

SPIRIT

Supporting Play and Intergenerational
Relationships with Indigenous Traditions



A strategic plan for our collective movement

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SPIRIT is creating a shared future that honors Indigenous children, families, and communities across Aotearoa (New Zealand), Australia, Canada and the United States. Like threads held steady on a loom, each person and activity of SPIRIT adds to a larger pattern of care, healing, and strength. We respect the joy of play, the love of family, the importance of community care and the wisdom passed on from our ancestors. We believe every child should grow up feeling safe and deeply loved—wrapped in the strength of their people. This movement is not just a program—it is a woven legacy, made with clear intention and a belief that each aspect of our work is stronger together.

Our strategic plan is not just a document—it is a place of memory, of dreaming and momentum. It is alive, filled with color, story, and soul. It will guide us to advocate globally, teach widely, and remember deeply.

Our Community



SPIRIT Vision

Indigenous play is medicine – healing and strengthening body, mind, spirit, family, community and nature. Play fosters connection, identity, and balance. Play nurtures the present and prepares us for the future, moving across generations to strengthen relationships, build resilience, and shape systems that protect and uplift Indigenous children, families and communities.

The global SPIRIT initiative strives to reclaim our languages, philosophies, and ways of being to restore intergenerational wellbeing for Indigenous Peoples and our planet. We envision a future in which all children are born into a world that knows and embraces them. A world where they thrive in spaces that honor their joy, their potential, and their brilliance; grounded in identity, language, land and ancestral knowing. A world in which caregivers are supported to nurture their children in safe, beautiful communities. The health of the planet will benefit from the success of this movement.

Play enables us to cultivate homes, communities, and movements that sustain wellbeing, ensuring all children and the caregivers and communities that love them inherit a world of safety and joy. Through play we restore, reclaim, and reweave a world of belonging for our children. We prepare systems to uplift their brilliance.

Play is both learning and healing.

Play is both rhythm and vitality.

Play binds us to what is sacred, to the natural world, and to each other.

Indigenous play is medicine. There can never be enough.

SPIRIT Values

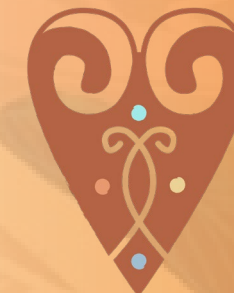
Generational Knowledge and Culture



Place and Land



Connection



Sovereignty and Solidarity



Generational Knowledge and Culture

We believe that knowledge flows across generations. Our cultures are our foundation.

This SPIRIT movement creates space to:

- **Transmit language, culture and traditions**
- **Learn with and from ancestors, elders, and children**
- **Center Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing**

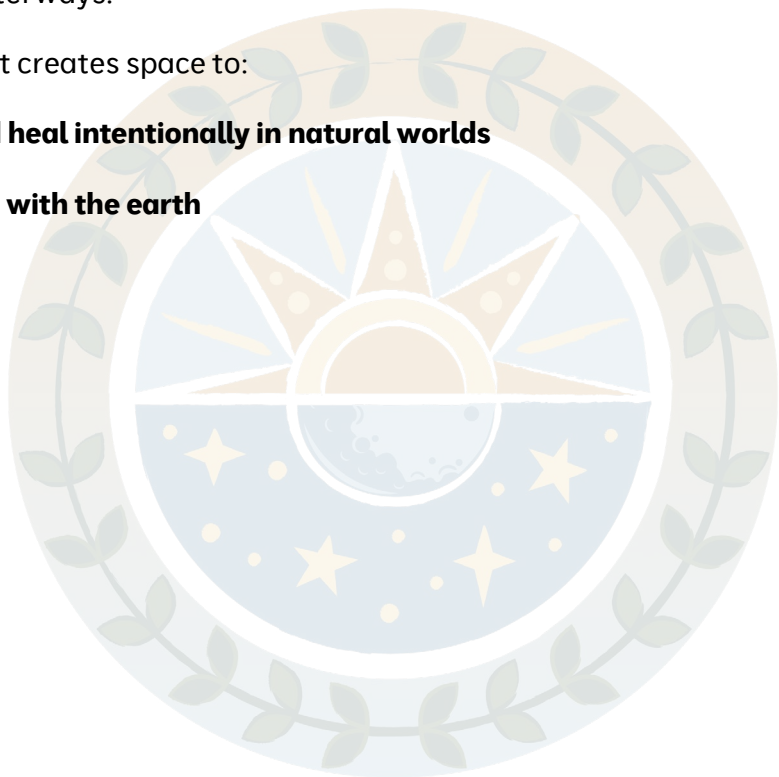


Place and Land

Our natural environment is sacred. We nurture our deep relationships and honor our obligations to lands and waterways.

