



**ASSEMBLY OF SEVEN GENERATIONS**  
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# **ASSEMBLY OF SEVEN GENERATIONS**

## **YEAR 2 REPORT**

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**The Students  
Commission**  
*Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement*



**2020-2021**

# ORIGIN STORY



## Story of A7G

In 2012 the founders of A7G along with many young people in Ottawa and across Turtle Island were inspired by the Idle No More movement. There were many youth in Ottawa that were at the rallies and ceremonies associated with the movement. And although the movement was predominately led by Indigenous youth, there were not a lot of opportunities for Indigenous youth to speak and share their truths directly.

In 2013 the founders of A7G talked about starting a platform for youth to speak their truth. And the idea of gathering youth began. Many of the teachings that provided the foundation for the group held the number Seven. The Seven Grandfather Teachings, the Seven Generations Teachings and The Seven Fires Prophecy. Because of this, the group was named Assembly of Seven Generations or A7G.

Before the group was incorporated, they participated in a tech program that typically focused on tech support for countries around the world. They worked with A7G because they wanted to support Indigenous youth in Canada. An important lesson the group gleaned from this experience was that you can't have a program that is not made by Indigenous people and try and Indigenize it after. You need to start with an Indigenous program. Another key learning during this time was that the most important aspect of programming for young people was to have a safe place to gather every week. To laugh, share and sing. Creating the safety of the group was the most important thing.

In 2015 the group was incorporated as a non-profit and they took part in activities as they arose. In 2017 the first youth/elders gathering was held which has become a staple of the A7G programming. In 2018 A7G had the opportunity to meet youth from Winnipeg who were active in Aboriginal Youth Opportunity/Meet Me at the Bell Tower and were able to hear from them directly.

The group was inspired by those in Winnipeg that didn't necessarily have nonprofit status or a lot of funds but were steadfast in their commitment to support Indigenous youth in their community.

Around this time, a city funded drop-in lost its funding. The program, 510 Rideau, had served Indigenous people who were experiencing homelessness. This program closed its doors due to these city cuts. In the two years following there were several deaths including young people. Although not recognized by the City of Ottawa, it was clear to the leaders at A7G that these deaths could have been prevented if people just had somewhere to go. Because the group could see the connection between the loss of community members and the closing of the drop-in they decided they had to do something to prevent more loss. Six members that were friends decided to get together as a supportive group every Friday night to provide that safe and consistent place in the community. This Friday night gathering has been happening ever since.

From this Friday night group, called the council, ideas for other programs and activities took root. Today A7G runs a weekly Anishinaabemowin language program, monthly sweats, land based activities like gardening and maple tapping, and annual programs like the Round Dances and Land Camps. Because of the groups deep connections with youth in the community, A7G also holds a leadership role advocating for systems change and adequate supports for Indigenous youth in Ottawa. Significantly, this past year, they carried out a Community Led Research project to explore and describe the gaps in service that Indigenous Youth experience in Ottawa.

# PROCESS & TOOLS



This report was completed to better understand the outcomes of A7G in all the work that they do with Indigenous Youth. Four interviews with people who play different roles in the A7G community were conducted and were later transcribed and analyzed for recurrent themes. The interviewees included an Elder and advisor to the project, one of the cofounders, a youth participant, and a youth member of the A7G community who is also on the board.

The recurrent themes found in the interviews were divided into two different sections: (1) What does A7G do? and (2) How do they do it?

## (1) What does A7G do?

In the first section of this report, data from the focus groups is presented to emphasize the work of A7G. The findings were presented in 3 different groups:

- (1) Beads: Work that impacts people on an individual level.
- (2) String of Beads: Work that impacts relationships between community members.
- (3) Beaded Piece: Work that is creating systems level change.

## (2) How do they do it?

In the second section of this report, data from the focus groups is presented to emphasize the way in which

A7G makes an impact, how they interact with each other, and how they turn their knowledge into action. These findings are presented in correspondence with the 7 grandfather teachings:

- (1) Love
- (2) Truth
- (3) Honesty
- (4) Humility
- (5) Respect
- (6) Courage/Bravery
- (7) Wisdom

