# PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATIONS IN CANADA

## LANDSCAPES, INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES AND PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

Edited by

Peter R Elson

Sylvain A. Lefèvre

Jean-Marc Fontan
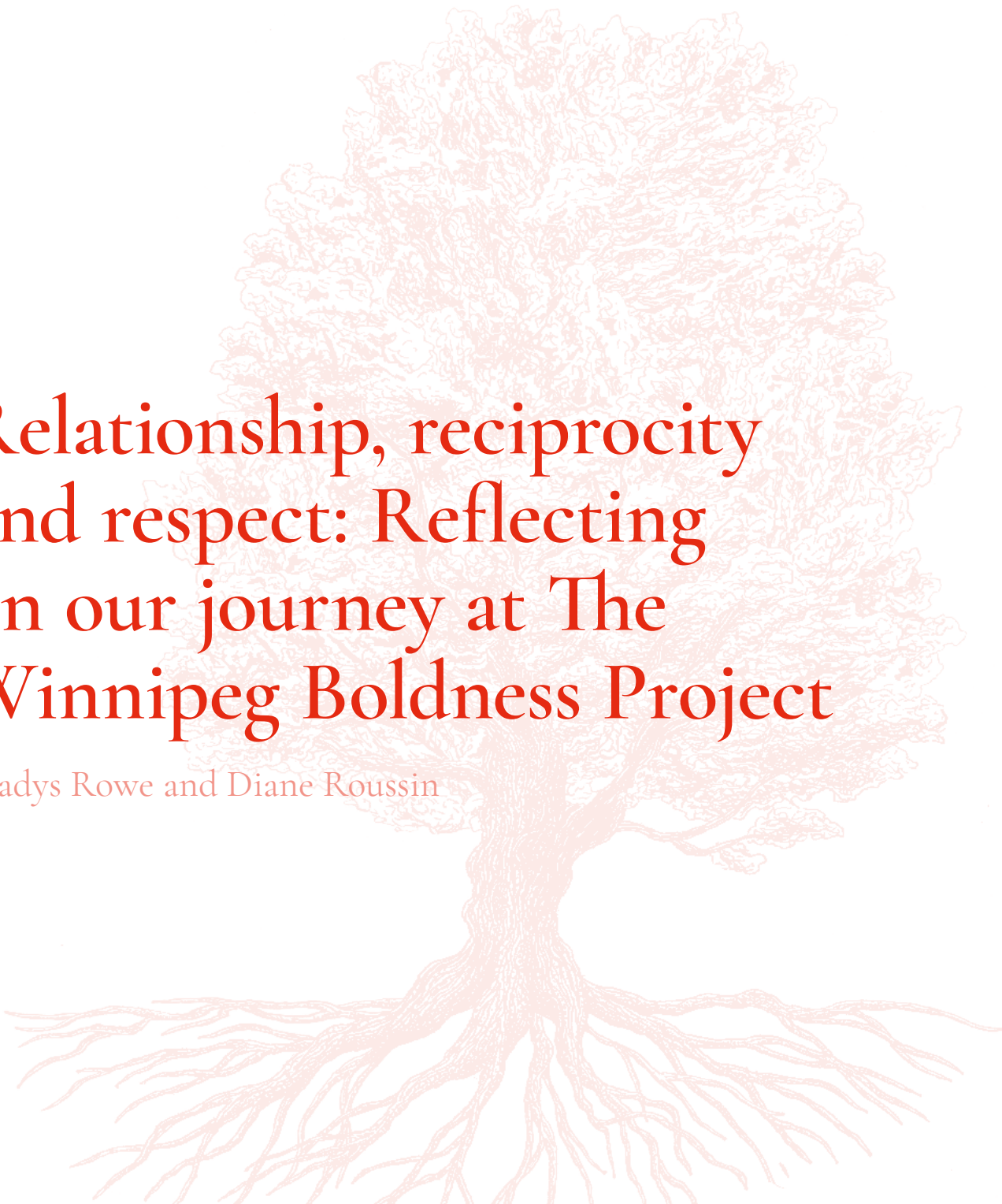
Dedicated to our dear
friend and colleague
Jack Quarter

1942–2019

# Table of Contents

# Pathways to change 189

# Reflections and conclusions 314

# Relationship, reciprocity and respect: Reflecting on our journey at The Winnipeg Boldness Project

Gladys Rowe and Diane Roussin

ansi! Aniin! Boozhoo! We are thankful for the opportunity to share what we have learned in working with our philanthropic partners on The Winnipeg Boldness Project.[1]

We are a social innovation project that began in 2014. We have been working in the Point Douglas neighourhood, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, since then to positively impact the health and wellbeing of families through systems change. Social innovation is a field that has emerged with a goal to bring together diverse collaborators to develop solutions that tackle complex challenges (Westley *et al.*, 2016). Labs that use social innovation have also expanded to include approaches such as person-centred design. At The Winnipeg Boldness Project we have combined social innovation with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, feeling, and doing. From this we have created a space where we have the opportunity to learn through emergence and through iteration – taking what is learned and responding to it.