This SPIRIT movement creates space to:

- **Play, learn and heal intentionally in natural worlds**
- **Live in balance with the earth**

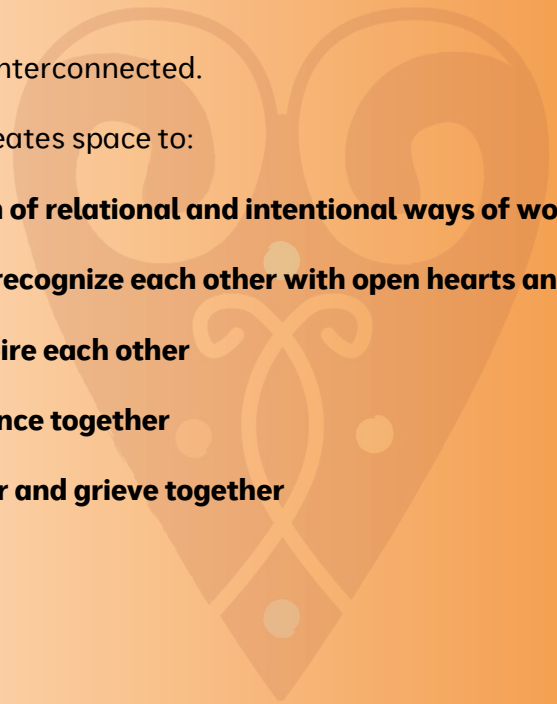


Connection

We believe all things are interconnected.

This SPIRIT movement creates space to:

- **Honor the strength of relational and intentional ways of working**
- **Speak, listen, and recognize each other with open hearts and minds**
- **Celebrate and inspire each other**
- **Sing, laugh and dance together**
- **Care for each other and grieve together**

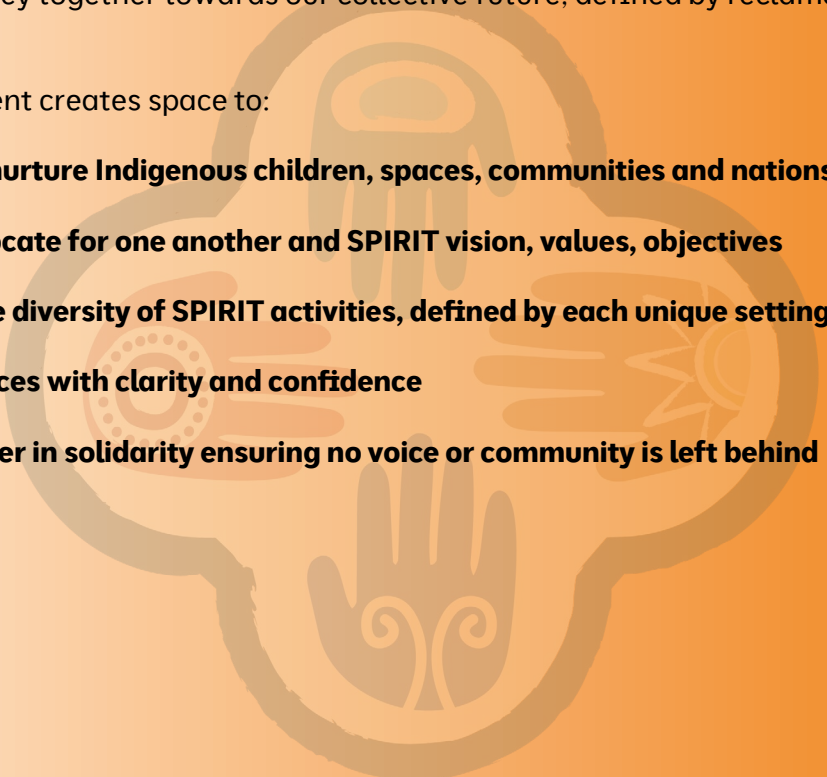


Sovereignty and Solidarity

We have autonomy over our future. We share histories of colonization and continued attempts of erasure and journey together towards our collective future, defined by reclamation and resurgence.