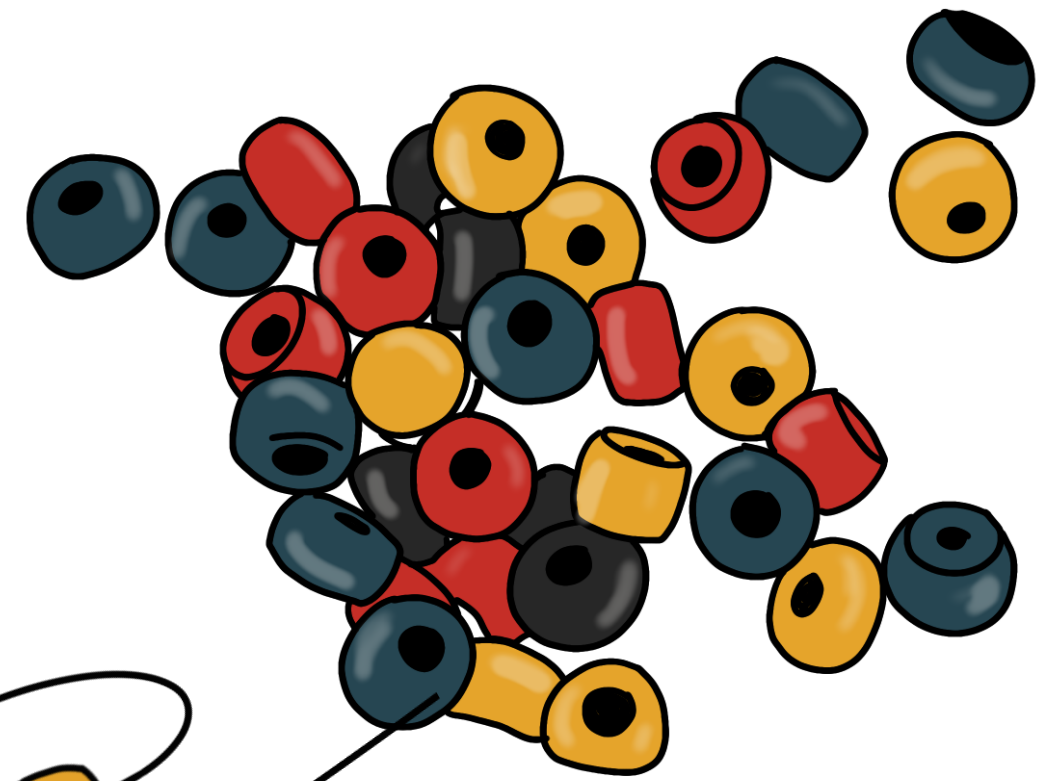


# WHAT DOES A7G DO?



## (1) BEADS

- Creates opportunities for participants to help others
- Identifies people's strengths and skills
- Helps youth network/connect and directs them to job opportunities
- Provides mental health support
- Connects youth with culture
- Provides material supports
- Navigates services
- Fosters friendships
- Emphasizes fun

