

The Harm Reduction
International Conference

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Latino Refugee Point of View:

Navigating Shifting Harms in Search of Safety

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Mother Earth Song

Patrick Smith

Manager of Indigenous Wellness
programs

Dr. Peter Centre



Meet Patrick



- **My past:** 25 years working in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside – ground zero for Canada's overdose crisis.
- Worked with Liz and Mark as the organization's first Indigenous manager.
- **My present:** Manager of the Dr. Peter Centre's Indigenous Wellness Program for the past 2.5 years.



What We Do



- A **wholistic approach** to working with people.
- **Licensed healthcare facility** with 38 complex care short and long-term residences.
- **Day Health program** serving more than 500.
 - Supervised injection room.
 - Medication management including OAT and iOAT.
 - 88,000 nutrient-dense meals annually.
 - Counselling, art and music therapy, recreational therapy, and Indigenous Wellness.
- A Canadian leader in harm reduction practices.



The Latino Program

- A shift in clients – from 3 to 90 Latino participants in 2 years seeking asylum, refugee status or applying for permanent residency.
- All have HIV and have limited access to healthcare.
- Unique and different challenges for us:
 - English is a barrier.
 - Unstable housing, culture shock, lack of social support.
 - Poverty creates pathway to undesirable action.





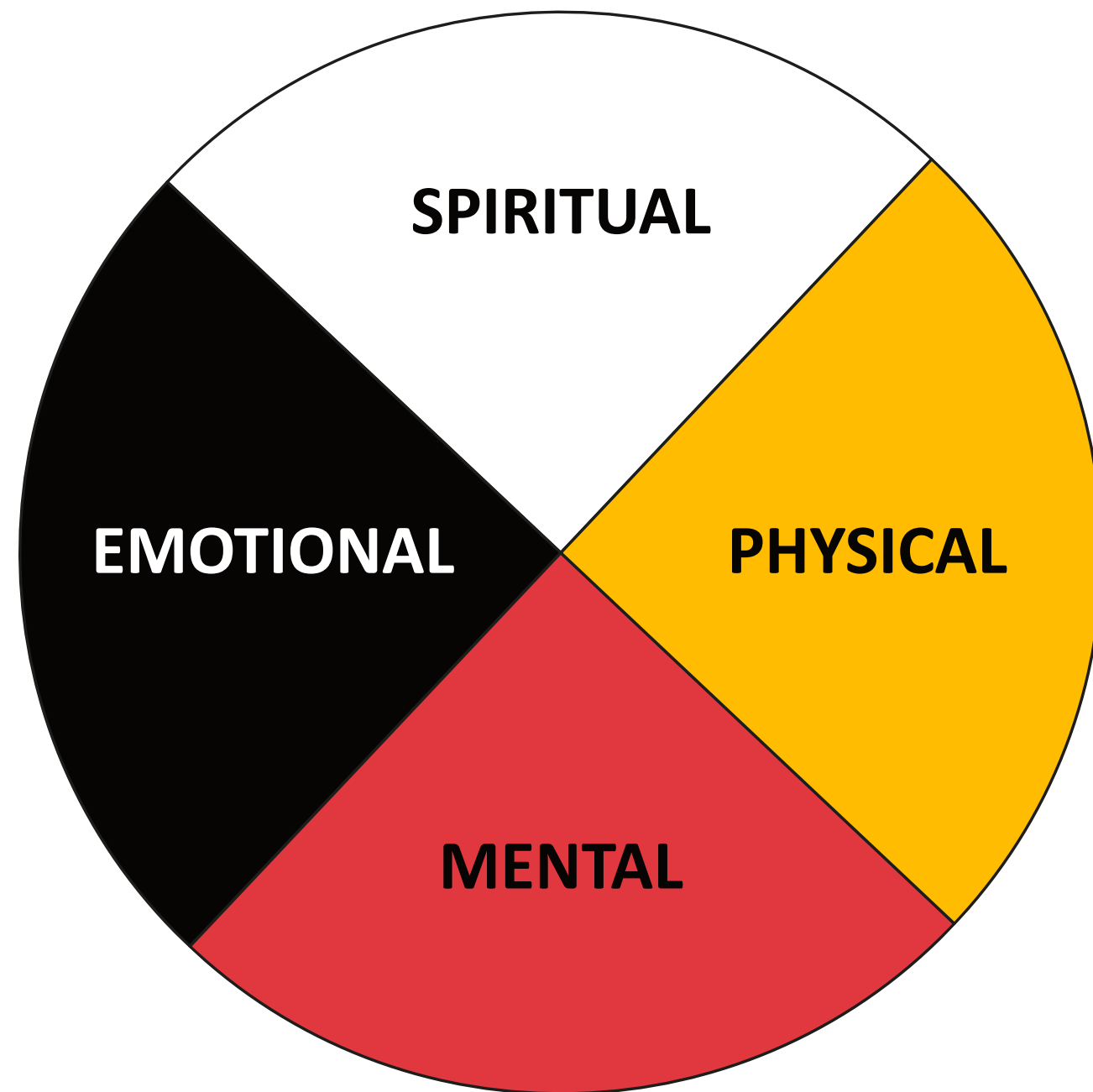
Healing Through Culture

- We are a place where participants can go when the rest of society has turned them away.
- We provide an oasis where they can sort out the chaos in their lives, on their time, and on their terms.
- Common to all who access our facility is the need to feel safe and accepted.
- But we lacked expertise with non-English speaking Latinos.
- A 500-year-old prophecy is the key to cultural connection, community, and safety.





Harm Reduction Through an Indigenous Lens



- Looking at harm reduction for refugees through an Indigenous lens.
- Strengthening belonging, community, and wellbeing through Indigenous practices.
- The Wellness Wheel was developed by Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
- Using Indigenous ways of Knowing and Being to support the refugee experience.



PHYSICAL

Food as Harm Reduction

- Building community around shared meals.
- Create a safe environment
- Honoring the participant: we know your name , we celebrate traditions and birthdays
- Nutritious and high-quality meals



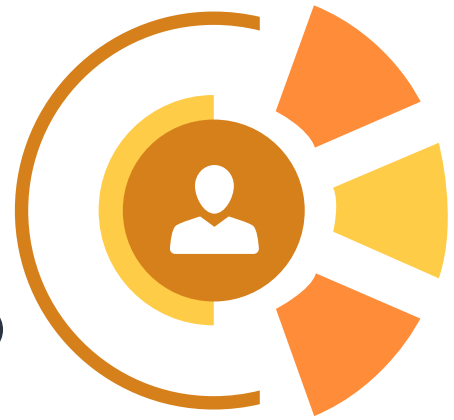


MENTAL

Making room for Choices

- No hidden agendas – participant makes choices
- Offer compassionate listening and space for sharing personal stories
- Embrace creativity and alternative healing methods with open-door access to music and art therapy.





EMOTIONAL

Being Seen and Wanted

- Destigmatized space and trauma corrective therapeutic services.
- You can show up as who you are.
- Seeing themselves and their stories reflected in the space, the art, and the other participants.





SPIRITUAL

Universal Grounding

- Using Indigenous ways of Knowing and Being alongside Western medicine.
- Integrating Indigenous healers like Don Chabelo (Mexican Curanandero, Sanacio'n Grupal)
- Nature as medicine: land-based practices, nature walks, sweat lodges.



Our goal is to create a safe,
welcoming place for people to belong.

Our core belief is that
humanity heals.