This SPIRIT movement creates space to:

- **Protect and nurture Indigenous children, spaces, communities and nations**
- **Actively advocate for one another and SPIRIT vision, values, objectives**
- **Celebrate the diversity of SPIRIT activities, defined by each unique setting and context**
- **Exercise choices with clarity and confidence**
- **Stand together in solidarity ensuring no voice or community is left behind**



SPIRIT Objectives

Work we do to grow the collective:

- **Build a community of Indigenous practitioners**
- **Family Spirit curriculum, implementation training and technical assistance**
- **Evaluation training and technical assistance**
- **Collaborative storytelling**
- **Produce good research**

Work we do with families and communities:

- **Home visiting and family-based services**
- **Group education services**
- **Build community-designed play spaces**
- **Distribute PLAYkits**
- **Distribute storybooks written by the SPIRIT collective**

Reach Goals

- **20,000 Children**
- **12,000 Caregivers**
- **900 Professionals**
- **250 Tribal, Regional, State, National Policy Makers**

These objectives are not just milestones; they are commitments to how we will move together as a living, breathing movement. They draw from the wisdom of ancestors, the innovation of communities, and the brilliance of children. They are designed to honor both local autonomy and collective strength, ensuring each project thrives in its own context while contributing to something greater.



Honor Play as a Sacred and Inherent Right

Recognize play as medicine, a sacred right, a source of healing and strength, and a shared responsibility. Support families and communities to create environments where children are safe, joyful, and thriving as their true selves.

Restore and Amplify Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Reclaim and strengthen intergenerational knowledge through language, land-based practice, storytelling, and spiritual connection. Protect cultural sovereignty and celebrate diverse ways Indigenous communities nurture identity and wellbeing.

Articulate and Illustrate the Power of Each Project and the Collective

Capture and communicate the unique change led by each local initiative while showing how, together, they form a movement greater than the sum of its parts. Ensure each organization can use the collective story and evidence to seek its own investment, while enabling collective investment when appropriate.

Build a Global Indigenous Ecosystem

Strengthen relationships, infrastructure, and shared capability so that all partners move from isolated projects to a living, interconnected network. Support each project to thrive locally while contributing to global innovation, resource-sharing, and relational accountability.



Shape Narrative and Influence Systems

Use storytelling, art, research, and evidence to influence discourse, policy, and long-term investment. Position Indigenous approaches to childhood, wellbeing, and identity as globally relevant and future-building.

Create Conditions for Structural Change and Investment

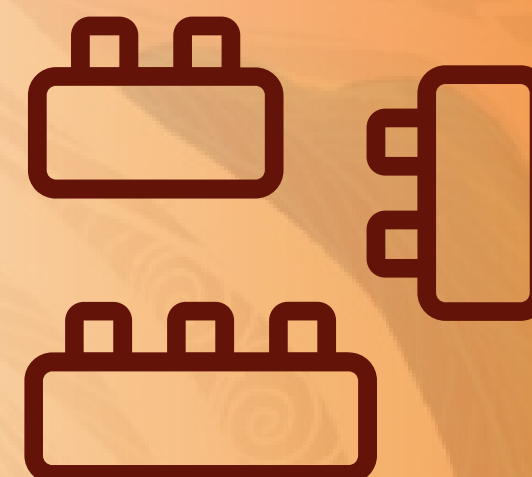
Leverage collective networks to open doors to policy change, partnerships, and sustainable investment. Build models of funding and governance that reflect Indigenous logic and prioritise long-term relational accountability.

Protect and Amplify Indigenous Innovation

Foster spaces for creativity and design grounded in ancestral wisdom while responding to modern challenges. Ensure Indigenous solutions remain relational, regenerative, and protected from extraction.

Measure What Matters Through Indigenous-Led Research and Evaluation

Build a living evidence base grounded in Indigenous values and methods to show how culturally grounded support, including home visiting as a relational foundation, creates the conditions for play, joy, and identity to flourish.