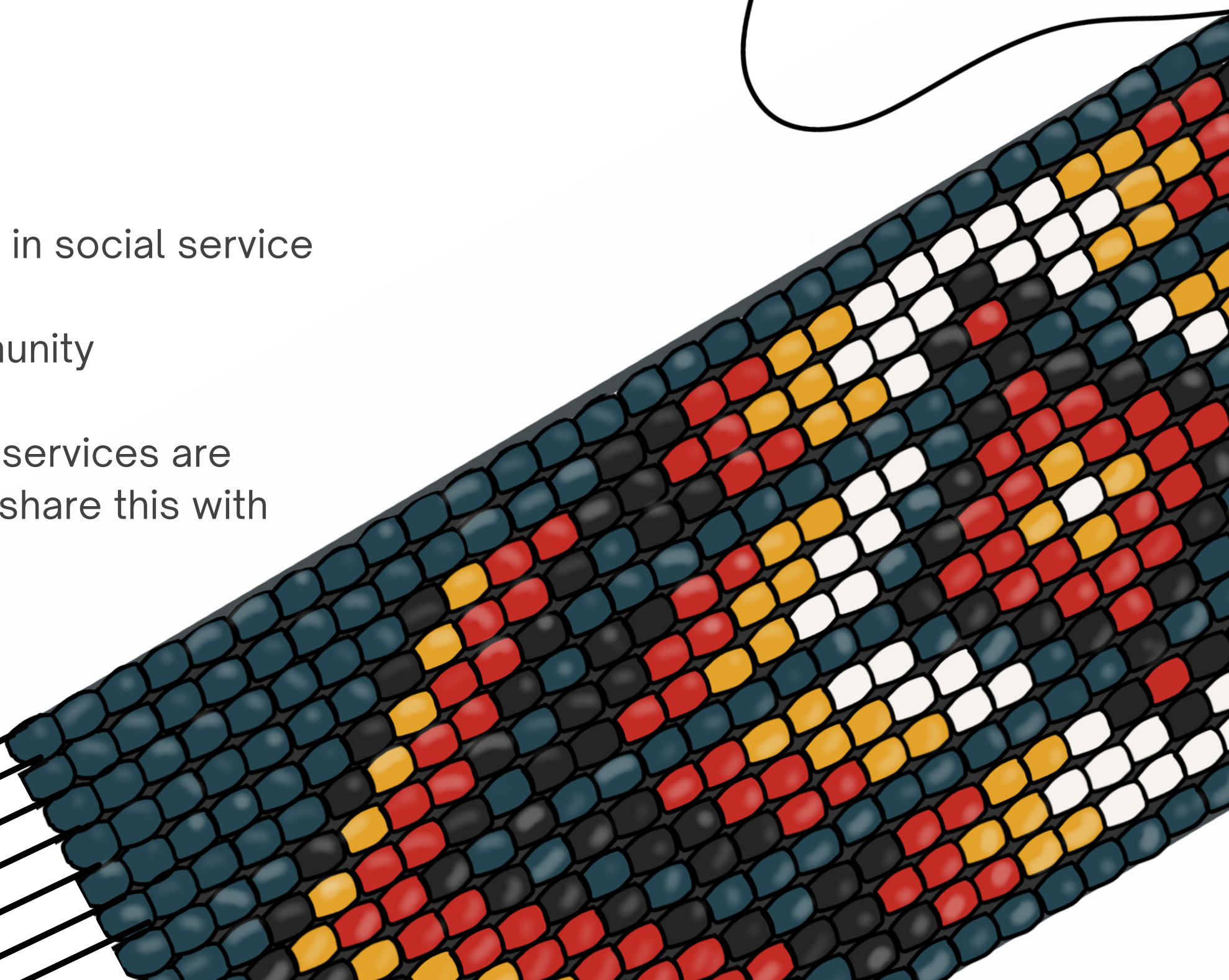


## (2) STRING OF BEADS

- Accepts youth no matter what
- Models reciprocal relationships
- Interrupts lateral violence
- Practices healthy communication
- Talks with the community about gender, sexuality and race

## (3) BEADED PIECE

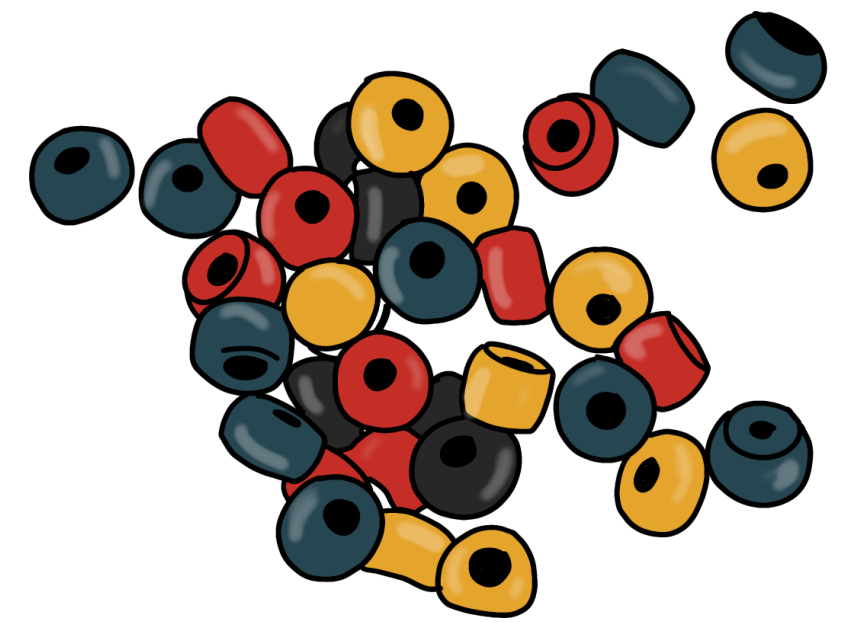
- Involves others in their work
- Uses influence to decolonize language in social service organizations
- Works to revitalize culture in the community
- Works to keep the community healthy
- Helps youth to understand what social services are best suited to them and helps them to share this with their peers
- Builds supportive relationships with non-Indigenous communities





# BEADS

Work that impacts people on an individual level.



## CREATES AN OPPORTUNITY TO HELP OTHERS

*'But I can regrow what I can do in the helping.'*

*'I want to be able to help the community.'*

*'I need to be able to translate this stuff that I have learned.'*

## DIRECTS YOUTH TO JOB OPPORTUNITIES, HELPS THEM NETWORK AND CONNECT

*'Giving job opportunities when they can, helping us to get paid.'*

*'helped me with a lot of networking and connections.'*

## PROVIDES MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

*'if there is a mental health crisis going on they will help us get what we need based on the situation.'*

*'we've had to do suicide prevention and intervention. We've often had to play the role of creating safe plans with people.'*

*'they are there to support.'*

## IDENTIFIES PEOPLE'S SKILLS & GIFTS

*'The ways in which they reached out to me. Saying they were struggling and reaching out. Knowing what skills and gifts people can bring into a space...When people definitely need help with something I know, they come to me with that specific thing. And that's great. Everyone has a different way they can specifically help A7G. And drawing on that is good. I haven't been in a lot of places that know how to take it on.'*

## EMPHASIZES FUN

*'for the most part we're just having fun. It has definitely helped me.'*

## HELPS WITH MATERIAL SUPPORTS

*'Care packages that were passed out during covid. They helped any Indigenous youth who filled out the form. They did a few rounds. Back to school and others. They were giving groceries, pads, tampons, gift cards to help people out.'*

## CONNECTS YOUTH WITH CULTURE

*'Also returning to the culture. They are connecting us with teaching and with elders.'*

## FOSTERS FRIENDSHIPS

*'closest friends I have are through A7G events, gatherings and nights. These are friendships I've had for 3 or 4 years.'*

*'friendship developed, relationships, bonding, helping. There are other youth that might still be struggling with substance use, I see how it helps others out.'*

## NAVIGATES SERVICES

*'We've often had to play the role of creating safe plans with people. Same thing when it comes with housing or pregnancy.'*

# STRING OF BEADS

Work that impacts relationships  
between community members

## INTERRUPTS LATERAL VIOLENCE

*'We will not allow you to speak  
that way in the group. But no  
lateral violence.'*

*'If there are issues in the group  
and someone needs to leave,  
they'll be asked to leave. If  
someone is repeatedly causing  
harm, they have to go'*