By using principles that honour Indigenous ways of knowing, being, feeling and doing, we have worked to continue to allow for an experiential, deeply reflective process. While this can feel exciting, it also means that *how* we know and have been taught to work in the design and provision of social services can be challenging.

As we sat down to explore these challenges and what we have learned so far, we thought it would be a story to tell through conversation. What follows is a conversation between myself, Gladys Rowe, former research & evaluation manager, and Diane Roussin, project director, as we explored what our learning has meant for the partnerships, and those we have with our philanthropic partners in particular.

[1] More information about The work of The Winnipeg Boldness Project can be found at http://www.winnipegboldness.ca

**Gladys:**     The Project[2] has been really framed as a part of the reconciliation process. I was wondering what you feel the role of our philanthropic partners has been, considering our work as community-driven reconciliation?

**Diane:**     I wanted to take a second and define who I feel our philanthropic partners are. For example, the chair of our board, Gregg Hansen,[3] I include him as one of our philanthropic partners. That is the role he is playing here. He is supporting the Project through his connections, asking the people in his networks to consider making donations. He's really invested in the work of the Project, trying to impact the people in his network, influencing them to support the work happening through the Project. Our other philanthropic partners obviously include the McConnell Foundation, United Way Winnipeg, and an anonymous donor. We have also been supported by the Richardson Foundation and Winnipeg Foundation – those are all considered philanthropic organizations who support our work.

When we say reconciliation, I always have in my mind this equation: reconciliation equals relationships – that's just the bottom line for me. And then everything else flows from there. If we have a relationship, we can talk about anything and we can work through anything. It's the first building block. Boldness has been working to build the necessary relationships for reconciliation through a collaborative process, collective impact, and through the cross-sectoral work. Each of those elements are concerned with fostering relationships and trying to bring together the diverse perspectives. Social innovation brings together diverse people to solve complex problems; it's about the diversity. And because of the diversity – whether it's in the corporate sector or the community sector – everybody speaks a different language, has a different perspective, and a different value set. The only way that we are going to come together is through relationship. The only way we're going to understand one another's perspective, values, and drivers is when we are in relationship with one another. The deeper and fuller this relationship is, the deeper and fuller everything else.

We can have surface relationships, but then we will have surface reconciliation. For example, when someone simply offers a land acknowledgement and then calls it a day, because someone said it's what we're supposed to do. We are looking for a deeper and sustained relationship with reconciliation.

---

2   Project, used throughout this chapter, refers specifically to The Winnipeg Boldness Project.

3   Gregg Hanson (Chair): Former president and CEO of Wawanesa Mutual. Now retired, Gregg remains active in Manitoba's business community on several company boards and has taken an active interest in the well-being of Winnipeg's Indigenous citizens in particular.

**Gladys:**    Do you think the relationships with the philanthropic partners themselves are acts of reconciliation?

**Diane:**    I think so. You think about our relationship with Stephen Huddart (president and CEO of the J W McConnell Family Foundation); that's easy, because he gets so much about why we need to do this work. But as a Project, our relationships with other people don't come so easily sometimes. It can be difficult, because these relationships start from a different place, often with a lack of information, and with a lack of awareness of privilege. As a Project, it is these relationships that have taken more work to foster and build trust. We have had to come to know and appreciate the intent that each of us brings and allow for the leeway to make mistakes. This appreciation also means we are committed to learning how to be in relationship and to become educated on the foundational issues as to why reconciliation is a necessary process to work on together in the first place. We have had to reflect on and assess questions like: What role do the philanthropic partners play? What is the purpose to the relationship? Why do we both need to keep working together towards the end goal?

**Gladys:**    That ties in really well to the next question, which is about reciprocity. The way that I understand reciprocity is that it is a give and take. It is a responsibility to one another as well as a commitment to work together. We talked about reciprocity in terms of our community partners and the guide groups. One of the ways reciprocity worked in these relationships has been through building capacity. Instead of simply asking our partners to give of themselves – to share their experiences, knowledge, skills, and expertise for a finite project (essentially extracting these resources) – we have worked to leave tangible products, skills, and resources behind. One legacy is the building of capacity as a result of the project, where the reciprocal relationships have facilitated this growth.

