

# Decolonizing Counselling Services at John Abbott College

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# Counselling Land Acknowledgment

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The Counselling team acknowledges that we are on unceded Indigenous lands, including those of the Kanien'kehá:ka, "Mohawk" and Anishinabeg "Algonquin" peoples.

With the perspective of our brief passage here on Earth, we give thanks for: the bountiful lands, the vitality of the waters, the warmth of the sun, the energizing winds, and the beauty that surrounds us.

We deeply honour the generations that came before us, and we respect the commitment and sacrifices made by them, to protect and care for this land we call home. We are dedicated to learning more, and being mindful of the trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples and its ongoing impact. We are also committed to learning from and valuing the strengths, perspectives and wisdom that Indigenous peoples maintain.

We commit to working towards reconciliation in our support of students and engaging in diverse ways of healing.

All our relations.



# Outline

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- Relation-based communities
- Importance of landmarks
- Changing how we define and offer “Counselling” support – unlearning Eurocentric ways
- Training for Counselling staff
- New initiatives:
  - First Peoples Garden and Microforest
  - Mindful Walking
  - SOAR

# Relation-Based Communities

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- Indigenous communities are grown through our relationships and these relationships have existed for thousands of years. It is common to have many family relations, to live in an area where many family members have houses on the same plot of land and live in homes that are intergenerational.
- These relationships include the land, being that Indigenous people were displaced and forced into reservation style living
- These many interwoven layers of relation – family, extended family, Clan systems, band, community – are implicated in daily life from grocery shopping to governance.
- This kinship worldview is lacking outside of our communities.

# Importance of Landmarks

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- A sense of home, a sense of belonging and being welcomed



# Changes to service provision

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## **Culture and language and land-based activities as medicine**

- Dedicated spaces – Indigenous student resource center, garden
- Meeting outdoors or out of the office, walking meetings
- Beading, drum making, hide tanning, cooking bannock at the fire pit
- Letting students guide us – the story of Lunch and Learns

# Evolving Counselling Services

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- Aiming to build trust through opportunities at connecting with students outside our offices.
- Active participation by Counselling team in community events and those organized by the Indigenous Student Resource Center.
- Diversifying access to services:
  - If a student's availability for an initial appointment does not correspond to '*Drop In*' times, we arrange an alternate time at the student's convenience.
  - Building trust and collaboration with Crossroads teaching staff to facilitate more personalized referrals.
  - Counselling team members may offer to meet with students in other locations on campus (eg. outdoors, other available locals), phone or online connections based on a student's preference.
  - Flexibility in session provision. Whether students may want consistent, intermittent, or a single meeting, counselling support will be offered.
  - 'Slowing things down', moving away from diagnostic model ('checking boxes' in a drop-in) towards greater curiosity about students' strengths and gifts.

# Training for Counselling staff

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- Bell Let's Talk – implementation grant
- \$10,000 allocated to training Counselling staff in culturally safe Counselling practices.
- 18 hours of supervision and training with Dr. Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao
  - Métis scholar with Cree, Gwichin and English and Viking ancestry (Swedish/Orkney).
  - Director of First Peoples Studies, Concordia University
  - Co-founder of the Centre for Response-Based Practice <https://www.responsebasedpractice.com>
- Key learnings:
  - Taking time
  - Unlearning Eurocentric habits
  - Getting out of the office and into nature
  - Being human
- Continuous learning – we meet every semester.



# New Initiatives



*Kanikonri:io – Good Mind Garden  
and Microforest*

# New Initiatives

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**MINI MENTAL  
HEALTH WALK**

JOIN US FOR A 30 MIN WALK  
TUESDAYS @ 11:30 AM

STARTING SEPTEMBER 17TH

MEETING PLACE: HERZBERG STEPS

FOR MORE INFORMATION MIO:  
GENERAL COUNSELLING

# New Initiatives

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## SOAR SUCCESS THROUGH OPPORTUNITIES AND REPRESENTATION



### MEET OUR INDIGENOUS MENTORS

#### TINA VALERIE BROWN

*"I joined this mentoring program to make lasting connections and learn new ideas and perspectives. Joining this program allows me to open new doors for not just myself but for others as well."*



#### THOMASINA PHILLIPS

*"I look forward to working in a mentorship capacity with students to support them through their academic career, as well as support their other interests."*

#### TOM DEARHOUSE

*"I bring traditional knowledge and practices to both work and personal life, having soaked up stories and teachings through oral tradition."*



#### JULIE KATSUAK LUSSIER

*"I hope to become a mentor I would have wanted to have when I was studying at John Abbott."*



# Questions/comments

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Thank you!