## TALKS ABOUT GENDER, SEXUALITY AND RACE

*'They are up there in orgs that  
know how to question gender and  
sexuality work.'*

*'A7G is able to say they are  
complicit in anti-Blackness and are  
open to talk about it. Being there  
to guide other people through  
when they are ready to talk too is  
part of the work.'*

## PRACTICES HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

*'A7G is raising awareness  
about how to consistently  
speak kindly to one another.'*

*'A lot of Indigenous Values  
are embedded in the model of  
Peer support. Like  
communication, healthy  
communication.'*

## MODELS RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

*'youth that are supporting one another.'*

*'It's a reciprocal relationship. Not one person benefits. It's a shared responsibility'*

*'So that, let's just say 10 folks come for a sweat. There are some that will be building and dressing and doing the physical labour. And some folks that will be doing the spiritual labour, the elder, the conductor and their helper. And there are folks that are there because they need it. They share what they are going through and they trust in the ceremony. Maybe the next time maybe they are in a place that they can do the physical labour.'*

*That is how reciprocity works in community. Maybe it can take a long time for someone to feel they have come through something.'*

## ACCEPTS YOUTH NO MATTER WHAT

*'In order to build space and grow and not fall into the narrative of disposability (that comes from capitalism) that we put that into our relationships and organizations. And today with social media we can do that easily, just unfriend. With p2p we are going to build networks and connections.'*

*'be listening and holding space for the person.'*

*'when I'm healthier, I have support, it means the people around me will have support and be in a better place.  
There is a ripple effect  
I guess.'*



# BEADED PIECE

Work that is creating system level change

## INVOLVES OTHERS IN THEIR WORK

*'We will not allow you to speak that way in the group.  
But no lateral violence.'*

*'If there are issues in the group and someone needs  
to leave, they'll be asked to leave. If someone is  
repeatedly causing harm, they have to go'*

## WORKS TO REVITALIZE CULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

*'They are up there in orgs that know how to  
question gender and sexuality work.'*

*'A7G is able to say they are complicit in anti-  
Blackness and are open to talk about it. Being  
there to guide other people through when they are  
ready to talk too is part of the work.'*

## DECOLONIZES LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

*'They are decolonizing some of the jargon  
and language from Social service  
organizations.'*

IMPACTS HOW YOUTH  
ACCESS SERVICES THAT ARE  
BEST SUITED TO THEM

*'its impacted how I view Indigenous Youth Services in Ottawa. It impacts how I recommend services and how I access services. If there's a youth in need I can always recommend them to A7G. That's a really huge element in systemic change, having a reliable community service.'*

BUILDS SUPPORTIVE  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH NON-  
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

*'I notice that youth take practices they learn at A7G and take it to other places. E.g. they were doing support with one of their friends who is not Indigenous. They brought that person to me as well, they needed help navigating school. It goes even outside just the indigenous community. I think a reflection of it is the community support we get overall.'*

*'building relationships with Black community during BLM, or Ottawa Street Medics, trying to make those relationships is part of communal support because it builds support.'*

WORKS TO KEEP THE  
COMMUNITY HEALTHY

*'A7G is raising awareness about how to consistently speak kindly to one another.'*

*'A lot of Indigenous Values are embedded in the model of Peer support. Like communication, healthy communication.'*

# HOW DOES A7G DO IT?



## 7 Grandfather Teachings

The A7G Program uses the 7 grandfather teachings as a framework to explain the values that guide the way in which they work and how this way of working impacts the community and makes a difference.

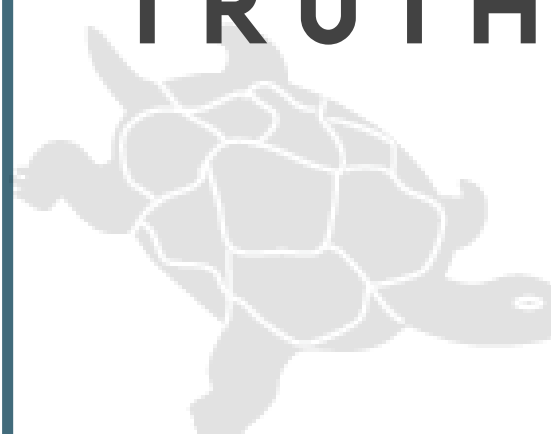
The 7 Grandfather teachings are a part of the Indigenous peoples' culture of turtle island. They are Love represented by the Eagle, Truth represented by the Turtle, Honesty represented by the Sabe (Big Foot), Humility represented by the Wolf, Respect represented by the Buffalo, Courage/Bravery represented by the Bear, and wisdom, represented by the Beaver. Because there is no standardization of Indigenous peoples' languages, words can change between regions but ultimately the teachings hold the same meaning across languages and dialects. In this report, the Grandfather Teachings are presented both in English and in Anishinaabemowin.

Each teaching is explored in detail with quotes from interviews. Quotes are included to highlight how A7G is mirroring each teaching within their work.

