

2016 CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS REPORT: WORKSHOP at the OACYC CHILD & YOUTH CARE WORKER CONFERENCE



CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS Collaborative Panel Presentation at the Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care (OACYC) Workers 2016 Conference in Thunder Bay, Ontario - May 25, 2016

The brain is hardwired to storytelling! That is the latest buzz: oral, written and digital.

The Circle of All Nations has long known of the power of the story - check out our old reports and blogs on our [circleofallnations website](http://circleofallnations.com), to track the stories we have told over the past two decades.

Oral storytelling goes back thousands of years. William Commanda said “My language is so vast, Romola”: for me, the striking use of the word vast evokes the image of the spirit of the land; his Anicinabe language emerged from the land, and it was a spoken, not written language. Over the past decades, countless people have witnessed the power of the story at his gatherings, and learned how to reclaim their own voices.

In our workshop, we employed storytelling in multiple formats to reach a diverse audience, and to engage all as players in an evolving script. With this e-report, we invite you to enter the playing field and help transform the pain, anguish, anger and despair children and young people are trapped in, in our modern world. We believe new stories can and will emerge.

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BACKGROUND

As you may know, Grandfather William Commanda organized the *Circle of All Nations* (CAN) International Millennium Peace Gathering at the end of May, 2000 - and we hosted five youth from South Africa under the umbrella of the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW); now my sister Zeni Thumbadoo is a key player in this inspirational organization, and so I have been able to keep abreast of their work over the years. This has been of special interest to me because, as a long time worker in the adult criminal justice system, I have noted our societal failures with children; also, the NACCW work is grounded in North American Indigenous approaches, including the Circle of Courage model of Dr. Martin Brokenleg, so it has resonated with our CAN style.

Anyway, a year after the Peace Gathering, 2001, Grandfather and I went to South Africa, and he offered the blessing at a NACCW training workshop; in ensuing years CAN kept track of the amazing work that was evolving, helped with some editing of the Isibindi success stories, and wrote a report on an Eastern Cape project; in 2014, I presented a workshop on CAN/Indigenous approaches to child care work at the NACCW Biennial Conference at the Cape Town Conference Centre (and it was very well received by NACCW Patron Dr. Don Mattera and so many of the now mature and seasoned child care workers who remembered Grandfather's inspiration from 2001!) CAN also offered a modest scholarship to two South African students in the name of Grandfather Commanda at the 2014 conference.

Because the NACCW work has been so fascinating to me, I even wrote it into my thesis proposal – as you may know I am studying the discourse of William Commanda.

When I learned that Zeni was going to be the Keynote Speaker at the OACYC conference, I alerted my Indigenous child care worker colleague, Clayton Sandy, from Manitoba. Then I learned that Sue Martin, who had been engaged in a *Home Fires Burning* healing vigil at Victoria Island, at the Asinabka Sacred Chaudiere Site, would be travelling to Thunder Bay around the same time – knowing of her passionate interest in children, given the death of her three year old daughter, and then the murder of her own daughter, I alerted her to this conference. Then I was encouraged to make a presentation at this conference. I decided to include my colleagues, Clayton and Sue. Thereafter, we involved young Matthew Allen, because he had made a moving presentation at the March CAN gathering. SO, almost serendipitously, the CAN team headed to Thunder Bay, to become formal players in the evolving Child and Youth Care Workers field.

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WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

The following is the abstract we presented for inclusion in the conference program, and we were well placed on the agenda – for a three hour presentation on the first day.

Ironically, this week was also the one of the Inquiry into the Deaths of Seven Young Indigenous students in Thunder Bay. First Nations student deaths inquest in Thunder Bay begins final ... www.cbc.ca/.../thunder-bay/first-nations-student-deaths-inquest-final-phase-1.3597397 May 25, 2016 - The **inquest** into the deaths of seven First Nations students in **Thunder Bay**, Ont., resumes Wednesday with lawyers for each of the parties ...

2016 Provincial OACYC Conference

Workshop Title

A *Circle of All Nations* collaborative panel presentation on “Medicine Wheel” approaches in Children and Youth Care Practice.

Description

A four person panel presentation on child and youth care work relevant to Indigenous and non-Indigenous schools and communities addressing Cultural and Human Diversity priorities. The workshop is a dynamic collaboration of grass roots, professional child and youth care worker, youth and academic approaches, with presenters from Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta, and it includes Indigenous ceremony and storytelling. The “Medicine Wheel” methodology evolves from vision/planning, to action/animation, to reflection/scrutiny to refinement/articulation; it discusses association with the spiritual, physical, emotional and mental dimensions of human nature; it examines the *Circle of Courage* incorporation of attributes of belonging, independence, generosity and mastery in child development; and deepens the potential impact of processes by the inclusion of critical human and non- human factors, including earth and time-based elements. These multiple dynamics are contextualized for integrating and strengthening child and youth care practice.