Thinking about reciprocity as a principle that guides the project – can you share your own understanding of what reciprocity is for you?

**Diane:**    I think it's probably what you laid out there – similar to what you think about reciprocity. It is interdependence – recognizing that we are interdependent and we both have value. Recognizing we both get something out of this relationship and, like it or not, we are linked. Good, bad, or ugly – we are linked. When I think about it specifically at its simplest, it's about give and take. You scratch my back and I scratch yours. That's at the surface level. Then, we can talk about a deeper interconnectedness as being meaningful reciprocity.

When I think about the philanthropic community I think of an interconnected and engaged community of partners. It is about people using philanthropy as influence

to affect a social cause. They are in a place in their lives to try to help make it better for others. I feel that our philanthropic partners – and I can't speak of all of them in the same manner – but many are trying to bring more to the table than just their dollars. I think the philanthropic groups are also trying to highlight and make visible other contributions. For Boldness, these contributions are the community wisdom that we are trying to surface through the prototypes – the philanthropic partners recognize that they don't have all the answers, and they want to know what to do to make it better for families. Philanthropic partners are looking to community wisdom to make things better – and so, in our case, there needs to be an understanding of the equal value of contributions to the Project.

Obviously, we are not as far down that recognition road as we could be, as far as valuing what each of us is bringing to the table. But I think there's an awareness and recognition that community wisdom is valuable. And this is felt more by some philanthropic organizations than others. Some are willing to walk with us, and others "just want us to figure it out".

**Gladys:**   There are varying levels of readiness and willingness to take risk – but also varying levels of trust in the relationship. You talked about reconciliation having a grounding in relationship – I'm wondering if you can speak a bit more about the importance of relationship in the Project?

**Diane:**   This is a space where philanthropic groups can come together and collaborate. Often social service organizations are called upon to become coordinated and prevent duplication. This can also be seen in the realm of philanthropy. The Project is a platform for philanthropic collaboration to take place. As a community, community-based organizations in the North End of Winnipeg have worked together for a long time.

When we think about the cross-sectoral role of the Project, this is also an important relationship. We don't often see reaching out across sectors to learn and take the best parts of approaches and frameworks and applying this in a social setting. Experiment, take risks, and develop good products – we are borrowing this from different fields. Boldness is another place where philanthropic organizations can be in relationship with each other. If they weren't already, this is a place for them to be in relationship.

**Gladys:**   So, there's been a different level of commitment with our philanthropic partners in that they have a willingness or openness to participate in the process in a hands-on way?

**Diane:**    Absolutely. We've always framed our relationships as the difference between transactional versus relational kind of funding. Funders are not sitting disconnected from the Project; they are actively participating each month all along the way. They are helping figure it out as we go. When it is relational, partners get more invested and take more responsibility. This is about responsibility and accountability, and it changes the way the relationship works.

**Gladys:**    At the beginning we didn't explicitly state that we were an Indigenous project – but, truly, because of who we are and how we operate personally and professionally, we have a strong foundation in Indigenous values and principles. How do you think this has impacted the work we have done with the philanthropic organizations? Or the way they work with us?

**Diane:**    I think we are living in the question. We are having the messy conversations about what sharing of knowledge is and what is considered to be appropriation. Really, we need to think about this – do we want every non-Indigenous person out there to adopt our ideas and scale them? There have been really negative experiences where we as Indigenous peoples have shared our knowledge, have had it taken, and then it's even been sold back to us! We get evaluated on it, and then we fail – to be blunt. That kind of appropriation is something we talk about.

In terms of the work that we are doing on the Project, we are talking about who gets to speak, whose voice gets centred, who has the responsibility and accountability, and who has the rights or entitlement. I think there isn't one answer. Within each of our relationships, we have those difficult discussions and then we come to the answer that is right for that relationship.

I am always saying, if you are in that good relationship, you can say the dumbest or silliest thing, and you are going to be given lots of leeway and support and patience. However, if you're in a bad relationship, you are going to get persecuted for blinking wrong or looking sideways. In the end, better relationships make difficult conversations more meaningful and easier to have.

**Gladys:**    In the Project, reconciliation and the Truth and Reconciliation's calls to action have been a point of constant reflection: What are we contributing in response to the calls? With the various philanthropic partners participating at the table, they are also doing their own reflecting on their action in reference to the calls. Do you feel this is strengthened by the relationship they have with Boldness?