**LOVE**



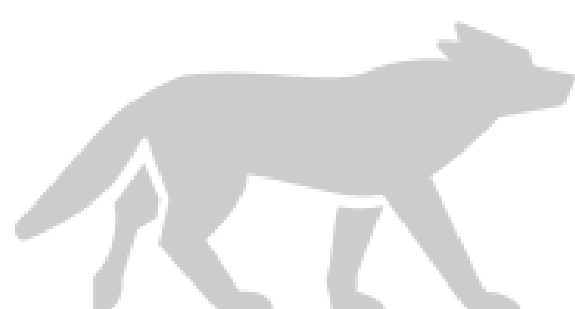
**TRUTH**



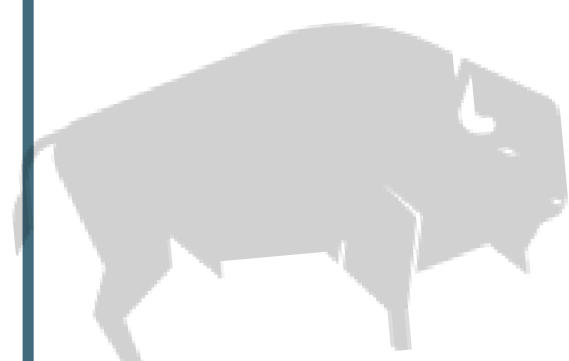
**HONESTY**



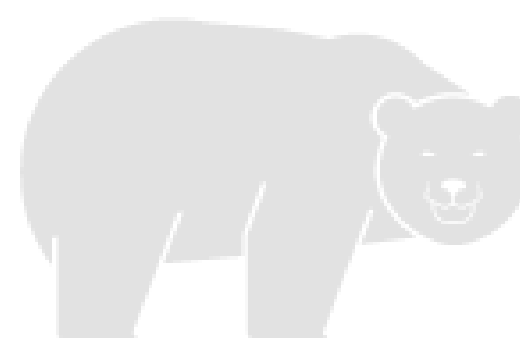
**HUMILITY**



**RESPECT**



**COURAGE  
/ BRAVERY**



**WISDOM**





# LOVE

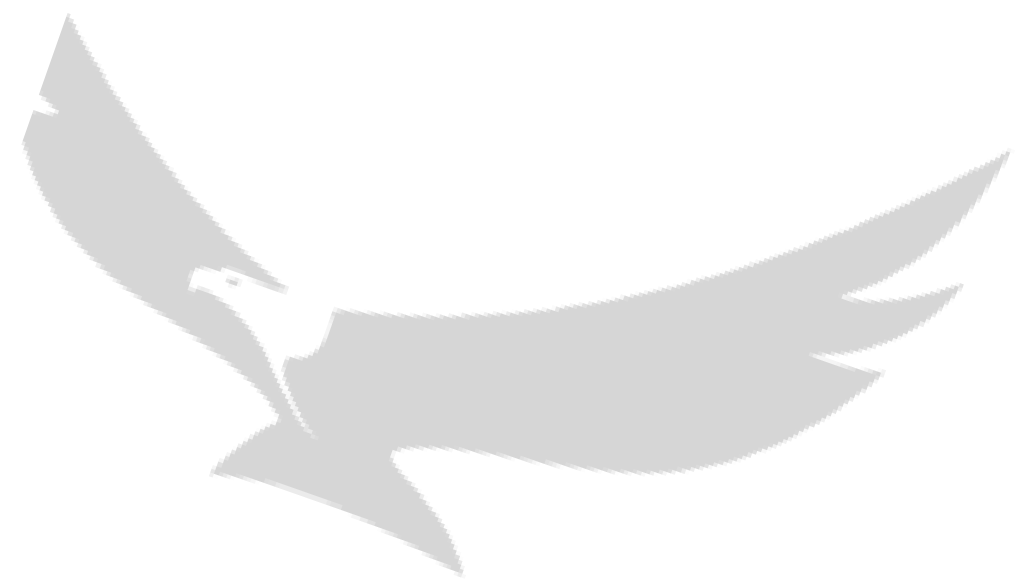
## EAGLE

### Zaagi'idiwin

Zaag - to emerge, come out of flow out

Idi - in a reciprocal way

Win - a way it is done



“The teaching of love is found in all of the other teachings. It is the eagle who mirrors these lessons back to us. The eagle is strong enough to carry all of the teachings and flies high enough to see all of creation. When we live by these teachings and see ourselves as the eagle does, we are able to love who we are. And once we have found that balance within, we can provide love to our family and community. For this reason, the eagle feather is one of the most sacred items and must be earned.”



*"That's why the younger ones come in because they see something positive with their siblings or friends."*

*"A7G is living in ceremony all the time. They will go without funding. I remind them to not burn out."*

*"There is a lot of love but I remind them to protect the love."*

*"There is unconditional love, unconditional support. They will except you in any state you are. How you are, how you are coming."*

*"And I remind them there are loving spaces that are watching in a good way."*

**Takeaway:** There were many comments surrounding the loving atmosphere of A7G. Participants believed that they were loved and supported unconditionally, while also suggesting that A7G promotes a diverse space for youth to gather and create a community.

