



Feather Carriers: Leadership for Life Promotion

Feather Carriers Overview:

The inaugural Feather Carriers: Leadership for Life Promotion initiative encompassed a community mobilization strategy and collaborative life promotion training approach. The initiative was founded in the North Simcoe and Muskoka regions in 2015, by Dr. Ed Connors, John Rice and Dr. Debby Wilson Danard. The vision for this initiative came out of a relationship to the land, and requests from Indigenous communities in this region, who were looking for additional supports and resources related to suicide prevention. As a result, the year-long Feather Carriers: Leadership for Life Promotion training was developed by our Founders, with support from local Indigenous communities and organizations, such as the Bamaadisiwin Mental Health and Addictions Planning Circle, Barrie Area Native Advisory Circle, Enaahtig Outreach Mental Health Team, and Canadian Mental Health Association.

The year-long life promotion training aspect of the initiative is an approach that speaks to the heart and minds of people working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) individuals and families who are at risk of premature death, as well as supporting loss survivors. Gathered from all directions, Feather Carriers brings the knowledge and experience of the whole community into practice. It builds on the values and belief that in this present time, life is worth living. As such, the training supports the development of community leaders through Indigenous knowledge and cultural understandings of life promotion, so they can continue to promote life and prevent premature death (i.e. suicide) in our communities.

During the development of Feather Carriers, the Founders discussed the feedback they had received from the local Indigenous communities over the past 30 years. Based on the feedback, there was a sense from Indigenous communities, that the mainstream suicide prevention trainings were missing elements. The communities felt the mainstream training did not 1) address suicide from cultural perspectives, 2) discuss the complex history of intergenerational trauma Indigenous peoples experience, and 3) provide sufficient follow up and support to training participants. This led to the creation of the year-long Feather Carriers training, which is organic, flexible, and wholistic in nature. The training aims to engage participants in the process of a paradigm shift from suicide prevention to life promotion, and through this process supports individual and group reflection and growth as part of the journey towards *mino bimaadisiwin* (living a good life).

Training Focus:

The Feather Carriers: Leadership for Life Promotion training is a year-long process held over the course of five (5) days. The day-long sessions are held on a seasonal basis, with Day 1 and Day 2 occurring consecutively, so that participants have a solid foundation in the concepts and cultural understandings of life promotion. Through the training process we look at:

- 1) A *life promotion* paradigm from Indigenous perspectives
- 2) The impacts of colonization, racism, and intergenerational trauma that have led to unnatural premature deaths in Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) communities
- 3) Our understanding of identity through contemplating the four essential questions
- 4) Our understanding of Indigenous wellness through the lens of the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework
- 5) The power of storytelling through the Miikaans teaching and understanding our bridging stories



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In addition to the sharing of cultural knowledge and self-reflection, the training also includes a focus on practical application. As part of the training process, and larger commitment to life promotion, the training participants are expected to be implementing the skills and knowledge they acquire through the training, into their own work or personal practices. This practical application is demonstrated through the presentation of a life promotion “project”.

The projects are not expected to be large in scale, but rather are meant to facilitate the continued shift towards the adoption of life promotion into our lives and work within our communities. The training facilitators will share examples of past projects with the participants, and collectively as a group, the participants then offer support, guidance, and feedback to each other. Some examples of past projects have included the development of cultural activities for youth to continue to learn about their identity as Indigenous peoples, the creation of a garden to grow and share healthy food, the creation of a song that embodies the spirit of life promotion, and engaging young people through sports etc.

Upon completing the training process and demonstrating a continued commitment to promoting life, the graduates of the Feather Carriers training will have the opportunity to pick up an eagle feather, if they feel they are ready to carry this responsibility. This honour is meant to recognize the participants’ efforts in promoting individual and community well-being, as well as all life within creation. The eagle feather will also be a way to identify the graduates as Life Promoters within their communities, as well as continue to support them in their life promotion work.

Training Structure:

Below you will find an example of the year-long training process with a Spring start:

Day	Season	Focus
Day 1 & Day 2 (consecutively)	Spring	Introduction of concepts and relationship building
Day 3	Summer	Application of concepts and project development
Day 4	Fall	Application of concepts and project development
Day 5	Winter	Graduation ceremony and presentation of projects

Fee for Service Structure:

We currently receive funding to deliver training at no cost within the North Simcoe and Muskoka region (Barrie, Midland, Orillia etc.). Outside of the regional trainings, we are able to provide the Feather Carriers: Leadership for Life Promotion year-long adult training on a fee for service basis. The following table outlines what is included in the base fee, as well as the additional costs associated with delivering the training.

Base Fee	Inclusion
\$20,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of 5 full days of training (total of 40 hours) • Facilitator fees for three training facilitators • Training materials for 20 participants

Expenses Not Included in Base Fee

- Ground travel for facilitators @ .45/km
- Space booking (large group space and 1-2 smaller breakout rooms for small groups)
- Coffee, lunch & snacks for participants
- Air travel for facilitators (if required)
- Accommodations for facilitators (if required)