1. Dance and ceremony 2. *Home Fires Burning* Storytelling and Indigenous teachings on child and youth care needs in healing from tragedy and trauma
3. Youth Empowerment at *Home Fires Burning* – Supporting Sue Martin’s unique one year healing retreat at the Sacred Chaudiere Site
3. Video presentation on Four Generations of Family Healing and Transformation from Indian Residential School trauma

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4. A Circle of All Nations orientation for child and youth outreach consistent with a conceptual Indigenous *Medicine Wheel*

5. Circle discussion

Time

180 minutes

Presenters

Clayton Sandy, Sue Martin, Matthew Allan, Romola V. Thumbadoo

Contact person: Romola V. Thumbadoo, circleofallnations@sympatico.ca; 506 Stratas Court, Kanata, On. K2L3K7; 613-599-8385

Mini-Biographies

Clayton Sandy, Aboriginal Child and Youth Officer with Manitoba Ministry of Education (38 years experience), Past Coordinator of MAYSAC, Aboriginal Youth Role Model Program, and board member on numerous Aboriginal corrections, justice and community development groups.

Sue Martin, given name, Mugwaw Thunderwomen, spirit name; participant in the Federal Government Inquiry on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women; and initiator of a year long Sacred Fire Spirit and Intent Healing Ceremony Camp at *Home Fires Burning*, Victoria Island, Sacred Chaudiere Site, Ottawa, grieving the loss of her daughter, and other Murdered and Missing Loved Ones; a mother, grandmother and great grandmother with passionate interest in outreach to children and youth.

Matthew Allan, youth who spent the past year volunteering and learning at the *Home Fires Burning*, Sue Martin's Sacred Fire Spirit and Intent Healing Ceremony Camp; he will share a power point presentation on his experience, and a video on the experiences of other young people at this healing retreat.

Romola V. Thumbadoo, Coordinator, Circle of All Nations, a global eco-peace community founded by Indigenous Elder Dr. William Commanda, OC; retired federal criminal justice system and community development worker; and presently a doctoral student at Carleton University researching the legacy and discourse of William Commanda.

Audio-visual requirements

Equipment for video and power point presentations.

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SLEEPING GIANT AWAKENING



THE PREAMBLE The day before the workshop, Sue, Matthew, Zeni, and also Neecha and Alex (who were part of the road trip) and I did a special trip to Sleeping Giant Park – to connect with and receive the blessings of this most sacred part of the Great Lakes landscape – Lake Superior.

The Mighty St. Lawrence River of Grandfather Commanda's ancestral territory is birthed (friends who were at Grandfather Commanda's wake in his lodge in Kitigan Zibi will understand why the Sleeping Giant is such a powerful messenger to me – solid rock, he is a direct energy link with Asinabka – and did you know we have a Grandmother Sleeping Giant in the Gatineau Landscape?).

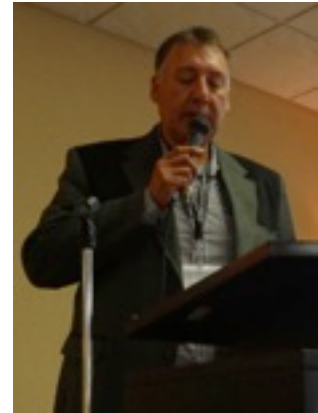
Magical things happen in sacred spaces – we saw five eagles overheads; I video taped Sue calling them in closer: they came. I guess they came to prepare us – on the eve of our presentation, we were presented with a significant challenge: that will be the subject of a separate report. In this narrative report, we offer you the highlights of our workshop presentation.



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OUR WORKSHOP

We commenced our workshop with Indigenous ceremony: Smudge, the Feather, and Song. Clayton Sandy had brought his colleague Mark Hall to the conference – and we invited him to do an opening greeting for our workshop – Mark offered a powerful Dakota ceremonial song that left us electrified. You could hear a poignant echo of the land.



We set the stage for Grandfather Commanda's work with a power point backgrounder presentation (You can find some of that material in our Facebook Page, Circle of All Nations, under the Photo drop down bar).