Measuring our SPIRIT Impact

We know change is so much deeper than numbers. We see it in the sparkle of a child's eye, hear it in the rhythm of laughter, and feel it in the strength of relationships. Change is often measured through data, charts, and reports but can also be captured through story, sensed in relationship, and carried in time. Both are valuable and our evaluation plan holds them together - story and statistic, senses and science, memory and measure.



Our Theory of Change

Evaluation Alignment | Tending and Planting for the Future:

Our purpose unfolds and is measured through the natural cycles of growth: from soil nourishment to seed to harvest, from potential to transformation.

Soil Nourishment | The Conditions for Growth:

Trust, safety, connection, and collective capacity.

Seed of Transformation | The Spark of Awakening:

Families are seeds that hold the past and promise of the future.

Growth and Flourishing | The Movement Toward Wholeness:

Families demonstrate strengthened connections to community, culture, land and traditions - wellbeing flourishes.

Harvest and Re-seeding | Tangible Transformation

Change becomes visible, embodied, and strong - creating new seeds that spur inter-generational change.



SPIRIT Navigation

Our movement architecture reflects the interconnected nature of Indigenous knowledge systems, flowing like life-giving waterways that nourish and sustain all they touch. SPIRIT's **Global Advisory Council** serves as the headwaters - the source springs where cultural wisdom originates and flows forth to nourish our collective work. Our **Leadership Group** forms the guiding riverbanks, channeling wisdom and direction while maintaining the integrity of our shared current. Our **Stream Working Groups** focus on Telling our Stories, Measuring our Impact, and Assessing our Currents.

Regular virtual **Navigating Our Waters Together Gatherings** bring the full collective together, including staff from all partner organizations, where our individual streams combine to create powerful currents that strengthen our shared journey forward.

Once a year, we hold our **Great Confluence** - our annual in-person global gathering where all waterways flow together in one place, alongside representatives from across our partner organizations. This time weaves together cultural exchanges, deep sharing of our work across the collective, and renewal of our shared vision. Just as Indigenous peoples have known the life-giving and connecting power of waterways for millennia, our structure honors this wisdom - each stream distinct yet part of a greater watershed, all flowing toward the shared vision of Indigenous children and families thriving in their cultural identity and joy.



Roles and Responsibilities

Partner Organizations

Act as springs and streams feeding into the watershed, delivering their own projects in alignment with the shared vision, values, and objectives while upholding their cultural identity, leadership, and self-determination. Contribute to collective storytelling, evaluation, and knowledge. Embed the project internally so the movement is a living priority.

United States: Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health, Coconino County Health and Human Services Healthy Families Program, Fort Defiance CIH Site (Navajo Nation), Nez Perce Tribe- Nimiipuu Health Clinic, Northern Arapaho Tribe - Wind River Family & Community Healthcare, Onkwehón:we Midwives Collective, Round Valley Indian Health Center, Wabanaki Home Visiting and Wabanaki Families

Canada: First Nations Health Authority, Cowichan Tribes, Lil'wat First Nation, Skowkale First Nations, Splatshin, Tawrang Nisgaa' Old Masset

Australia: The University of Queensland, Batchelor Institute, Pertame Ngketja Untja (Pertame Language Nest), Children's Ground, Child and Family Wellbeing Hub

Aotearoa (New Zealand): Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pōmare, Tu Kotahi/Kōkiri Marae, Toi Matarua, Te Hou Ora Whānau Services

Organizational Leaders

Bridge between local integrity and organizational commitment. Maintain the health of their own streams while contributing to the larger watershed. Represent their organization in decision-making spaces.



Stream Working Groups

Telling Our Stories Stream: Responsible for shaping how we share the heart and essence of our work, including stewarding children's voices and vision, internally across all our partners, externally with our communities and others, and systematically through policy and advocacy. The navigators of our storytelling efforts will direct the overall strategy which will help support smaller currents to tell the SPIRIT story to a range of audiences.

Purpose: Shaping how we share the heart and essence of our work - stewarding children's voices, connecting with communities, and amplifying Indigenous-led solutions around the world.

Core Contributors: 3-5 additional members invited by Navigators based on specific projects and expertise needed.

Measuring Our Impact Stream: The purpose of this work group is to refine evaluation approaches, review data, guide the shaping of findings, and tell the story of our process and impact.

Purpose: Refining evaluation approaches, reviewing data, guiding findings, and telling the story of our process and impact through data.

