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First and foremost, I **witnessed respect, kindness, joy and the genuine desire to learn** with and from one another and to uplift children.

Tim Fox talked about something that always amazes me: the **survivors are** the people who should be the most jaded and angry, yet they are always the **most generous** because they have **hope for change** and for the future. They believe in us.

Michael Redhead Champagne talked about **making family**, and the environment to those relationships has to be one where children feel safe and cared for.

I witnessed **3 beautiful families** who shared their journeys of **challenge, joy and most of all love**.

The Heavy Shield Family inspired us through their shared gift of **artistic expression** and love of learning.

I witnessed the beyond resilient Lightning family who leave me in awe at how they continue to give so selflessly to their community through **sport and recreation**, beyond all odds, and as Angie always says “**just keep handing out the confidence**” which is something that some of us got the pleasure of hearing her delve more deeply in to in her second session.

And then there’s the Morin family, with the long legacy of strong yet humble leadership from the **powerhouse Grandmother** Thelma Chalifoux to the beautiful spirit that is Sharon Morin and on to the **brilliant next-gen leader** Joshua Morin who blows me away all that time as he embraces the opportunity and challenge of teaching the Michif language to people older than himself.

What is family other than **relationship and connection**?

Relationship, relationship, relationship... I think that is something that we all witnessed here. And we’ve heard over and over that it’s the **key to learning**.

Education isn't just about imposing government mandated curriculum into the heads of our children... that's called assimilation I think, and it breaks relationship. Which has been a government agenda in this country before and we all know the tragic outcomes of that agenda.

Gail Stromquist and Brian Coleman of the BCTF shared some of the **beautiful medicine** that they use in their territory to **educate the hearts and minds of teachers** in a way that **equips them to teach children about the historical and current atrocities** of things like MMIWG and the recovery of unmarked graves at the sites of former residential schools where not only relationships were intentionally broken but the lives of children and family were taken.

So, we need to **rebuild** that. We need to rebuild those relationships. And I witnessed how **building and mending relationships is medicine**. Remember, Michael started us out on the first morning reminding us that we are the medicine and that we have the medicine. There has been so much medicine shared with us.

Some of the **medicine that** we use is educating minds and hearts... helping to equip teachers to be able to educate children in a different way... in a way that **connects their heart and their mind and their spirit**. That coming together helps to **heal the broken relationships** and the fractures in our society and in our schools and in our systems, and in our families, through education because education can be what we choose education to be.

We were gifted with more medicine every time someone spoke over this last couple of days. We've heard an important answer over and over again to the question, 'How do we mend the broken relationship?' ...**we listen**.

We listen. We don't interrupt. That doesn't mean we don't have something to offer back. It reminds me of a practice that my husband brings to our home. When there is something, he needs me to hear, he makes an offering and tells me 'I just need you to hear me. I don't need you to answer me today. I don't need you to debate today. I just need you to listen. When we **take that time, we can reflect and come back** to what we heard. That's one of the really important teachings that I was reminded of this last couple of days as I witnessed our time together.

Northland School Division and Telus world of science are an incredible example of what happens when **Science people listen to and value Indigenous science**. Witnessing that relationship was one of my many exciting moments because focused on science. I have some issues around the language that we use that we talk about science in education. We talk about *Indigenous knowledge and beliefs* and then science... as though western science is valid, and Indigenous knowledge and beliefs are just nice stories.

There's Indigenous science, and there's Western science.

There are Indigenous beliefs and there are western beliefs. And so, it was exciting for me to see it all come together in a way that prioritized Indigenous science because the people at the Telus Science Center were listening and in doing that, they **provide a space where many people**, students, families, communities can come and **learn about Indigenous science** in a public place of learning because of what they learned as they listened. I found that to be a very exciting relationship and one that I may not have expected to see here.

I witnessed so much hope seeing educators, community members, Knowledge Carriers, youth, parents, school and system leaders and student support workers all **coming together in such an open and good way**. But I also witnessed some relationships that I'm guessing we didn't expect. And one of them was with the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta and her husband who came to build relationship with us two evenings in a row... Not needing to be heard. **No expectation for acknowledgement. They just wanted to be here to learn with and from Indigenous peoples and to build relationships**. Her Honour is really deeply committed to reconciliation. But the fact that they just wanted to come and be in community with us to connect with us isn't always what people expect.

Or the **kindness of time, knowledge and spirit** as Shelley Kirkvold guided us in building the Legacy of Hope Foundation exhibits assisted by one of our keynote speakers, JR LaRose... who's height was very helpful BTW ☺ That's community. It was amazing how well things came together when we could listen to Shelley and learn from her experience.

