Anishinaabe law was always sustained). Finally, the unexpected and disastrous can happen and one needs to roll with it as best one can. On one occasion, a visiting elder had asked that we use my eagle feather rather than my talking stick to facilitate sharing in our circle. She began with an inner circle of children. Upon receiving my feather, one little boy of about five years grinned and promptly brushed it against its grain, potentially destroying it. I cannot speak about the implications of this act for my personal life here, but I would just say that it is not a minor incident. At the same time, he was a kid and he was disconnected from his culture. What is one to do? I rolled with it. Then I gave my feather a cedar bath that night and (gratefully) it was like new again.

Third, flexibility was necessary with the academics too. Their schedules are full and they have many other commitments which needed to take higher priority. This meant that only one of them ended up coming to Couchiching. This was difficult to accept, but I had to accept it and be understanding of folks I respect so much, and who have earned my trust. We pushed on as best we could and it was great. The academics continued to be as available as I needed to talk things through and were a wonderful support for me in that way. I would be thrilled to work with any of them again—I chose them precisely because of how amazing I know them to be on projects just like this one.

#### 7) Partner engagement

In retrospect, I think I ought to have had representatives from the PETF come to Couchiching near the beginning of the project's life. I think this would help to build the relationship. I thought that would get much easier as the project proceeded, but for the reasons already canvassed, the project remained highly variable and nothing got easier. That being said, I think the PETF needs to do some work internally to prepare itself in order for it to be reasonable for the community to extend such an invitation. I am hopeful that with events like our trip to Teslin Tlingit and especially to Turtle Lodge, and our engagement with elders like Harry Bone, the PETF is, *on an institutional level*, taking steps in this direction. It will greatly facilitate partnerships with communities like mine.

#### 8) Communications

It is a challenge to get the word out into the community, because everyone engages with different media. I was often requested to call one person, text another, and facebook message a third. The most effective means to communicate for the purposes of advertising the sharing circles was to get a poster into the community newsletter. This was sometimes a challenge as the deadline for

that is two weeks ahead of time. Even when the poster did get in, it did not always work to generate larger attendance.

Report of Dr. John Borrows

## Issues discussed in my visit to Couchiching First Nation

### John Borrows, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Law, UVIC

Anishinaabe law has long looked to the natural world to understand how to live better as human beings. Lessons about how to encourage and regulate behavior and resolve disputes, as learned from the natural environment are embedded in stories, language, songs, ceremonies, treaties, and community stories. Elsewhere I have written about this process:

The Anishinaabe have a tradition of practicing law by reference to the natural world. The Anishinaabe word for this concept is gikinawaabiwin. The word akinoomaage is also used to describe this phenomenon. It is formed from two roots: aki and noomaage. "Aki" means earth and "noomaage" means to point towards and take direction from. The idea this word conveys is that analogies can be drawn from our natural surroundings and applied to, or distinguished from, human activity. This is the heart of Anishinaabe legal reasoning: parallel situations are correlated, dissimilar situations are distinguished. In this legal approach, the environment becomes the legal archive that practitioners read and use to regulate their communities.

In this legal tradition, the earth has a culture that the Anishinaabe strive to embed in their laws.

Our gathering discussed these lessons in four stages, using stories and experiences related to birds to draw out law.

Our gathering also used a circle to discuss Anishinaabe law. We opened with ceremony. We had food present. Hospitality was illustrated by welcoming the spirits and any others who wished to attend. The atmosphere of the evening was encouraging, uplifting, engaged and openhearted.

I shared spring time seasonal stories about birds (bineshiyag). Stories about birds shared were of 4 orders: leadership (maang and chijjak), freedom (opitchii), healing (kekek miinawaa taaso-wigamig – hawk and the barn) and the sacred (biimibattoo Victoriaing - running in the rain). On the way we talked about "Beware the danger of the single story and nuance is sacred.

The maang and chijjak story (crane and loon story) leadership story is a story we tell at our language table in Victoria. Janice Simcoe subsequently wrote it down and goes as follows:

The story is about the Loon (Maang or Maangag in the plural) and the Crane (Aiijaak or Aiijaakag in the plural). Both Loon and Crane are, in Anishinaabe tradition, leadership clans. Here is the story:

Old Crane had always led the migrations of all the birds, from the south to the north in the spring and from the north to the south in the fall. Crane knew the journey, knew how to reach the destination. He had an infrequent but compelling voice and when he spoke the other birds listened to him. He was trusted, if not always loved.

