

Erynne Sjoblom- University of Alberta

Project: Reclaiming traditional Wahkotowin (kinship) support systems: Measuring the impact of community-driven and culturally-rooted strategies to promote mental wellness

Background



My doctoral research project is part of a larger prospective cohort study called the Wood Buffalo Healthy Families Program. This is a community-led research project, focusing on supporting families now and across generations, namely how cultural approaches can improve the lives of families and children in five Cree, Dene and Métis

Nations of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Specifically, my doctoral research has two main goals: 1) involve the community in designing the study and creating meaningful ways to measure mental wellness, and 2) explore the effects of two programs on mental wellbeing—the Aunties within Reach and Elders Mentoring Programs. We will look at families and child development to see how these community-driven programs impact mental wellness over time. Through this work, we aim to support community capacity, empowering communities to design, implement and evaluate programs that effectively support families in providing healthy environments for children. Moreover, results will provide evidence for wise practices to optimize children’s developmental trajectories, support wellness, and decrease risks that negatively impact mental wellness in Indigenous communities. It

will ensure communities own, control, access, and possess data that is meaningful to them to inform self-determined health priorities and approaches. It will also provide evidence of the efficacy of community-driven, culturally-grounded strategies to promote mental wellness. We hope that this evidence can be utilized to support Indigenous communities' efforts to acquire and direct resources towards bolstering these types of community-driven cultural approaches to health promotion.

Bio:

Erynne Sjoblom is currently navigating being both a student and a new mom to Oscar (1 year) and Eleanor (2 years). She is a settler Canadian of European descent who grew up in northern British Columbia near the Yukon Border on Treaty 8 territory. She has worked for Indigenous organizations for over 13 years, mainly in the realms of community-driven health research, policy and health promotion and prides herself in being a helper that goes wherever she may be needed. Her academic pursuits led her to a Master of Science in Community Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba, where her thesis work involved a community-based participatory research project with a Manitoba Tribal Council and a remote First Nation to explore the roles that language, culture, and community play in promoting and protecting mental wellness. Now Erynne is looking to expand her skillset in Epidemiology and Biostatistics, as a result of having witnessed a growing need for experts in quantitative methods within Indigenous-led organizations. Her aim is to apply the skills she learns through her work within Indigenous organizations to support efforts for data sovereignty, facilitate the generation of evidence pertaining to culturally-rooted health promotion, and to aid in translating community-driven wellness needs and priorities into action to improve health equity.