Core Contributors: 3-5 additional members including country leads and storytelling representation

Assessing the Current Stream: These working groups form when needed for focused time to work on specific projects. Examples may include a stream focused on language reclamation and revitalization, a current focused on developing inspirational materials for our babies, etc.

Purpose: Forming focused response groups when specific needs arise (Language Reclamation, Creating Inspiring Materials, etc.)

Formation: Ad-hoc based on project needs and volunteer interest.

The Stream Working Groups meeting frequency will be dependent on the group workplan and no more than every 2 weeks.

Leadership Group

The Leadership Group will meet every other month and as project needs arise. Guardians of the vision, with representatives from each country. Hold and evolve the vision, values, objectives, and direction. Ensure the project team is supported, focused, and resourced. Consider and support collaborative funding opportunities.

Global Advisory Council

The Global Advisory Council will meet quarterly. Highly experienced, respected carriers of Indigenous knowledge, who add their wisdom, foresight to the movement with linkages to their global networks. They are voice-carriers and champions, providing cultural guidance and deep insight. They use their influence to raise visibility, open doors for investment and transformation, and amplify the narrative of Indigenous-led solutions.

- **United States:** Kim Belone, Wambli Dolezal, Lyle Harvey, Tamara Littlesalt-Butler, Cassie Kitcheyan.
- **Canada:** Ann-Marie Louie, Lois Andrews and Jeena Pasacreata.
- **Australia:** Dr. Pat Anderson, Dr. Odette Best, Dr. Tracey Bunda, Dr. Aileen Moreton-Robinson.
- **Aotearoa:** Te Rika Temara-Benfell, Dr. Guy Penny, Sarah Pihema, Dr. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith.

Navigating our Waters Together - Virtual Gatherings

Bi-annual, virtual, all-hands sessions where:

- The full collective comes together for visioning, tone-setting, strategic direction, relationship building and play
- Stream working groups present progress and seek input
- New initiatives and “Assessing the Current” projects are proposed
- Everyone can express interest in contributing to specific work

The Great Confluence – In-Person Gatherings

Once-yearly, in-person gatherings where:

- All streams align with organizational leaders, community members, and knowledge holders from across partner organizations
- Cultural exchanges deepen relationships and honor diverse Indigenous traditions
- Partners share comprehensive updates on their work and impact across the collective
- Strategic visioning sessions chart our path forward for the coming year
- Celebration and ceremony strengthen our bonds and renew our shared commitment
- New collaborative opportunities and partnerships are explored
- The movement’s growth and transformation is witnessed and celebrated together



Mud Pie Recipe

By Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith

Global Advisory Council Member

(Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou)

Ingredients (and things you need)

3 or 4 double handfuls of good dirt (or more dirt)

An old cup or pot to hold water

Sun, stars and the moon

A piece of wood or an old roasting dish from your mother's kitchen

A small hole in the ground for mixing mud, in the garden or somewhere else where your mother won't ground you for making a hole in her flower garden

A stick, a spoon or a trowel

An old tea towel or rag

Some flower petals, or leaves or stones for decoration

Instructions

*Dig a hole for mixing your mud, with your stick, spoon or trowel
Pat the sides of your hole, so they are smooth or line it with an old tea towel*

*Find some good dirt, in your father's garden. Make sure it is not too hard,
not too stony, not too sandy, not too full of roots and leaves and not the dirt where
your father has just planted Fejoa's-*

*Oh and the hole should be near where you will get the dirt, not far away, or
you will make a mess carrying the dirt*

*With your two hands, take a scoop of dirt and put it in the hole, do it again
until you have the amount just right*

Fill your cup with water and make some mud

*Make sure it is very, very smooth, like a pancake mix. Not too runny, not too
thick*

*Pick out any worms or roots you find and throw it back in the garden. Worms
are good. But not in the mud pies.*

*When it is smooth, scoop out a small handful of mud and shape it into a little
ball, put the little balls on your piece of wood or roasting dish and press them down a
little bit*

*You can decorate them with leaves and other stuff you can find
Don't pull your mother's flowers out though, she might ground you again
Put the wood or the roasting dish with the mud pies, where the sun and the
moon and the stars will shine down and dry them out*

*The next day, you will have mud pies. You can't eat them of course. That's
not their purpose. The purpose is just to make mud pies with your own hands.*



www.globalspiritcollective.org