One summer Loon said that he wanted to lead the migration south. He had been on it enough; he was a leader too; he had good contributions to make to the journey. Crane, practicing the teachings of humility and knowing better than to demand the place of leadership, agreed to step aside and let Loon have his way. Well now, Loon was a community-minded, social creature. He saw that one of the bird families needed to do some last-minute work on the home they

lived in during the summer months and the migration got off to a late start. Then, on the journey, a member of a different family said she needed to stop and do something so Loon had the whole flock wait for her. This happened again. And again. Soon the flock was in peril. The trees were redder than they'd ever seen before and the nights were so cold that some birds didn't survive to the morning. By the time the flock reached its first southern destination, the flock was much smaller than it had been at the start of the journey. The birds left did not want to continue under Loon's leadership and demanded that Crane take over the journey. Loon argued, but eventually supported the will of the whole. He was left alone to consider what he had brought upon himself and his community.<sup>1</sup>

We did not draw out specific teachings from this story in the circle because we largely followed protocols of letting stories speak for themselves and for listeners to determine their own meanings.

The story of Kekek and taasowigamig (hawk and barn) is a story about healing. It is a story which happened to me as I was growing. I wrote the story elsewhere as follows:

When I was a boy I remember exploring our barn out back. Whenever you entered the birds would fly all over the place, from rafter to rafter, throwing dust into shafts of light. I would spend days at a time finding all sorts of secret chambers in the hay. I found baby mice, new born kittens, freshly hatched chicks and a hundred varieties of spiders and bugs. The place was full of magic. Anyway, one day when I was about ten, I was exploring the chicken coop on the second floor. It had two windows about three feet off the floor. I wanted to see outside. I jumped up to rest my stomach on one of the window sills while I took in the view. You could see out to the ravine, along the creek and to the forest beyond the fields at the back. My feet were dangling about a foot off the floor. When I was finished I pushed myself back down off the windowsill and felt a sharp pain in my foot. A rusty nail pierced my old North Star shoes. It went an inch into the centre of my foot. It hurt so bad I could hardly stand but there was no one around to help. I had to extract the nail from my foot and make my way back to the house. And to add insult to injury I remember going to the doctor and getting the biggest tetanus shot anyone had ever seen. I had difficulty walking for a few weeks. That curbed my enthusiasm for the barn for a while.

It wasn't until a few years later that I started going in the barn again. One day when mom was walking in the ravine she came to one of those old white pine trees that grew on its slope. They towered over the land. At the bottom was a fledging red tail hawk that seemed to have fallen and damaged its wing. She approached it and it didn't resist so she picked it up. She held it by the legs, with the talons away from her body, and cradled it in her arms. She then walked back to the barn and placed the injured bird in the empty chicken coop. She called a man from Natural Resources to see if he could do anything to help but he was fairly pessimistic. He said its wing was broken and it would probably never fly. He said there was no place to care for such a bird so we might as well dispose of it. Mom had no such intent and did what she could to help. She read about its dietary needs and spoke to people she thought might know something about these birds. She fed it every day on cat food and water.

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<sup>1</sup> Janice Simcoe, A Circle of Aiiijaakag, a Circle of Maangag: Integral Theory and Indigenous Leadership <http://integralleadershippreview.com/12516-115-circle-aiijaakag-circle-maangag-integral-theory-indigenous-leadership/>

When you entered the coop the Hawk would just stare at you. When you left you could spy through the cracks and watch it hop over to its meal. As the months passed it seemed to get stronger until one day it tried to fly to its food. It was awkward at first but it eventually got the hang of it. Through time we could see the bird was getting better. With its health seemingly restored mom made a plan to release it. We threw open the main barn doors and opened the chicken coop door, placing some food to tempt it out. We left a trail of food to freedom, Hansel and Gretel style. Following the food the Hawk hopped out of the coop and seemed content to sit amongst the bales of hay for a while. Its movements were tentative so we made a lot of noise, waving our arms and yelling for it to leave. Our actions shook its complacency and it jumped to the door's threshold, looking over the barnyard and ravine. Again it seemed hesitant to leave. Something must have sparked its intuition. All at once it jumped and glided across the barnyard. It landed on the old hand pump near the well house and looked back towards the open barn. Then, with a mighty force it sprung into air, beating its wings and catching the currents. It rose higher and higher. It circled the barn, looking down on us below. It did this for five to ten minutes before heading out over the fields in complete freedom. I remember thinking how majestic it looked as it soared away. The image is etched in my mind. From that time forward, I had no fear of the barn and it became a favorite place once again.<sup>2</sup>

The story was told in my own voice, as I reflected on my experience growing up. It was a story which helped me learn the importance of healing as an Anishinaabe law, from my mother's influence and nature's intervention.

I also told a story about opitchii. There are many versions of this story. The version I told was given to me by Basil Johnson, an elder from Cape Croker. It is a story about freedom. I wrote about it as follows in another place.<sup>3</sup> The story was also told by Schoolcraft.<sup>4</sup> It was retold in the following way here:

Once upon a time there was an old Indian who had an only son, whose name was Opeechee. The boy had come to the age when every Indian lad makes a long fast, in order to secure a Spirit to be his guardian for life. Now, the old man was very proud, and he wished his son to fast longer than other boys, and to become a greater warrior than all others. So he directed him to prepare with solemn ceremonies for the fast.

After the boy had been in the sweating lodge and bath several times, his father commanded him to lie down upon a clean mat, in a little lodge apart from the rest. "My son," said he, "endure your hunger like a man, and at the end of TWELVE DAYS, you shall receive food and a blessing from my hands." The boy carefully did all that his father commanded, and lay quietly with his face covered, awaiting the arrival of his guardian Spirit who was to bring him good or bad dreams.

His father visited him every day, encouraging him to endure with patience the pangs of hunger and thirst. He told him of the honor and renown that would be his if he continued his fast to the end of the twelve days. To all this the boy replied not, but lay on his mat without a murmur of

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<sup>2</sup> John Borrows, *Drawing Out Law: A Spirit's Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> John Borrows, *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Henry Rowe Schoolcraft,

[http://www.psd1.org/cms/lib4/WA01001055/Centricity/Domain/36/ES\\_The\\_Boy\\_Who\\_Became\\_a\\_Robin.pdf](http://www.psd1.org/cms/lib4/WA01001055/Centricity/Domain/36/ES_The_Boy_Who_Became_a_Robin.pdf)

discontent, until the ninth day - when he said, "My father, the dreams tell me of evil. May I break my fast now, and at a better time make a new one?"

"My son," replied the old man, "you know not what you ask. If you get up now, all your glory will depart. Wait patiently a little longer. You have but three days more to fast, then glory and honor will be yours."

The boy said nothing more, but, covering himself closer, he lay until the eleventh day, when he spoke again, "My father," said he, "the dreams forebode evil. May I break my fast now, and at a better time make a new one?"

"My son," replied the old man again, "you know not what you ask. Wait patiently a little longer. You have but one more day to fast. Tomorrow I will myself prepare a meal and bring it to you." The boy remained silent, beneath his covering, and motionless except for the gentle heaving of his breast.

Early the next morning his father, overjoyed at having gained his end, prepared some food. He took it and hastened to the lodge intending to set it before his son. On coming to the door of the lodge what was his surprise to hear the boy talking to some one. He lifted the curtain hanging before the doorway, and looking in saw his son painting his breast with vermilion. And as the lad laid on the bright color as far back on his shoulders as he could reach, he was saying to himself: "My father has destroyed my fortune as a man. He would not listen to my requests. I shall be happy forever, because I was obedient to my parent - but he shall suffer. My guardian Spirit has given me a new form, and now I must go!"

At this his father rushed into the lodge, crying, "My son! my son! I pray you leave me not!"

But the boy, with the quickness of a bird, flew to the top of the lodge, and perching upon the highest pole, was instantly changed into a most beautiful robin redbreast. He looked down on his father with pity in his eyes, and said, "Do not sorrow, O my father, I am no longer your boy, but Opeechee the robin. I shall always be a friend to men, and live near their dwellings. I shall ever be happy and content. Every day will I sing you songs of joy. The mountains and fields yield me food. My pathway is in the bright air." Then Opeechee the robin stretched himself as if delighting in his new wings, and caroling his sweetest song, he flew away to the near-by trees.

