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*Saskatoon Mothers' Centre:  
Supporting a Culture of Safety for  
Indigenous Women*

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# Contributors



# Disclosures

*I live in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, on Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Metis.*

*I work with Saskatoon Health Region, which is committed to “continuing to find constructive ways of implementing the Calls to Action outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada June 2015 that are relevant to health and health care”.*

*With reference to the International Code, I have no disclosures to declare.*

# Objectives

Participants will be able to assess the collaboration processes at the:

- community level, in the development of the Saskatoon Mothers' Centre (SMC).
- health region level, in supporting the SMC space to become an Indigenous women's space.
- Inter-personal level, in creating opportunities for dialogue and healing.

# Demographics: Saskatoon

Saskatoon is the largest city in the province, with a population of 250,000 with 300,000 in the metropolitan area.

Saskatoon has the youngest population among cities in the country, with a median age of 35 years.

The Indigenous population in Saskatoon is 21,340  
*Stats Canada (2011)*

# Demographics: Core Neighborhood

- Six neighborhoods with 30% of the population living below low income cutoff (LICO).

(2011, the LICO for a family of four living in an community with a population between 30,000 and 99,999 is \$30,487)

- Highest birth rate: 17% per 1000.
- 1.5 times the infant morality rate.
- Home to 25% of children aged 0-6 in the city.
- Single parents head 36% of families.
- Leading causes of hospitalization are upper respiratory tract infections , injuries and poisoning.

# Background

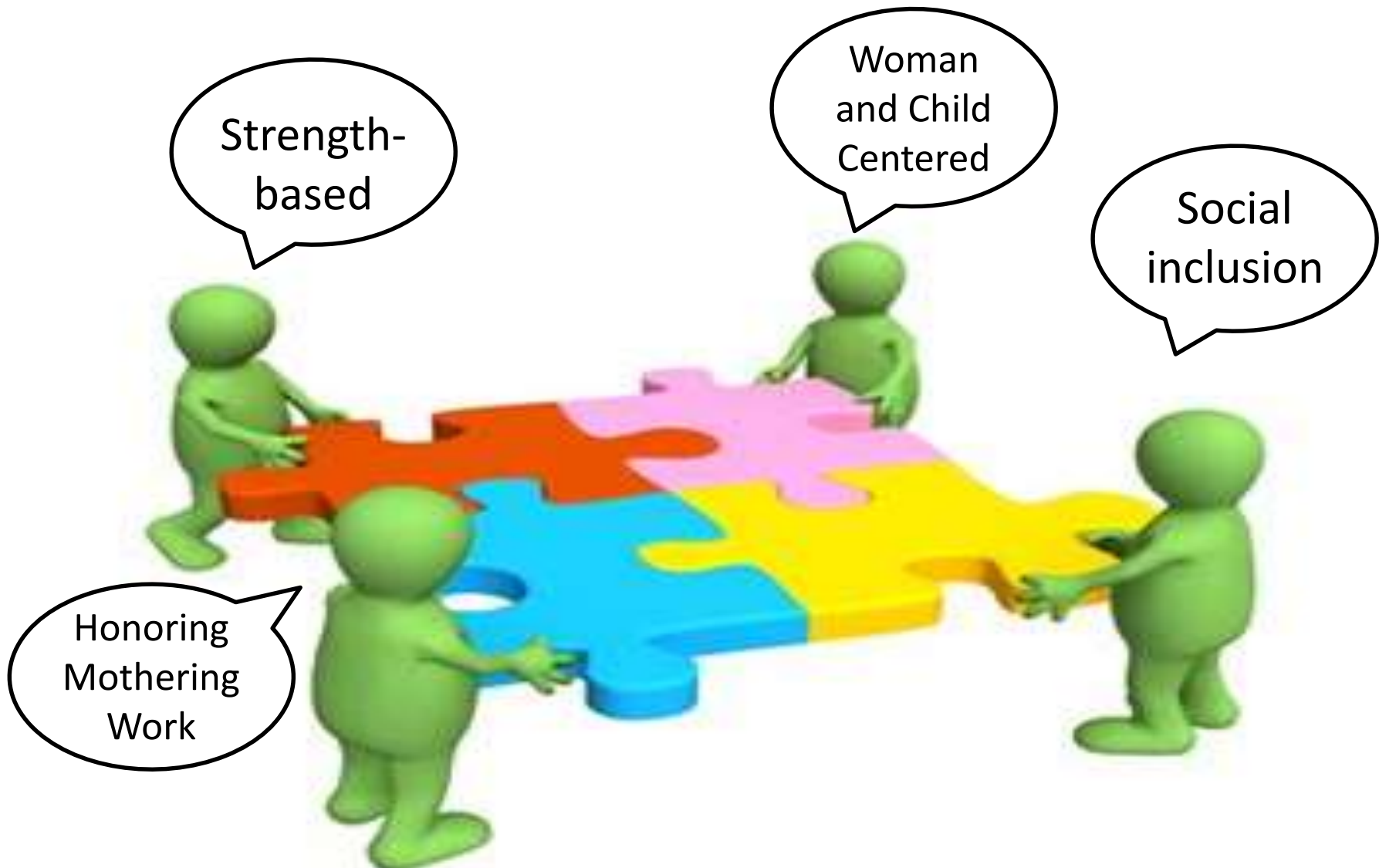
## **Creation of Saskatoon Mothers' Centre as a safe public living room for women in the core neighborhood:**

- concept promoted by Saskatoon Breastfeeding Matters
- developed and supported by Saskatoon Health Region
- located at Station 20 West in the core neighborhood
- intergenerational, women centered space
- run by an independent board of Indigenous women
- Indigenous women act as hosts, to provide hospitality to newcomers and others in the core neighborhood.

# Mothers' Centers International

- Original model is Mothers' Centre in Salzgitter-Bad Germany.
- Publicized by Belenky et al (1999) in "The Tradition That Has No Name."
- