

# An Indigenous Perspective to Supporting Children & Families with Developmental Disabilities

2022

By Rona Sterling-Collins, MSW

## Presentation Outline

Welcome everyone!

Rona Sterling-Collins, MSW

- Terms: Indigenous, Aboriginal and First Nation
- \* Special Needs, Developmental Disabilities

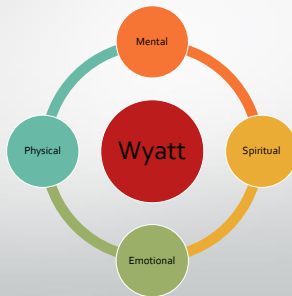
### Presentation:

- Part 1 – Our Journey with Wyatt
  - Strategies
- Questions/Answers
- Part 2 – Research & Recommendations
  - Supporting Indigenous Children & Families
- Questions/answers

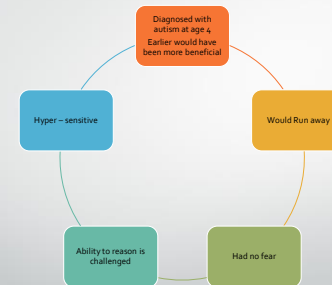
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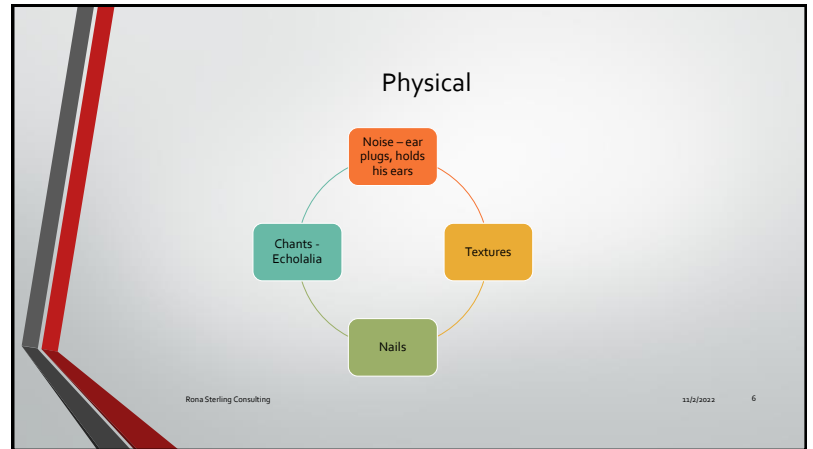
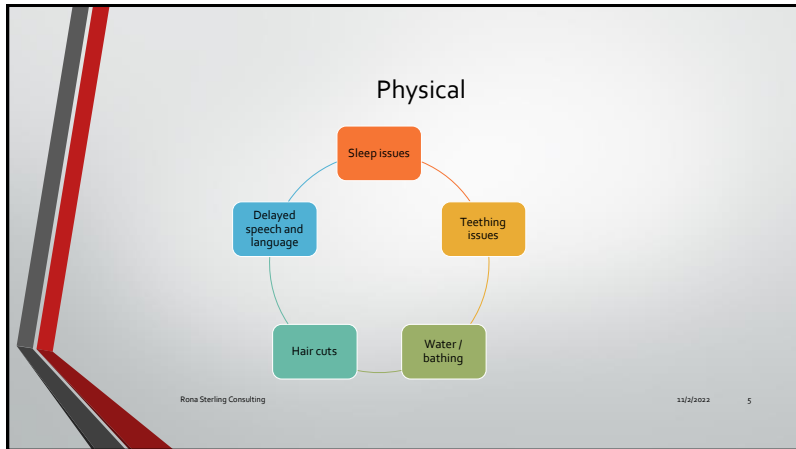
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# WHOLISTIC FRAMEWORK

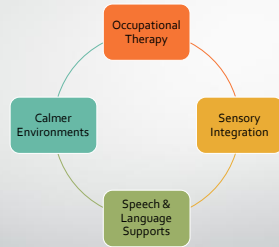


# Physical

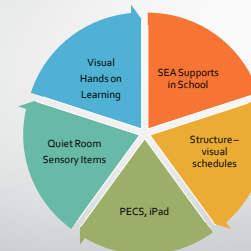


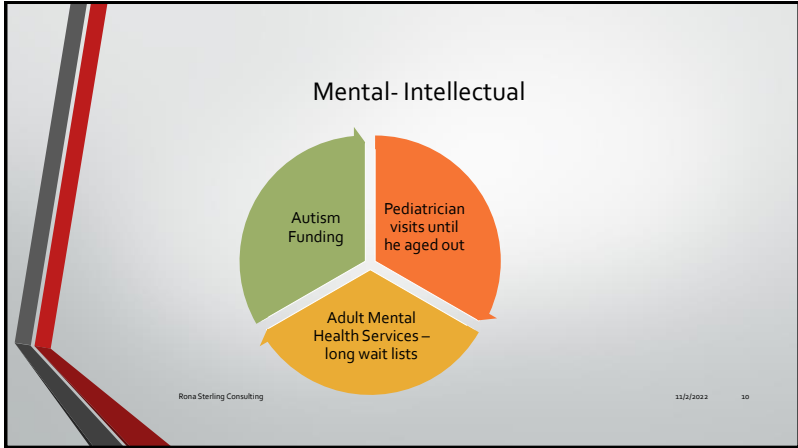
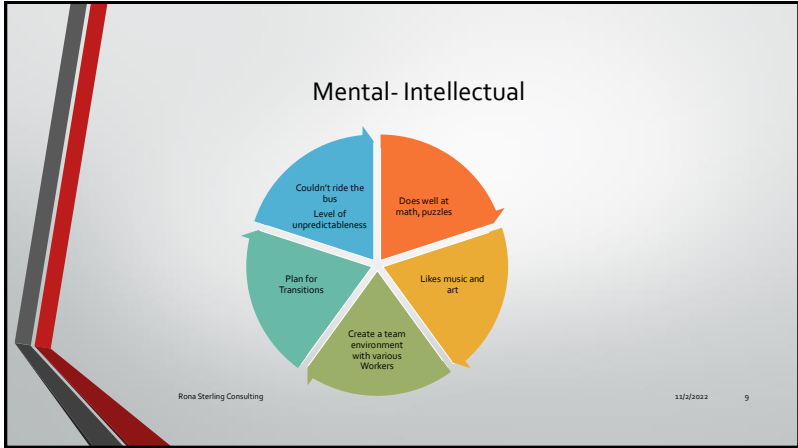


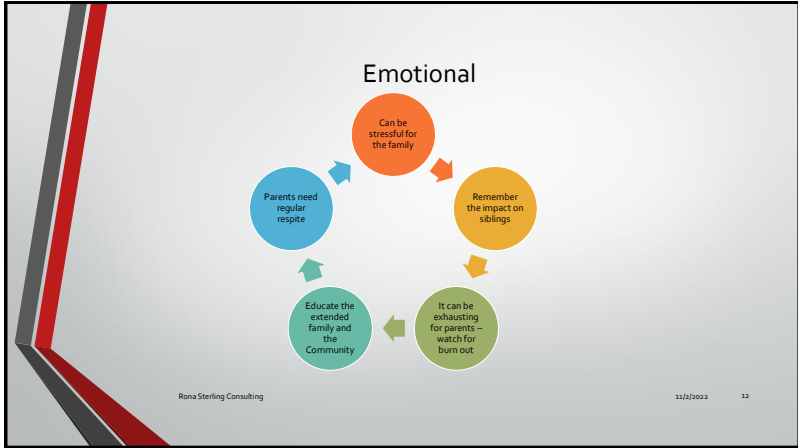
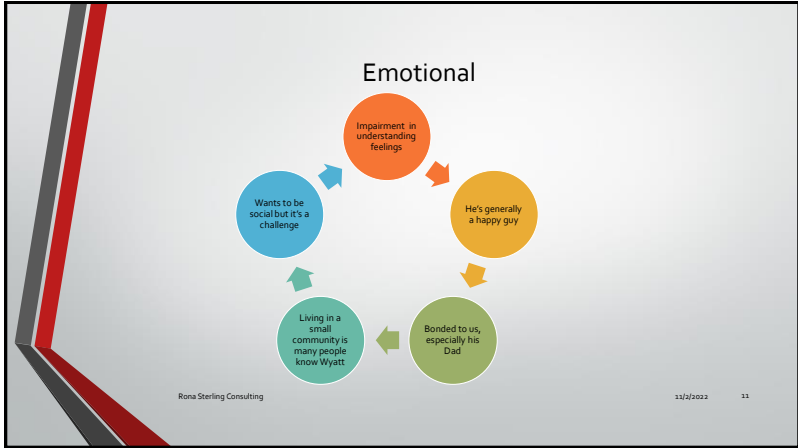
### Physical Aspects..... What Helped

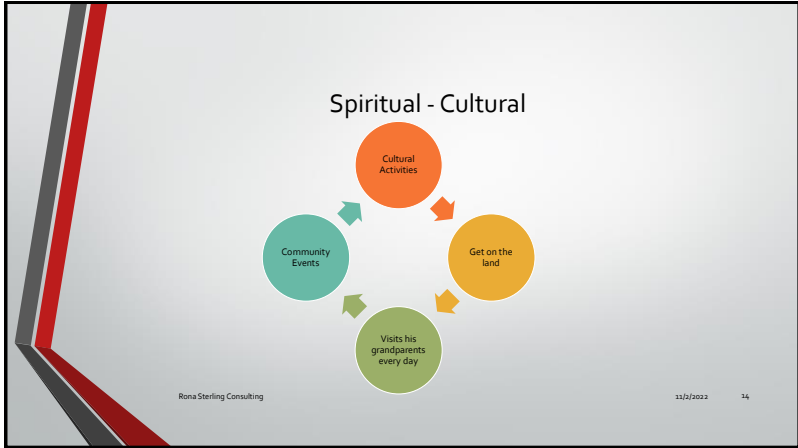


### Mental - Educational









### Current Issues and Challenges:

- Wyatt continues to struggle with the challenges of autism;
- He goes through 'fixations'.
- His sensory system continues to get overloaded.
- Medication and finding the right medication/dosage.
- Finding services in a rural community.
- Employment opportunities is a challenge.
- Socialization challenges.
- Long term planning.

### Current Issues and Challenges:

- Structure, routines, visual schedules, calendars – ongoing need
- Melt-downs – know the signs and offset it
- Triggers – sensory related – crying babies, too much noise, hungry, tired, wisdom teeth
- He can't tell us



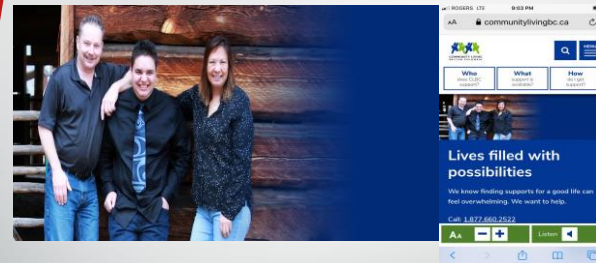
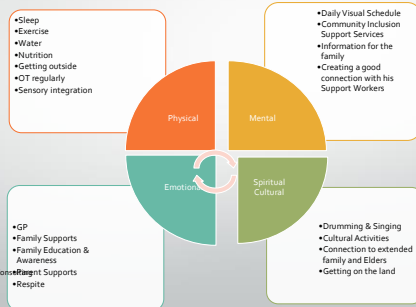
## Current Goals – Adult Services



## His Gift

- Despite the challenges that Wyatt faces on a daily basis, he is generally a happy guy.
- He continues to show gains and improvements.
- Since 2017 his art work has evolved with the help of an Art Teacher.
- He's held 3 of his own art shows, and participated in another 2 community art shows.
- Wyatt created a successful tribute called the Red Dress Series in memory of MMIWG.
- His most recent paintings are a tribute to the Kamloops Indian Residential School – 215 unmarked graves.

## Self Regulation & Supports





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## Art Show 2018

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## Part 1 - Q/A's

- Questions/Comments – From Part 1

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## Community Consultations & Gathering Data

- 1) Comprehensive Needs Assessment in the Nlaka'pamux Nation on Special Needs (2007).
- 2) Ongoing service delivery in the Nation by Nzen'man' Child & Family Development Centre.
- 3) Collaborative Research Project with Simon Fraser University in 2018/19 (Michael Smith Foundation and SSHRC)

## Challenges for Indigenous Communities

### Findings:

- The first thing to keep in mind is the historical trauma that First Nations people, families and communities have gone through with colonization and residential schools.
- Our communities are still healing and recovering from these impacts.
- Inter-generational trauma is a real issue in our communities.

## Challenges for Indigenous Communities

- Little or no services for disabilities;
- Lack of information and awareness of what is available for disabilities and how to access it;
- Restricted eligibility criteria for services;
- Lack of transportation for many families;
- Family lifestyles can sometimes be an issue;

## Challenges for Indigenous Communities:

- Little or no access to specialists and therapists;
- Lack of supports for families, extended family, and service providers (stress and burn out);
- Lack of respite available;
- Many school-age children not receiving services;
- Some communities have limited access to internet and telephones;

### Challenges for Indigenous Communities:

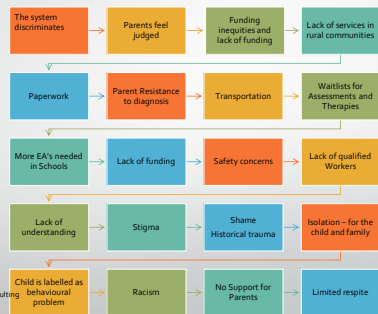
- Parents are uncertain about accessing services, or are intimidated by the paperwork and the assessment process;
- Support and inclusion of siblings and extended family is needed;
- There is a need for outreach programming: bring the service to the child and family;
- Services are often not culturally-relevant or inclusive of culture and language;

### Challenges for Indigenous Communities:

- Funding needs to be sustainable;
- There needs to be better coordination of services;
- Training for Indigenous Workers is needed;
- Many children do not have assessments and cannot receive services – need flexible policies so services can be offered sooner.

Source: Community Needs Assessment – Nzeirman Child & Family Development Centre Society and Sterling Consulting (2007)

## Barriers & Inequalities



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## Supporting Indigenous Children & Families

1. Support and encourage parents to get a diagnosis to access services and resources.

- there are historical issues (in general) around Indigenous kids being labelled and put into segregated classrooms
- there is historic mistrust by many families
- Families need to know there is a benefit to getting an assessment AND that they are in control of who they want to share their information with
- Families need to know how to go about getting a diagnosis

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## Recommendations



2. Act as a sounding board for parents. Attend appointments with them. Recognize the stress that parents are under.
3. Support the extended family. Arrange for a family circle and other support systems the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others may require. Bring in an Elder or Cultural Advisor to support the family.

## Recommendations



4. Assist the family in accessing services and resources.
5. Assist the family in developing a wholistic plan for the child and family: consider the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects and needs.
6. Support the family in celebrating the progress of their child.



## Recommendations



7. Assist the family in accessing financial resources for services.
8. Assist the family in maintaining a record.
9. Remember there is stress on siblings.
10. Assist the parents to seek respite.
11. Gather information for the family.
12. Arrange for transportation for the family.

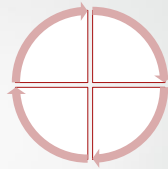
## Recommendations



13. Arrange networking meetings among service providers to 'wrap' services around the entire family, not just the child.
14. Link the family: parent groups, on-line services, resources, books, lending library, etc.
15. Support the home environment: the home may need to be altered or structured, depending on the needs of the child.

## Recommendations

16. Assist the family in developing self care plans.
17. Encourage parents to utilize cultural and traditional systems and incorporate culturally relevant programming.



## Recommendations

18. Build community capacity:
  - General education and awareness workshops and information
  - Training
  - Mentoring Staff
  - Funding / resources for more services
  - Building relationships with service providers and community leaders
19. Educate yourself about colonization, reconciliation and cultural safety. This awareness will better equip you to support Indigenous families.

Reference: Community Needs Assessment – Nbeem'nan Child & Family Development Centre Society and Sterling Consulting (2009)  
A Holistic Approach to Supporting Children with Special Needs by R. Sterling - Collins in Wicthawin: Indigenous Social Work in Canada (2009)

## Community Supports



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## Hopes & Dreams

Child

Supports regardless of where they live  
Holistic Services that are individualized  
Acceptance  
Social supports  
Happy, Healthy, Safe  
Stress Management for Caregivers  
Family Support as a Whole  
Good quality of life  
Opportunities  
Independence  
Inclusion  
No financial issues - needs are met  
Trained caregivers in the community  
Understanding - by Service Providers and Community  
Friendships and personal relationships  
Employment and recreation  
Pursuits of College, University, Trades  
A voice in their care plan  
More awareness, education  
To find their strengths and talents  
For things to get easier

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## Questions - Comments



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## Kwukwscemxw - Thank you!

Acknowledgements: Nzen'man' Child & Family Development  
Centre Society  
and Simon Fraser University  
Research Project

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Website images: Bing On-line  
Photos: Nzen'man' Child & Family Development Centre  
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