School isn't the only place of learning; we know that and have heard it loud and clear. But school is where we all work most of the time so we need to make the changes in our schools, and we got some great advice on how we might do that.

Seneca Crowe and Elder Wilson Bearhead reminded us that **Indigenous people will come to schools when they see themselves reflected** in the schools, **when they see Indigenous staff there and their knowledge respected as valid knowledge**.

Which Annalee Nutter and Elder Lorraine Albert reminded us, **will not magically drop from the sky** into your schools, rather we need to **learn the various protocols of nations, communities and families in the territory where you live... go out, offer those protocols, build trust and invite people in a good way**.

Bobbie Jo, Manny and Chris from Lois Riel School Division in Winnipeg shared a great example of how to do that in **a way that engages students** in the Manitouabee Aki Minecraft game where students virtually travel to the places of their people in a virtual world, and even see drone footage of real life sacred places like petroglyphs.

Michael Redhead Champagne reminded us that **when we treat people like they are relatives** then they become our family. Lorraine Albert shared a story of just that happening.

Lorraine Albert talked about just such experience when she was a young Dene woman, taken in by a loving Blackfoot mother of 10, and treated as family. Lorraine credits that Blackfoot mother for teaching her what is it to be a woman.

So many beautiful and hopeful **stories of relationship- to one another, to the land and to all our relations**. Stories from the Elders, Nakota stories from Wilson and Howard, Blackfoot stories from Mike, Joe and others, Dene stories... all of these stories are really the true history and the original knowledge of these lands that we all need to help us live here in a good way. These are all truths that we need learn and that we've had the opportunity to embrace here.

We were reminded by the actions of filmmaker Courtney Montour that the stories of the people are never really lost. Even when **the story of Mary Two Axe Earley** and the courageous women warriors **was told 40 years after their victory with Bill C-32** reinstating the treaty status of First Nations women and their children. Courtney lifted up the voices of the warrior women upon whose shoulders she stands by way of this beautiful NFB film.

And NFB's work of truth seeking, reconciliation and commitment to authentic Indigenous voice doesn't stop there. Keep an eye out for the **Indigenous Voices** program **with 13 learning pathways**. As one educator said to me as I slipped into the room, "Am I imagining things... shouldn't all of THAT be integrated throughout our curriculum?"

And don't forget the amazing **mini-lesson plans**, available at no cost on the NFB website, that our very own Crystal Clarke created with NFB based on **films by Indigenous filmmakers**.

The generosity of knowledge, spirit and resources that I witnessed over the course of the Gathering is unbelievable. Billie-Jo Grant and Lisa Cruickshank from **Rupertsland Centre for Learning** shared so many **incredible Métis online learning resources**, their Moodle, their beautiful videos, and all that even after the government of Alberta took away their funding. Amazing! Imagine what they could do if the Ministry of Education recognized that they have to show up with more than their hearts!!!

It was such a gift to enter the room where **Canadian Geographic education** was sharing the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada giant floor map just in time to have **Elder Mike Bruisehead** give **powerful guidance around the Blackfoot names of places and the stories behind those names**. An even greater gift was when he declared his commitment right in that moment to work with us at Canadian Geographic to take the learning to the next level of authentic learning. Indigenous languages are shaped by the land.

And wasn't it a **gift to be surrounded by the languages** of all the original peoples of these lands? It's soothing, it's inviting, and it calls us to action for our children.

Some of the learnings came in the most unexpected places. In the ATA session on **Indigenous Matriarchy**, we got a lesson on pronouns and the lack of gender in personal pronouns as we are all beings. That, along with the teachings of the power of women was such a gift in this session.

Obviously, it's not just in Indigenous communities that the women hold the community together, as there were consistently **4 times as many women** in pipe ceremonies, which is the best place to feel the spirit of language. I honour the women and express my gratitude for the gift of your love and time. But **I am calling the men to action... walk with us** in all of these areas and I look forward to seeing more of you in pipe ceremonies next year ☺

I really appreciated Noreen Demeria's reminder to us that Indigenous languages are so important, but we also have to pay close attention to the way that we use the English language. In her excellent presentation on **STEM Education**, she called our attention to the fact that STEM doesn't mean anything in community and to knowledge keepers. **It is actually relationship to the land.**

Hayley Christen shared the truth of her experience in Red Deer Public Schools: recognizing that they have done great work in Indigenous learning but have not done exceptional work in the area of Indigenous languages. She addressed the common issue in our schools and divisions where we spend so much time talking about barriers that we never get to the actual work and she raised the question, "**Are these really barriers or do have we let them become excuses?**"

And of course, JR LaRose reminded us that we **can't let our barriers become excuses** that keep us from moving towards our goals. He also implored us to **never forget the power** that we hold **to make a difference in a young person's life.**