Aaron has written about this story too, and we discussed some of its meanings. Finally I told a story about rain:

When I was running Friday morning I was thinking about spirit.

I thought: sometimes my knowledge distills like the morning dew. It is gentle, imperceptible, and light.

It gathers while I am sleeping, it comes quietly, and it lies all around me when I awake.

It arrives unbidden and it vanishes in the heat of the day.

Though its presence is fleeting, it nevertheless nourishes the earth and is exceedingly beautiful.



Just as I had this thought it started to rain!

I was so amazed.

It changed my train of thought.

I ended up with this insight:

Spirit can be gentle and light, but sometimes a knowledge pours like the rain - saturating with surprise.

The deluge can be charged with life and impossible to miss. It washes around me. It flows like a river. It refreshes all it touches.

I love the morning.

Mystery speaks in so many different ways, through our own ecologies and cultures and laws, tradition and worldviews. It can be such a rich source of nourishment.

Financial Report  
Ben Morrisseau, Finance Manager, Couchiching First Nation

**COUCHICHIING FIRST NATION**  
**Legends Project**  
**Statement of Revenue and Expenses**  
**12 Periods Ended 31/03/2017**

**Unaudited**

|   |               | <u>CURRENT</u>    | <u>ANNUAL BUDGET</u> | <u>CURRENT YTD</u> | <u>OVER/(UNDER)</u> |
|---|---------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Revenue:</b>                         |               |                   |                      |                    |                     |
| Revenue - Legends Project               | 43000-08-8370 | 0.00              | 59,400.00            | 21,250.00          | 38,150.00           |
| <b>Total revenue</b>                    |               | <b>0.00</b>       | <b>59,400.00</b>     | <b>21,250.00</b>   | <b>38,150.00</b>    |
| <b>Expenses:</b>                        |               |                   |                      |                    |                     |
| Legends Project - Travel                | 52000-08-8370 | 0.00              | 17,500.00            | 0.00               | 17,500.00           |
| Legends Project - Admin Fee             | 54700-08-8370 | 0.00              | 5,400.00             | 2,700.00           | 2,700.00            |
| Legends Project - Equipment & Sup       | 68210-08-8370 | 0.00              | 2,500.00             | 0.00               | 2,500.00            |
| Legends Project - Sharing Circles       | 68300-08-8370 | 1,764.66          | 10,000.00            | 4,367.12           | 5,632.88            |
| Legends Project - Teaching Lodge        | 68400-08-8370 | 0.00              | 7,000.00             | 0.00               | 7,000.00            |
| Legends Project - Research Team         | 68600-08-8370 | 0.00              | 17,000.00            | 0.00               | 17,000.00           |
| <b>Total expenses</b>                   |               | <b>1,764.66</b>   | <b>59,400.00</b>     | <b>7,067.12</b>    | <b>52,332.88</b>    |
| <b>Surplus (deficit) for the period</b> |               | <b>(1,764.66)</b> | <b>0.00</b>          | <b>14,182.88</b>   | <b>(14,182.88)</b>  |

**COUCHICHING FIRST NATION**  
**Legends Project**  
**Statement of Revenue and Expenses**  
**4 Periods Ended 31/07/2017**

**Unaudited**

|   | <u>CURRENT</u>     | <u>ANNUAL BUDGET</u> | <u>CURRENT YTD</u>     | <u>OVER/(UNDER)</u>  |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Revenue:</b>                                 |                    |                      |                        |                      |
| Total revenue                                   | <u>0.00</u>        | <u>0.00</u>          | <u>0.00</u>            | <u>0.00</u>          |
| <b>Expenses:</b>                                |                    |                      |                        |                      |
| Legends Project - Sharing Circles 68300-08-8370 | <u>0.00</u>        | <u>0.00</u>          | <u>101.06</u>          | <u>(101.06)</u>      |
| Total expenses                                  | <u>0.00</u>        | <u>0.00</u>          | <u>101.06</u>          | <u>(101.06)</u>      |
| <b>Surplus (deficit) for the period</b>         | <u><u>0.00</u></u> | <u><u>0.00</u></u>   | <u><u>(101.06)</u></u> | <u><u>101.06</u></u> |

G/L Transactions Listing - In Functional Currency (GLPTLS1)