**Diane:**    Yes, I believe that. Putting in the work takes a lot of effort and a good relationship. I think that a good relationship is something that transcends all the calls. Actually, it transcends all of the topic areas. There's always a topic area – mental health, education, child welfare. There're always going to be issues to deal with – but a strong foundation of relationships is critical. For example, I have had a relationship

with one of the partners over several projects – it transcends the issue areas – when we do our work and wrap on that one, we move to the next one. That's a lifelong commitment. It's a long-term commitment, it may even be intergenerational.

**Gladys:**     I'm thinking about iterative-ness – the idea of think, act, reflect, adjust, and living in the question. This has been a process we have used in the Project from the beginning. I think it has also been a process that we've used with our philanthropic partners as well. Can you think of any examples of where this has come through in how we work with our partners?

**Diane:**     I do feel that the lab process is very conducive to what I would call my Indigenous way and method. That's why I really ended up embracing the lab process, and for all those reasons you just said – the emergence, the iteration, the relationship base, whose voice gets centred in terms of figuring issues out, and how solutions get determined. It fits very much with the child-at-centre model (see Figure 1), that way of working. I think that the philanthropic partners groups we work with have put resources on the table in a way that allowed that way of working to come forward. Without these resources, this Project would have never happened. Being able to really bring forward this lab approach and show how conducive it is to this Indigenous way, this wouldn't have happened had the philanthropic groups not been the catalyst with their dollars. They are really that seed, that catalyst, that initial, short-term, up-front spark kind of money.

**Figure 1 – Child-at-centre model**
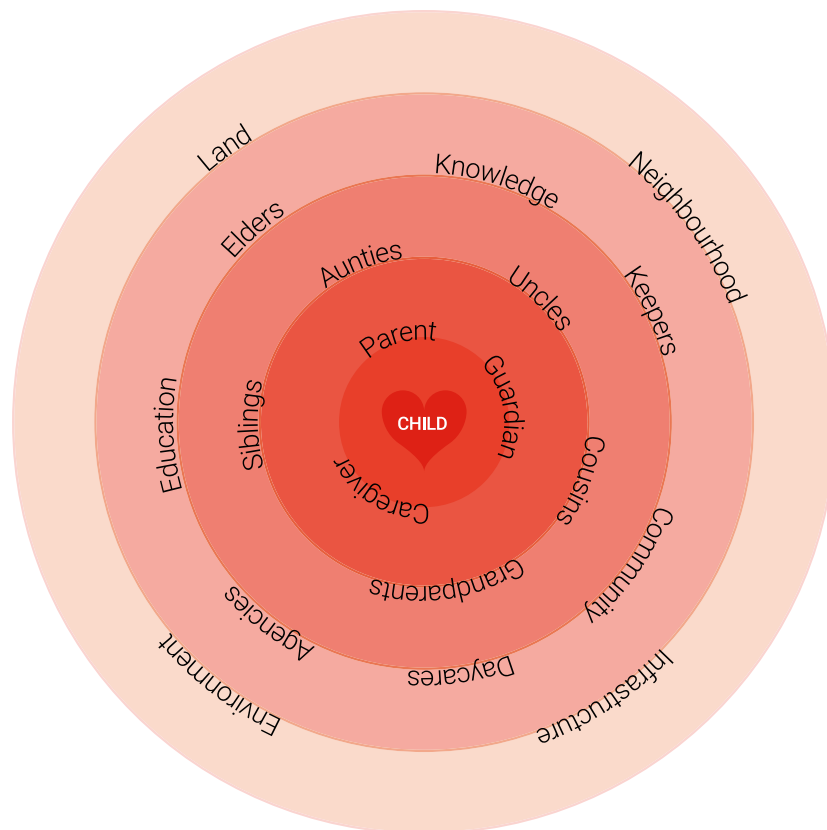
Also, the philanthropic partners themselves, I feel like they are trying to figure out how they can implement this way of being. They are examining how their frameworks and methods do this work – because the granting process can be very transactional. Instead, they are funding this thing [the Project] that they really believe in, while also turning the mirror back on themselves and asking: "How are we doing this work? How can we be iterative and relational? Whose wisdom gets centred? How can we benefit from living in the question?"

**Gladys:** The last question I have is a typical interview wide-open question. Do you have any other insights or "aha" moments that you feel are important to share from our work with the philanthropic partners on the Project?

**Diane:** Well, the word "trust" comes to mind. Trust is built on really good, deep, solid relationships, what we just talked about: emergence, iteration, giving space for responsiveness, and turning on a dime and moving in another direction. It's anti-planning and anti-long-term planning to some degree. The things that people have normally put their trust in, such as month-to-month planning, clear activities outlined, clear reporting on those exact activities – that's where people put their trust. And they call that accountability. And with Boldness we are very process driven – people have to look at the process. They judge that the process looks good, but they still don't know where it is going or where it will end up – so people need to fall back on trust. The knowledge mobilization framework (see Figure 2), and the values and principles outlined in the "ways of knowing, being, feeling & doing" ask our partners to participate in a meaningful process where the journey is just as important as the outcome itself.

**Figure 2 – Knowledge mobilization framework**
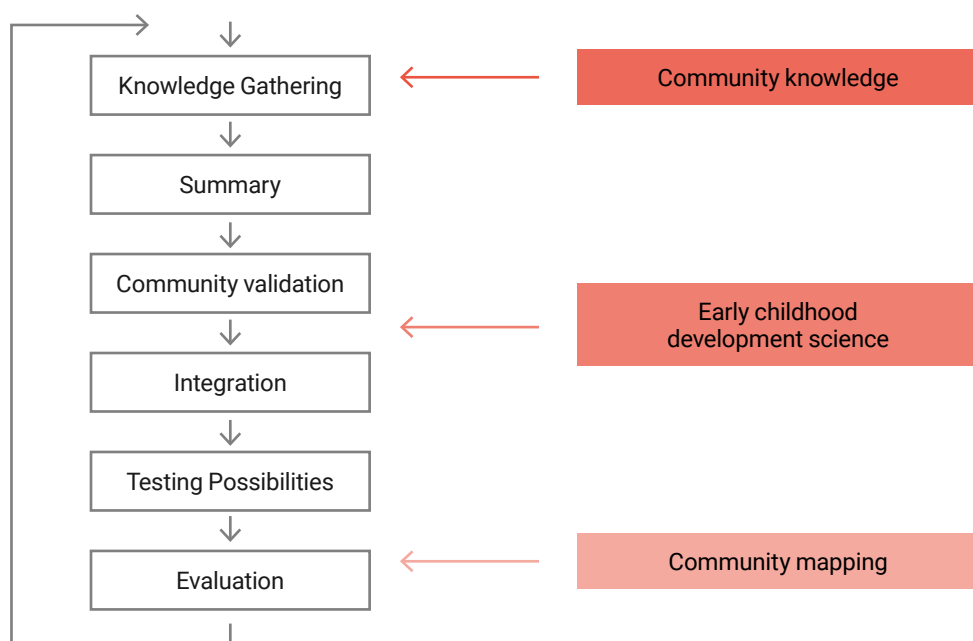
I feel like lots of our funders have given us money because of who is sitting around the table and the trust level. Not so much because of what we're doing. We don't fit the mold, so they can't trust a workplan and reporting on predetermined activities. The leadership at the Guide Group tables have trust. How do you have a trusting relationship? Based on lots of conversation, understanding, respect – all built over time. It's easily lost but hard to get and build up – but once it's there you can really count on it. It's all relational (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3 – Winnipeg Boldness accountability framework**
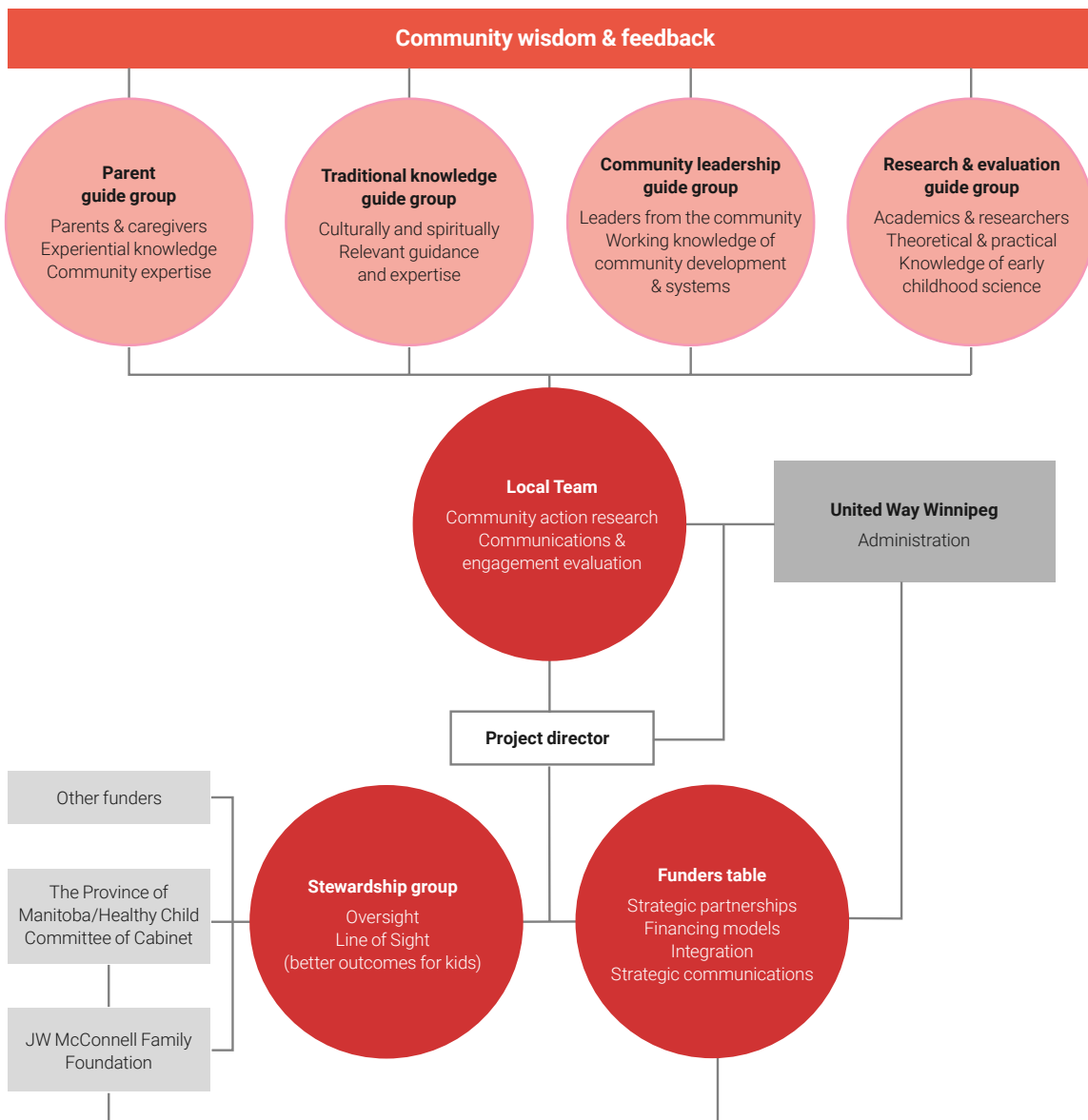
**Gladys:** The structures that have been built in the Project have supported a way of relating to one another with the underlying goals of respect, understanding, empathy, relationships, and trust. You have touched on trust and relationships, you talked about reciprocity – all of those are really personal and human-focused values. The "ways of knowing, being, feeling, and doing" (see Figure 4) were outlined not only as a guide to the work with families in Point Douglas, but also as a guide to how the Project works itself. These values, however, are very subjective and heart-centred, based on instinct sometimes. This can be very contradictory to what many people have been taught about how you judge value in the world of programming, evaluation, and philanthropy. So, trust and the relationships – all those things that you talk about – are really key. They seem really straightforward – and it is straightforward at Boldness, but it's also not straightforward because it's not really the normal way of operating, judging worth, and measuring progress. You keep going back to the value of relationship: it is so fundamental. Without it nothing else is going to happen.

### Figure 4 – Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being, Feeling, and Doing

Our Ways of Doing

Our Ways of Feeling

SPIRIT    BODY

MIND

Our Ways of Being    Our Ways of Knowing
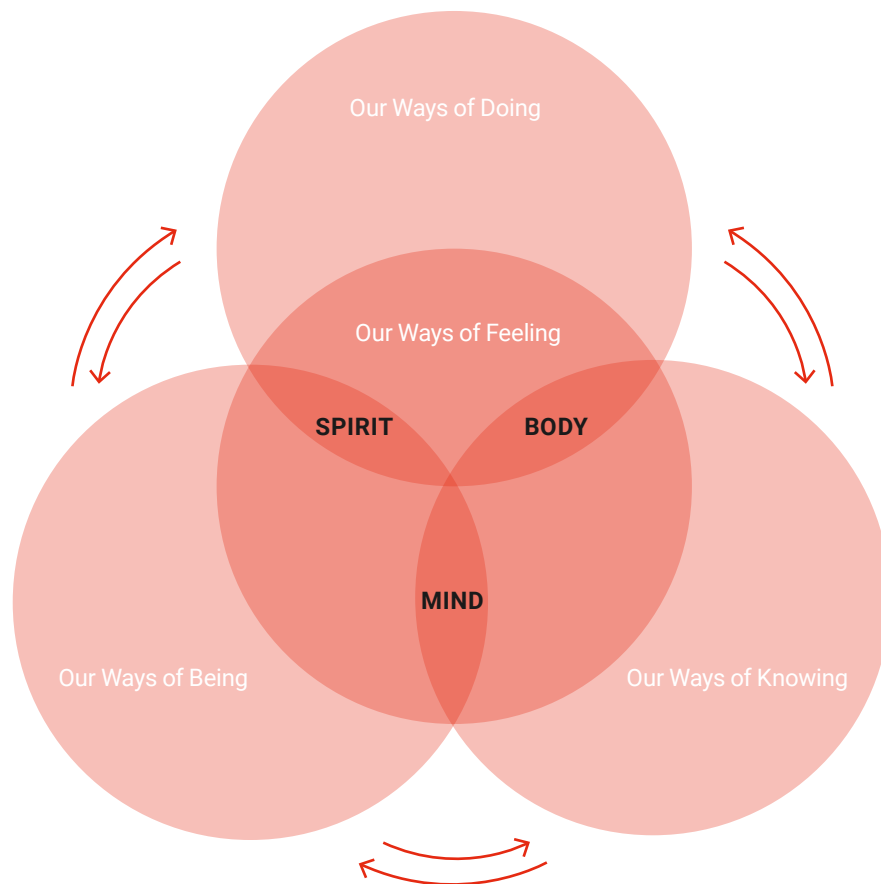
**Diane:** The other two words I'll throw in there are "risk" and "vulnerability" – because I don't think I say enough about those things. In order to live in the question, in order to experiment, which I think we really need to do, in order to try things out we need to take risk. We hear this in the business community all the time. People take risks and they fail ten times to succeed once. We need to take risks. We don't do that in the social services world. And the only way that we can become comfortable with risk, I think, is if we are in those deep relationships. It is like we say to ourselves, "We will be okay, we are going to venture out here, but we know we have one another's backs. We are going to do it together, and we are going to take this big leap of faith. And even if we fail we will be okay – because we are going to do this together." With that risk is that vulnerability – to go "Uh-oh, we don't know; uh-oh, we can't fail; uh-oh, we did fail." And then "Uh-oh, did we wreck the funding world for everyone else coming after us now, because we failed?" As a Project, to put ourselves out there in that way is about vulnerability.

The other words that were coming to my mind as you were talking, from Peter Senge, are related to value-based decision-making. I can share an example, when I worked in group homes. Many of these kids were considered as being really challenging and this was their last resort. This was the last place on the list where they would be sent. If they didn't make this work, then they are seen as lost causes.

They would come to our centre and, as with any other group home, expect the rule book. The rule book is what governs the relationship. A worker can stand back, stand an arm's-length away or more behind this rule book. And the staff can make all kinds of decisions that affect this kid and not have to be accountable for the decisions because it's the rule book that says so. Not they themselves, they are not the bad person; the rule book is the bad person. I'm imposing this decision on you because the rule book says I have to. Not because I want to. Then the kid freaks out, gets mad – but you can't get mad at the staff, you have to get mad at the rule book. But who makes the rule book? Well, we don't know. Someone made a policy somewhere. Maybe the executive director did, maybe the government did, maybe there's legislation. The rules came from somewhere. Then we have nobody to interact with because someone somewhere made the rule.

In value-based decision-making we didn't have a rule book, we didn't have a book of strict policies that said, when the kid swears at you, you take away their phone. We didn't have a rules-based approach. It was more about the framework that we had. It began with, this is your home, we love you, you are a good person, you are valuable, we want the best for you, and we want to work with you. All these value statements. This is what is important, all the values. What this looks like in practice then is, if a certain kid does a certain thing, then staff have to assess that

thing and they have to have a response on this thing based on values. Based on that relationship. In this case staff and kids – a whole bunch of us had a hard time responding when asked about the standardization, and equal treatment. We had to have conversations about customization and equity. Each kid is different and has a whole different set of needs and they need a whole cup of water – you, on the other hand, you only need half a cup of water, but you also need a bun to go with it. Here's you, here's what you need – so let's customize to you and get you what you need, and then let's customize to that kid and get that kid what they need.

I think we do that in the world in general; we stand behind policies and rule books and displace the relationship. Therefore, we don't have to be accountable for our behaviour and our reactions, because the rule book says so. And then no one can ever figure out who made the rule book and how you change the rule book. And how do you create a rule for every scenario anyway? That's rule-based thinking and operating, and I think we are trying to figure that out in Boldness – that's the iteration, the risk, living in the question – we are trying to figure out how to do value-based work.

I think our model is very much about value-based work – but here we have so many systems that are built on a hierarchical model that is all about punching out the same parts of the car, standardization, everyone does the same thing and let's get the end-product the exact same every single time. That's not human reality. When we are doing value-centred work, it's highly customized. The end product looks like a circle, not that triangle, not that bureaucracy. It feels very different – it's not equality; it's equity.

**Gladys:** Do you think that the philanthropic partners came to the table with an understanding of that values-based decision-making, or was it a learning curve for them?

**Diane:** The partners had to have had some level of understanding. There is no way they could have come to this Project and stuck with us without understanding it. I do think that some came to us with more of an understanding than others. For those who may not have had a strong understanding, they at least came and were open to something, even if they did not know about values-based decision-making. I think there would have been barriers and an uphill battle for people who had no clue or no awareness. The optimist in me believes that there is not a person who, fully aware of the current realities and understanding the context that has brought us to today, would just dig in and work to maintain the status quo.

**Gladys:** I think this is great because you have validated the observations I made. I had a list of insights that I had copied down for myself – and you touched on all of them. Here they are:

- You need to be okay being in a space of unknowing, discomfort, and risk
- You need to ensure space to learn is kept open
- You need to have the tolerance, the ability, and the framework to be able to support and take risks
- Reconciliation and innovation are a journey that takes time and strong, trusting relationships
- The voice of those who are directly impacted must lead the process. This is not an opportunity for those who are privileged to continue to hold the microphone – this is important to remember and support.

There is a responsibility to carry the work in a good way. I would include participation in ceremony, but I questioned myself after saying that, as one who is a part of this project and being in relationship – do you necessarily have to participate in ceremony as a part of the project – do you have any thoughts?

**Diane:** I struggle with that one, I do think it's a sensitive one. You don't want to force anyone to do anything. But then how do you understand Indigenous wisdom if you don't participate in some of that?

**Gladys:** Yes, and is that key, participation? Or is it in knowing that Indigenous wisdom is important and knowing that it must be centred and then stepping back and letting the space exist?

**Diane:** Well, that might be the answer – if I know I am not going to be participating in those ceremonies, then I'm not going to be the lead on that. I have to step back and let those people lead the way. I often say that the heart-work – people who can go to the heart of people and tend to people – that is really not me. I'm more of a head-person, an administrative type. I mean, I can lead that kind of process work and I have done ceremonies in the past, but I know that is not my strongest skill. I know when I need to step back and let heart-people lead. Ceremony is the same, there are some people who have deep wisdom because they've put the time in. Knowing your role, maybe it's the clan system – knowing your role and what your responsibilities and gifts are.

# Conclusion

The Winnipeg Boldness Project has been built by capitalizing on and respecting the need for diverse partnerships, collaborations and networks. With this comes a necessary commitment to a shared vision. Getting to this point, however, is not an easy task. It requires great skill in relationship-building, the ability to listen to understand rather than to respond, and an awareness of the roots of structural inequities that are faced daily by families in Point Douglas. Finally, and perhaps one of the most critical aspects of this commitment, it requires the time and space to engage people who are directly involved in the work of creating systemic change.

We have had the great opportunity to work alongside families, organizations, community leaders, various helping professionals, policy makers, government representatives, funders, and philanthropic partners to work towards our bold goal. We have learned along the way that this can be bumpy. The stories that we share about these experiences over the last few years have not come easily. We hope that through this chapter you have been able to take something that is meaningful for your experience – something that you can implement in the work that you do in your own community, and in your relationship with Indigenous peoples.

Meanwhile, we continue to learn and grow while remaining committed to the vision of systemic change that is driven by the voices of children and families in Point Douglas.

# Three key takeaways

**1**

It is critical to understand that the people who are directly impacted by an issue must be the ones to lead. We must make space and provide support to ensure this happens.

**2**

Relationships are necessary for this work. Strong relationships are based on trust, reciprocity, and openness. Reconciliation is about relations. Being committed to working together is one aspect of reconciliation.

**3**

This is values-based work that requires people to come to, be present in, and contribute to the whole. It is circle work.

# References

Westley, F, McGowan, K, Antadze, N, Blacklock, J & O Tjornbo (2016) 'How game changers catalyzed, disrupted, and incentivized social innovation: Three historical cases of nature conservation, assimilation, and women's rights', *Ecology and Society, 21(4). Retrieved from:* http://www.jstor.org/stable/26270034