# TRUTH

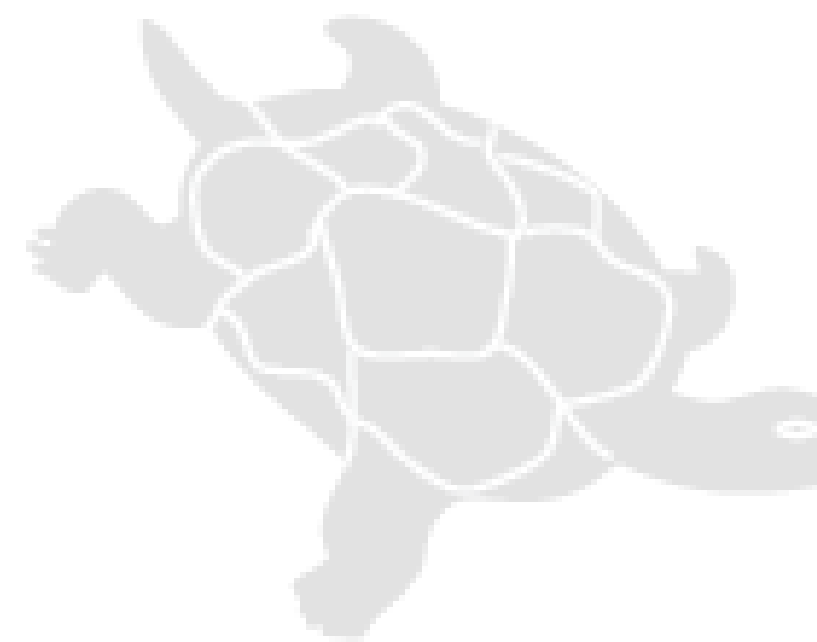
## TURTLE

### Debwewin

Deb- to a certain extent

We-sound or vibration

Win - a way it is done



“The teaching of truth is taught to us by the turtle. The turtle was here when all life was created and carries teachings related to the beginning of life on its back. There are 28 scutes around the perimeter of a turtle shell; these represent the 28 days of a woman’s menstrual cycle, which is key to the creation of life. There are 13 scutes in the centre of a turtle shell; these represent the 13 moons and the 13 times the Earth circles the sun each year.”



*“The biggest struggle is that there is not a lot of supports for youth in crisis. Hotlines don’t help. The youth we have don’t use the hotlines. They haven’t worked for our youth. They are supposed to be a net, but they don’t work.”*

*“The kids are gone, we don’t talk about them. Same as jail. Families were left to their own devices. But if we combine them all together and say no matter where you go, we’re here.”*

*"Everyone has a different way they can specifically help A7G. And drawing on that is good. I haven’t been in a lot of places that know how to take it on [drawing on people’s strengths]."*

*"Our youth should not be homeless for ceremonies. We need to give them space and say “You were right, we believe you, you were right. You deserved a space that was loving."*

**Takeaway:** Participants were truthful in acknowledging the issues facing youth today. It was said that accepting these issues and being truthful will allow for changes to be made. It is important to acknowledge the problems with the current supports in place, and realize that more needs to be done to help youth thrive.

# H O N E S T Y

## S A B E

### Gwayakwaadiziwin

Gwayakwa - correctly

Aadizi - he or she live

Win - a way it is done



“The teaching of honesty is taught to us by Sabe or sometimes the raven. Sabe is believed to be closer to the spirit world than humans and reminds us, just as the raven does, that we must be truthful to who we are. The Ojibwa expression Kitchi-Sabe means to walk tall, or to have integrity. It is only by being honest that we can have integrity.”



*"to understand when ego comes in, in a stance way of...the gracefulness to understand that they have every way to speak up when things are not right (talking to other youth). We will not allow you to speak that way in the group. But no lateral violence. It is done gracefully."*

*Following through, being honest, it's very important. Our reputation proceeds us. That feeling that people have, the good feelings is because of the work we have done with youth.*

**Takeaway:** Participants in the A7G program expressed the importance of honest communication within the group. It is encouraged for youth to speak up and say their truth within the program. It was also stated that honesty of the organization is crucial to maintaining a reputation for doing genuine work with youth.



# HUMILITY

## WOLF

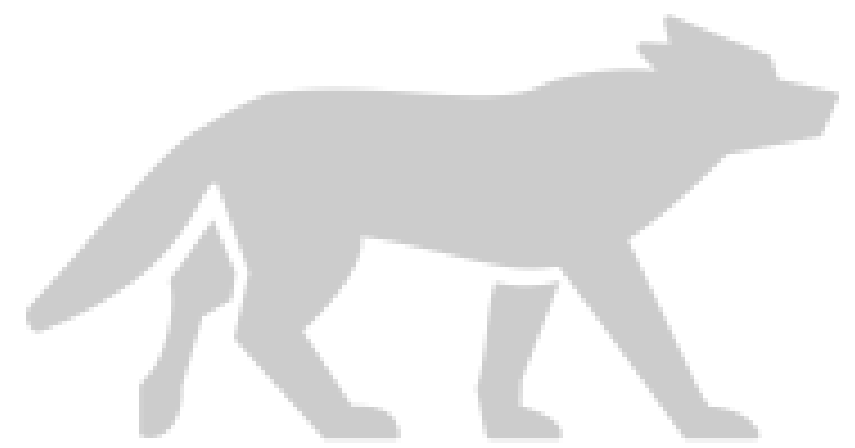
### Dabasendiziwin

Dabas - lower or low

End - pertaining to thought

Izi - state or condition

Win - a way it is done



“The teaching of humility is taught to us by the wolf. The wolf is strong and powerful alone, but finds its greatest strength when part of a pack. Wolves are known to remain with packs for life, raising pups while protecting the group’s well-being. The wolf teaches us that humility imparts strength to families and communities.”



*"I came because I've been around A7G. Perimeter around to make sure it's safe. I am from the wolf clan so we perimeter around and make sure it's safe."*

*"They bring in the conversation of what does the aftercare of land defenders look like. And recognize what the trauma from police and the larger community is."*

**Takeaway:** The importance of humility was also expressed by participants. They believed that A7G was a humble organization that cares for youth first. They recognize the trauma and barriers facing youth today, making it their priority to protect and provide healing for youth.

# R E S P E C T

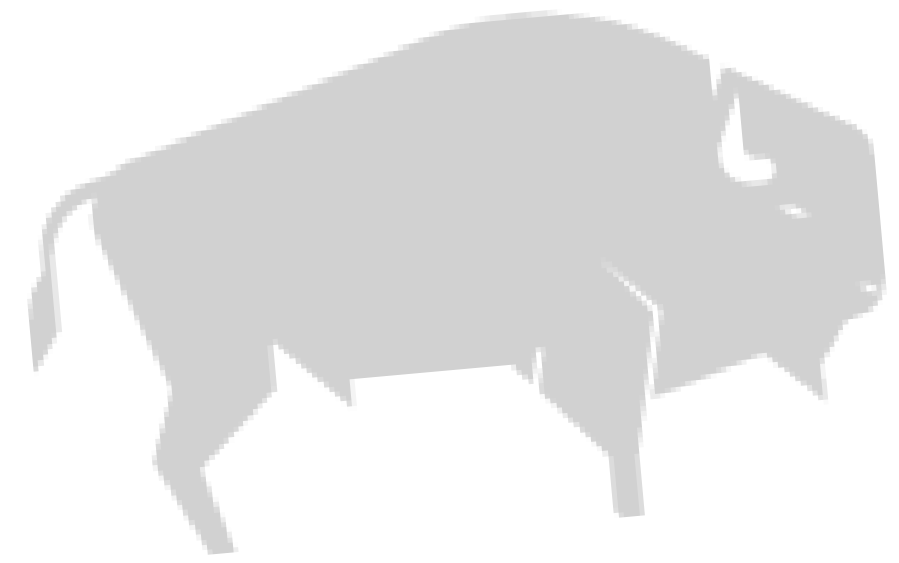
## B U F F A L O

### Manaaji'idiwin

Manaaji - to go easy on someone

Idi- in a reciprocal way

Win- a way it is done



“The teaching of respect is taught to us by the buffalo. The buffalo provided Indigenous Peoples with everything they needed to survive: hides for warmth and shelter, meat for eating, muscle for sinew, and bones for tools. The buffalo reminds us to respect all living things, and in doing so we achieve a balance that keeps us alive.”



*"A7G is raising awareness about how to consistently speak kindly to one another [when someone makes a mistake]. And how to understand different traits that we all take along."*

*"Understanding our own capacity to have hard conversations, to be present for people when they are struggling. Looking at a relationship where there is no hierarchy. I am your equal and I am here to be there."*

*A long time ago, in the first year, we made our group norms, we said these are the rules we will follow to respect each other. Pronouns, no gossiping, talking through any issue that comes up... They acknowledge and hold people accountable to the group norms.*

**Takeaway:** It was also noted that A7G heavily focused on providing a respectful environment where everyone is treated fairly. They promote having equal and fair conversations, and respecting the diverse nature of youth in the organization.

# COURAGE & BRAVERY

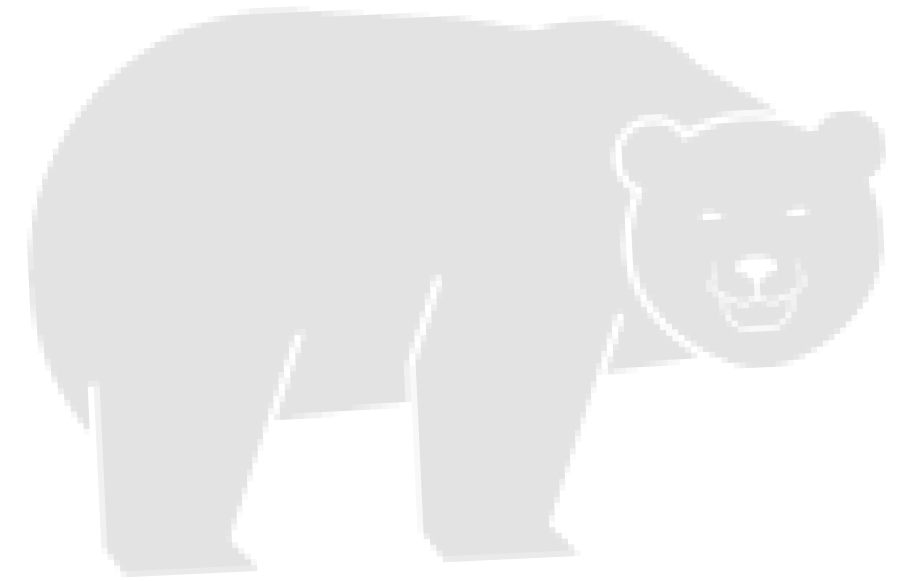
## BEAR

### Zoongide'ewin

Zoongi - solid, strong

De'e - form of heart

Win - a way it is done



“The teaching of bravery is taught to us by the bear. Bears are known to confront threats they should be fearful of, especially female bears who will protect their cubs against larger bears and other dangers. The bear also reminds us to be playful and to rest when needed. It is in the balance of these teachings that we are taught when to be courageous.”



*"When I was their age there was no way I would do it. Be in a group sharing like that. But I can regrow what I can do in the helping. Regrow with others."*

*"They are decolonizing some of the jargon and language from Social service organizations."*

**Takeaway:** Those in the focus groups touched upon courage within their participation. Despite their own experiences, participants were brave enough to step up and help others.



# WISDOM

## BEAVER

### Nibwaakawin

Waa - pertaining to sight

Kaa-in abundance

Win- a way it is done



The teaching of wisdom is taught to us by the beaver. Beavers use their teeth to cut trees and build dams; in doing this they have a positive impact on their community (the nature around them), their family (who live in the dam), and themselves (by finding purpose and health in doing what they are meant to do). The beaver reminds us that we all have gifts and a purpose in this world. It is through the love of knowledge that we find wisdom.”



*“They revitalized the youth and elder relationships and traditional helper relationships and family to family.”*

*"I hear, [in group] my parents don't just don't get it. And I remind them that what they're parents are saying is exactly what I said."*

*"They lead the round dance in this community. They have realigned more traditional perspectives within the round dance."*

*"They are connecting us with teaching and with elders. The land based activities that help the culture connection. And if there is something you want to do, they will help make it happen. They will ask you to help, but they always make things work."*

*"There's knowledge keepers and elders that are part of that trusted circle. We rely on them and they come by. It's about really focusing on the relationships."*

*"There is also a training that the elders and the sweat conductors are doing. You don't just wake up one day and lead a sweat. You have to go through years of experience with the sweat."*

**Takeaway:** Throughout the interviews, participants expressed the importance of elders in the organization. Elders were said to provide wisdom, guidance, and connection to youth within a trusted circle. A7G focuses on these relationships and gives youth the opportunity to connect with family, culture, and other trusted relationships.

# DISCUSSION



The voices in this report demonstrate how the A7G program is positively impacting the lives in their community. The A7G program is providing a space to deliver culturally-anchored, activities and supports for Indigenous youth. Youth are gaining traditional knowledge from elders, building meaningful relationships, and accessing culturally relevant supports. The data presented in this report confirms that A7G is continuing to provide a safe space for youth to connect with others and with their culture.

Interview participants identified many positive impacts that the A7G program is having on their lives. These were later organized to reflect either beads, a string of beads, or a beaded piece. For ‘beads’, A7G was said to create immense opportunities for youth, including job/career opportunities, networking opportunities and/or opportunities for helping others. The program identified individual strengths and skills, while also providing supports in the community (e.g., mental health supports, material supports, and navigating services). The program was able to connect youth with their culture, while also fostering friendships in a fun/enjoyable environment. In relation to a ‘string of beads’, A7G was seen as a space that accepted all individuals. They foster reciprocal relationships and demonstrated healthy communication. Through this, they were also able to talk about gender, sexuality, and race while interrupting lateral violence. Finally, themes surrounding a ‘beaded piece’ were also discussed. A7G was able to impact the community as a whole by revitalizing culture, keeping the community healthy, and building relationships with the non-indigenous community. They were able to involve others in their work and decolonize language in social service organizations.

The A7G program uses the 7 Grandfather Teachings in order to provide a safe space to interact with youth and act towards positive changes in the community. These teachings provide insight as to how the A7G program does what they do. Participants in the four interviews highlighted these teachings when describing the A7G program.

Love (Zaagi’idiwin) is demonstrated by the loving and accepting atmosphere of A7G, where participants feel safe to be themselves. Truth (Debwewin) is shown through the acknowledgement/truth of struggles facing youth today, in order make changes for the future. Honesty (Gwayakwaadiziwin) is described as a recurring theme in the program, as A7G fosters open and honest communication with all members in the program. Humility (Dabasendiziwin) is fostered in the program by prioritizing youth voice and creating a humble atmosphere. Respect (Manaaji’idiwin) was seen from participants in the form of raising awareness and having conversations. The A7G program fosters equality amongst members and respects diversity within the group. Courage and Bravery (Zoongide’ewin) is present in A7G as participants described the organization as a platform to set up and help others. Finally, wisdom (Nibwaakawin) was promoted through the presence of elders, connection to others and cultural teachings.

Overall, it is evident that the Assembly of Seven Generations program promotes an inclusive space that has a positive impact on youth. Voices from those who participated in the interviews illustrate that youth are engaged in a space where they feel immersed in their culture and connected to others.

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