Include Accounts With No Activity [No]  
 Include Balances and Net Changes [Yes]  
 Include Posting Seq. and Batch-Entry [Yes]  
 From Year - Period [2017 - 01] To [2017 - 12]  
 Sort By [Account No.]  
 Sort Transactions By Transaction Date [No]  
 From Account No. [ ] To [ZZ]  
 From Account Group [ ] To [ZZZZZZZZZZZZ]  
 From Program [8370] To [8370]  
 Last Year Closed 2017  
 Last Posting Sequence 22613  
 Use Rolled Up Amounts [No]

| Account Number/ |        | Year/      |  | Description/<br>Reference                             | Posting<br>Seq. | Batch-Entry | Debits   | Credits   | Net Change | Balance    |
|-----------------|--------|------------|--|---|-----------------|-------------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Prd.            | Source | Date       |  |   |                 |             |          |           |            |            |
| 43000-08-8370   |        |            |  | Revenue - Legends Project                             |                 |             |          |           |            | 0.00       |
| 2017            |        |            |  |   |                 |             |          |           |            |            |
| 10              | AR-PY  | 23/01/2017 |  | Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation<br>10616-PY000021508 | 21681           | 24823-59    |          | 21,250.00 |            |            |
|                 |        |            |  | Net Change and Ending Balance for Fiscal Period 10:   |                 |             |          |           | -21,250.00 | -21,250.00 |
|                 |        |            |  | Totals: Revenue - Legends Project 2017                |                 |             | 0.00     | 21,250.00 | -21,250.00 | -21,250.00 |
| 54700-08-8370   |        |            |  | Legends Project - Admin Fee                           |                 |             |          |           |            | 0.00       |
| 2017            |        |            |  |   |                 |             |          |           |            |            |
| 11              | GL-JE  | 07/02/2017 |  | Record 2016-17 Admin Fees<br>JE 11-6                  | 21734           | 24848-6     | 2,700.00 |           |            |            |
|                 |        |            |  | Net Change and Ending Balance for Fiscal Period 11:   |                 |             |          |           | 2,700.00   | 2,700.00   |
|                 |        |            |  | Totals: Legends Project - Admin Fee 2017              |                 |             | 2,700.00 | 0.00      | 2,700.00   | 2,700.00   |
| 68300-08-8370   |        |            |  | Legends Project - Sharing Circles                     |                 |             |          |           |            | 0.00       |
| 2017            |        |            |  |   |                 |             |          |           |            |            |
| 08              | AP-IN  | 14/11/2016 |  | Isaac, Tracy<br>11142016                              | 21420           | 24394-1     | 300.00   |           |            |            |
|                 |        |            |  | Net Change and Ending Balance for Fiscal Period 08:   |                 |             |          |           | 300.00     | 300.00     |
| 09              | AP-IN  | 07/12/2016 |  | Mainville, Bessie<br>HONORARIA DEC 5 16               | 21485           | 24491-1     | 450.00   |           |            |            |
| 09              | AP-IN  | 14/12/2016 |  | Bruyere, Johnna<br>P CASH DEC 14 16                   | 21485           | 24566-32    | 101.10   |           |            |            |
|                 |        |            |  | Net Change and Ending Balance for Fiscal Period 09:   |                 |             |          |           | 551.10     | 851.10     |
| 10              | AP-AD  | 27/01/2017 |  | Willie, Doris   | 21686           | 24784-1     |          | 150.00    |            |            |

G/L Transactions Listing - In Functional Currency (GLPTLS1)