Then Sue Martin told her story – about her painful childhood, registered in memory dramatically by age three; running away from home by age nine; the devastation and blinding grief of loosing her infant daughter, Sherry Lee Yvette, aged just three, at the age of nineteen herself; about grief compounded by the brutal and “unsolved” murder of her daughter Terrie Ann Dauphinais, aged just twenty four, estrangement from young males, and ensuing separation from her grandchildren; the impact of the violent tragedies on the lives of her entire family; frustrated healing efforts; the vision to seek healing via a vigil on Victoria Island, at the Sacred Chaudiere Site, which ended up being a year long Home Fires Burning camp out on the special island on the Ottawa River, in the heart of the capital city; the harassments, hardships, and relationships developed; the provision of support to hundreds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, from Ottawa and beyond, including from outside the country, many deeply wounded themselves; the outreach to people of diverse backgrounds; the management of complex security, fire keeping, housing and hospitality needs; the participation in the Murdered and Missing Women's Gathering convened by the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Carolyn Bennett, in Winnipeg; and the reconciliation with youth, via an evolving relationship with a young man with a speech impediment; and the priceless healing wrought out of this incredible experience – it was a profound and moving statement of the

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meaning of sacred land.

Sue received a standing ovation for her presentation; many people were in tears, including some



of the conference organizers.

Next, Matthew Allen talked about his six-month life changing experience supporting Sue at *Home Fires Burning*. His father had connected with Sue while tending the Sacred Fires during the *Walking with our Sisters* ceremony at Carleton University in 2015; his parents introduced Matthew to *Home Fires Burning*, and the shy young man with a speech impediment, learned to tend fire, maintain the grounds, support security, and engage with people – in fact, he became Sue’s right hand support. Though I had seen him regularly at *Home Fires Burning*, he was



generally like wall paper, lost in the background of the perpetual hustle around the place. I only talked to him alone a bare week before our March 2016 CAN Equinox event – only then did I realize what a deep and alert thinker was hidden behind the long hair hiding his eyes, and what keen observations he had about his own experience, healing and growth. I invited him to participate in our workshop – within a week, he had prepared a power point presentation, and also done a video of other young people, focused

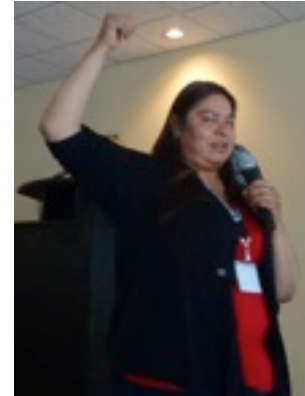
on capturing their experiences and learnings at *Home Fires Burning!* Needless to say, his presentation was very well received, and so Sue and I decided to invite him to join us in Thunder Bay. In preparation for that, he did further work on his video. Unfortunately, the unexpected conference challenge mentioned earlier, obliged him to spend much of the night adjusting his presentation. At any rate, the young man of the speech impediment, commenced his presentation with an articulate speech supported by a few point form notes, did a power point presentation to focus attention on his specific tasks, learning experiences and the application of discipline to the challenges and opportunities of life, then showed his video; Neecha and Alex were on the video, though not a formal part of our workshop; with remarkable poise and sensitivity, he invited her to share some thoughts.

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Neecha, herself a Sixties Scoop child, removed from her birthplace in Northern Ontario, adopted and raised in Gatineau, talked about her engagement in the long and painful experience of reclaiming relationship with home, land and family, experiences tragic losses of friends and family of the most painful nature (suicide, unsolved murder), raising a young son as a single woman; also passionately involved in environmental protection, Ring of Fire development challenges

and band leadership issues in her territorial home, ones of national implication, her spontaneous contribution to our workshop was electrifying. Intriguingly enough too, she had connected with Grandfather Commanda a decade ago, securing his approval for her to smudge the Parliament Buildings!



Oh, and note who joined us at our workshop - Darlene Necan - [Ontario withdraws charges against homeless woman who built her ...](http://www.cbc.ca/.../thunder-bay/ontario-withdraws-charges-against-homeless-woman-who...)
www.cbc.ca/.../thunder-bay/ontario-withdraws-charges-against-homeless-woman-who...

Mar 19, 2015 - A homeless woman from northern Ontario plans to move into the home she built herself after the provincial government withdrew its charges ...

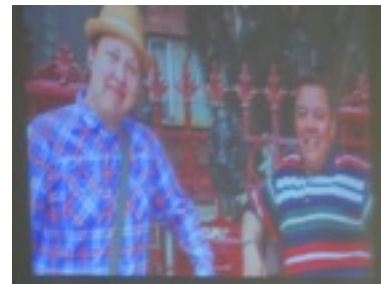
Then it was time for Clayton's presentation. Clayton just retired after thirty seven years of work with Manitoba Education, and has encouraged Aboriginal engagement, awareness and healing at multiple levels – with youth, role model programs, corrections and police, government, schools and universities, environmentalists and so on – we met at an 1991 RCMP Aboriginal Youth Conference that he initiated in Winnipeg, and have remained close friends and colleagues over the years. He 'mc'ed one of the Aboriginal Justice Learning Meetings I organized in the nineties, and he noted that he passed the feather around and that the talking circle did not stop over the next three day – we do not underestimate the power of spirit. Grandfather and I took Wampum Belts to the first Men's healing conference Clayton organized – long before people began to think of this critical subject in the story of safety and healing for women and children.

