

## What is Reclaiming Connections?

The co-creation of Reclaiming Connections is an ongoing collaboration among urban and rural Aboriginal communities and caregivers across British Columbia, including government stakeholders and researchers. The development of culturally sensitive and safe parenting programs for Aboriginal families is among the calls to action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Although programs are available for caregivers of young children, few address the needs of caregivers of teens. Together our goal is to co-create a new program built on the foundations of Connect, an evidence-based and relationship focused program. The Connect program was shaped through over a decade of feedback from caregivers, clinicians and community partners. Over 450 leaders have been trained in communities to lead the Connect program and it has been delivered to over 6,000 families across BC. Connect has also been offered in communities across Canada, Sweden and Italy. To date, there has been strong positive feedback from caregivers that the Connect program has been helpful to both them and their teens.

We began the process of collaborating with a number of communities in the fall of 2014, to integrate the voices of group leaders and caregivers and the heritage of Aboriginal peoples of Canada into Reclaiming Connections, recognizing and respecting the unique strengths, wisdom and cultural practices of caregiving in each community. Communities have been generous in sharing their experiences of the diverse historical effects of government policies and forced acculturation that threatened their rights and privileges to parent their children. Communities have also shared their understanding of the challenges faced by their teens and their commitment to, and ideas about, how best to support the health and well-being of their families and communities. Through their wisdom, language and connection to cultural heritage, community, and land, these conversations began the process of the co-creation of Reclaiming Connections.

In its current form, Reclaiming Connections is a 10-week program for caregivers of Aboriginal youth (ages 8-18). Honouring the diversity of the makeup of Aboriginal families and caregivers, the group meets together each week for 1.5 hours with two trained leaders. Before coming to Reclaiming Connections, caregivers meet individually with group leaders, building relations, trust, and inspiring hope and motivation. Rooted in the concepts of relationships, adolescence and parenting, each session begins with a guiding principle that relates to and supports caregiving. The program does not tell caregivers how they should parent. Through supportive open discussion and the use of role-plays and reflection exercises, caregivers generate ideas about how best to support their teen and to also balance the need for understanding, safety and guidance. In this way, Reclaiming Connections promotes the belief that relationships, connections and communication are the foundations of caregiving.

Through collaboration and partnership with all levels of community, we continue to gather information and reflect on how to make Reclaiming Connections relevant and ensure cultural sensitivity and safety. Information gathered belongs to each community and with permission, new knowledge will be shared to support the continued co-creation of the program.