| Account Number/ Year/ Prd. | Source | Date       | Description/ Reference                                     | Posting Seq. | Batch-Entry | Debits | Credits | Net Change | Balance  |          |
|----------------------------|--------|------------|--|--------------|-------------|--------|---------|------------|----------|----------|
|                            |        |            | 2017   |              |             |        |         |            |          |          |
| 10                         | AP-IN  | 11/01/2017 | Isaac, Tracy<br>2017007TI                                  | 21595        | 24692-26    | 250.00 |         |            |          |          |
| 10                         | AP-IN  | 25/01/2017 | Mainville, Bessie<br>HONORARIA LEGENDS PROJ                | 21654        | 24767-2     | 150.00 |         |            |          |          |
| 10                         | AP-IN  | 25/01/2017 | Willie, Doris<br>HONORARIA LEGEND PROJ                     | 21654        | 24767-3     | 150.00 |         |            |          |          |
| 10                         | AP-IN  | 25/01/2017 | Isaac, Tracy<br>2017 01225 AVY                             | 21687        | 24787-17    | 250.00 |         |            |          |          |
|                            |        |            | <b>Net Change and Ending Balance for Fiscal Period 10:</b> |              |             |        |         |            | 650.00   | 1,501.10 |
| 11                         | AP-IN  | 06/02/2017 | Isaac, Tracy<br>CATERING FEB 8 17                          | 21728        | 24842-6     | 300.00 |         |            |          |          |
| 11                         | AP-IN  | 14/02/2017 | Aaron Mills<br>4   | 21802        | 24921-1     | 344.61 |         |            |          |          |
| 11                         | AP-IN  | 14/02/2017 | Aaron Mills<br>5   | 21802        | 24921-2     | 150.00 |         |            |          |          |
| 11                         | AP-IN  | 16/02/2017 | Aaron Mills<br>6   | 21802        | 24921-3     | 190.00 |         |            |          |          |
| 11                         | AP-IN  | 23/02/2017 | Aaron Mills<br>7   | 21826        | 24944-32    | 116.75 |         |            |          |          |
|                            |        |            | <b>Net Change and Ending Balance for Fiscal Period 11:</b> |              |             |        |         |            | 1,101.36 | 2,602.46 |
| 12                         | AP-IN  | 08/03/2017 | Mainville, Bessie<br>9                                     | 21893        | 25006-1     | 150.00 |         |            |          |          |
| 12                         | AP-IN  | 08/03/2017 | Roger Fobister<br>8  | 21893        | 25006-2     | 300.00 |         |            |          |          |
| 12                         | AP-IN  | 23/03/2017 | Aaron Mills<br>11  | 21976        | 25092-5     | 287.96 |         |            |          |          |
| 12                         | AP-IN  | 30/03/2017 | Borrows, John<br>7248970620528                             | 22026        | 25139-13    | 232.48 |         |            |          |          |
| 12                         | AP-IN  | 30/03/2017 | Borrows, John<br>171279044                                 | 22026        | 25139-14    | 192.11 |         |            |          |          |
| 12                         | AP-IN  | 30/03/2017 | Borrows, John<br>432349                                    | 22026        | 25139-15    | 182.11 |         |            |          |          |
| 12                         | AP-IN  | 30/03/2017 | 2174911 Ontario Limited(Wasaw)<br>20170322-01              | 22042        | 25154-17    | 420.00 |         |            |          |          |
|                            |        |            | <b>Net Change and Ending Balance for Fiscal Period 12:</b> |              |             |        |         |            | 1,764.66 | 4,367.12 |

G/L Transactions Listing - In Functional Currency (GLPTLS1)

Account  
Number/  
Year/

| Prd. | Source | Date | Description/<br>Reference                      | Posting<br>Seq. | Batch-Entry | Debits   | Credits   | Net Change | Balance    |
|------|--------|------|--|-----------------|-------------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|
|      |        |      | Totals: Legends Project - Sharing Circles 2017 |                 |             | 4,517.12 | 150.00    | 4,367.12   | 4,367.12   |
|      |        |      | Report Totals:                                 |                 |             | 7,217.12 | 21,400.00 | -14,182.88 | -14,182.88 |

3 accounts printed







RMB 2027, RR#2  
Fort Frances, Ontario P9A 3M3

Phone 807-274-3228  
Fax 807-274-6458

Jennifer Petrela  
Director of Content and Strategic Engagement  
Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation  
600 - 1980 Sherbrooke Street West  
Montréal, Quebec Canada H3H 1E8

Dear Ms Petrela,

I am writing this letter to verify the amount of expenses incurred by Couchiching First Nation in regards to the project, "Revitalizing Anishinaabe Inaakonigewin (Law): Aadizokaanag Biboon 2016-17" proposed by Aaron Mills. The cumulative total of expenses incurred amounts to \$7,168.18 of the \$21,250.00 received. If you require any further information or documentation, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ben Morrisseau  
Finance Manager  
Couchiching First Nation  
(807) 274-3228  
[benmorriseau@vianet.ca](mailto:benmorriseau@vianet.ca)