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Clayton's presentation focused on his own multigenerational journey in search of healing post the impact of the Residential School experience on his family; he showed the video originally prepared for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission work; here he talks about his estranged relationship with his father (a student of a Manitoba residential school and a World War One vet); he exposes the painful violence in his family his own spiral down that path; he

describes the wake up that came with the birth of his son: at this pivotal moment, he committed to quit drinking in order to ensure that his son did not grow up in a similar environment of abuse; he also talked about the further estrangement from dysfunctional family members that his healing journey both caused and required; he then described his present day relationship with his young grandson, with whom he returns to his culture and spiritual grounding in pow wow dance – dance on the earth.



Clayton's was as dramatically transformative a story as Sue's - somehow, these two have been able to pull themselves out of the quicksand of utter hell and hopelessness, and emerge as amazingly resilient warriors, with truly inspirational stories to share, with personally claimed toolboxes of strategies to engage fully in the dance of life, and without the fear, anger despair, depression and dread that is driving others to suicide, rage or burnout. Indeed they have much to share and teach, and not just to Indigenous Peoples and children and youth. In this zone as in *many* others, I believe Indigenous are the *canary in the coal mine*; I believe also that in our increasingly institutionalized rule based mainstream reality, we are dangerously close to cementing our capacity for resourcefulness, and that we are allowing consumerism to blunt our realization of the impending doom; soon, we will all need this amazing re-generative capacity that Indigenous Peoples like Clayton and Sue emanate. We will need to re-learn how to drink from the source of life.

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It is ironic that at this time, Canada is awakening to the crisis in the child care system. We are apparently world experts in this field of work – so where does the problem lie? May I say, if we continue to crush and stifle the earth generated resurgence such as I have described here, and such as William Commanda “midwifed” amongst thousands of peoples, and sought to have animated at the Sacred Chaudiere Site, we will all rue this.

We returned to formal information with a Circle of All Nations presentation on Indigenous approaches to Child Care work. We explored the CAN animation of the Circle of Courage model developed by Dr. Martin Brokenleg and colleagues. People remained engaged, questioned and commented, and appeared to be very interested to engage in new perspectives and strategies. We received a standing ovation, people were animated and energized, and comments were positive and encouraging – we also know workers with some Indigenous roots were particularly moved; the others took notes!

We ended our presentation with Clayton’s uTube clip of the global concert jammed by musicians from around the world – for me it was very much a William Commanda moment, remembering how, unbeknownst to us, he orchestrated his send-off concert after his funeral with Marc Velo’s Grand Piano and Caravan d’Amour from France. I concluded that he was pleased with us!!

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have been devastated by the unending reports of child suicide, youth violence and dysfunction sweeping the country this past year – indeed, it is much like the tide of racist violence that dominated American politics a couple of years ago. Formal reports on Child Care services reveal widespread systemic and overt problems, with First Nations, Inuit and Metis children and communities most severely impacted. Evidence is also revealing the minority communities, especially Black and now Moslem, are being poorly served.

We made the journey to Thunder Bay entirely at our own cost and time, to understand what was happening in this field and to share; we invested our own efforts into generating our materials, information and ideas; and we are not professional child care workers, supported by organizations to attend this conference or address these compelling issues. In fact, we were not clinical child care workers at all – but we do believe we have a unique and compelling orientation to offer here.

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Further, this three hour workshop is only a fragment of what we intend to share in the future. A few of you may already have participated in our Overview of the Inner Healing documentary of our young autistic friend Adrien Esposito, grounded in Indigenous approaches to healing – we have much to expand upon and offer here. We also intend to go back to the work of another of our *Circle of All Nations* heroes - Donald Marshall Junior and his Youth Camps of the 1990s. It is because efforts like his stalled then that youth are in the crisis they are in today. They can't scream for help any louder. Please let us all go out there and fan hope.



SO OF COURSE it was the amazing Child and Youth Care work of my sister Zeni Thumbadoo and her NACCW team that took me to Thunder Bay in the first place.

We are doing our best to advance understanding of the more formal workforce training opportunities that lie in the inspirational ground breaking work of the National Association of

Child Care Workers (www.naccw.org.za) in South Africa, and their Isibindi Safe Parks program. Check out this video to learn more yourself! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gflyQNrPovs>

We look forward to sharing our compelling child and youth care storytelling training workshop and related ideas with you and others. Help us spread the word! Join us and help animate this work with our eyes focused on the Seventh Generation! Lets go out and transform the country and the world, and change the playing field for future generations!

Its all part of the living Legacy of Grandfather William Commanda!