I loved the stories from the **youth- past and present- of challenges, resilience, triumph, hope** and the **desire to be heard and be that change.** Wasn't it wonderful to follow that thread through so many personal stories shared by so many presenters- Crystal, J.R., Michael... started from a place of challenge, moved through journeys of resilience supported by one or more amazing mentors/ supporters- often a teachers- to inspiration and triumph today. **Having youth voices with us in our Gathering is such a gift.**

Donita Large and her **students from Braided Journey's** demonstrated exactly what it looks like when we **embrace those opportunities to uplift youth...** and I have to say that **the number of you who showed up to hear their voices warmed my heart.**

In that same spirit... Spirit North to be exact... Laura Filipow and Laurie Thompson shared the power of their program at Kikino School where **students expressed** over and over how the **feelings of absolute joy that they derived from their skiing experience carried them through the days in school**, improved their school performance and how some students even got their families involved in the sport.

Chief Tony Alexis **warned us that as leaders** we must be diligently aware that the ever-present human condition that is **susceptible to greed and arrogance so that we never give in to those temptations**. He reminded us that it is not **just about whether the cup is half full or half empty**, but to take note of **what is in the cup**. He reminded us that as leaders **our job** is to empty those cups that are full of negative attitudes and energy and **to fill them with good medicine**.

So many of our presenters reminded us to **think about the questions we ask**, and to never stop asking questions of ourselves and those we need to learn from:

Michelle Ranger and Lori Prichard reminded us to **ask ourselves WHY we want to do the things we decide** we need to do in the name of reconciliation.

So much learning, in so many ways in such a short time together.

Some overwhelmingly **recurring threads** of the presentations were:

- **Impact and power of educators** and messages to educators:
 - o JR: you hold the **power to uplift students** rather than letting them quit or quitting on them
 - o Michael- **you might be that safe space**
 - o Crystal- **every word you say to your students counts**. You have the power to **influence where and how they see themselves in school**.

- **Importance and validity of Indigenous knowledge** in very different ways:
 - o Crystal – you know what’s in books and **we know the land** (texture of the air-SCIENCE) these “knowings” are both **valid knowledge**
 - o Seneca talked about the importance of Indigenous knowledge and **honouring the gifts and spirit of the child over a piece of paper**. She noted that we hold so much value for the paper and we need to **stop talking about Indigenous knowledge as less valid and important**. Both are key to our students.
 - o Elder Joe Eagle Tailfeathers- said it this morning. **We don’t write our knowledge** down but **just because it’s not on paper doesn’t mean it’s not true**- he doesn’t trust paper. I love that reminder.

- **It takes all of us** and we are seeing more and more coming together for our children and communities. What a message of hope and celebration when Elder Joe Eagle Tailfeathers stated, **“If I could live at any time in history I want to live now because we are coming together.”** One of our gold sponsors, Tanya shared with us this morning how as a young woman she didn’t want to talk to white people and now she recognizes that all kids need Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors. **We are making changes in the right direction.**
- **Listen... listen, listen-** Yvonne Poitras-Pratt and Patricia Danyluk talk about it in their session, and more importantly they live it and model it with dignity and grace every single day, no matter who is watching or not watching.
- **Truth must be told before reconciliation** can happen- **seek truth, speak truth, pursue reconciliation....** Audrey Poitra-Pratt reminded us that **reconciliation is not a destination it’s a practice.**

So, what are **your take aways?**

What can you do now, tomorrow, next week, next month on this journey?

What are **your calls to action for yourself** and your team?

Some that I can share with you that **I’m taking away:**

**show up,
be present,
listen,
find your place,
do your part.**

I know that **we are all at different places** in this journey together, but the **important thing is to keep moving.**

Shelby Laframboise from McEwan University noted that we have **come such a long way** from freezing outdoors to smudge – then last week’s smudge in her office with the VP before a meeting. **BUT** she also noted that people want to see more, and **we need to do more,** than Orange Shirt Day.

You **know your division,** you **know your own gifts,** you have the ability to **reach out, connect** and **make relations...** you’ve watched it and **experienced it here** over the past 3 days.

What we saw with New Blood in the beginning is what we need to take away with us in the end.

Relationship really is the root of all things.

We saw what happens **when non-Indigenous educators find the courage to reach out to knowledge keepers ... and when knowledge keepers offer kindness and patience, knowledge and age-old wisdom.** When we have the moral courage to do what is right, respectful and honouring through relationship... not what is mandated.

Then maybe we raise a new generation of leaders and decision makers who will mandate what is right and respectful and honouring... *if we let it happen.*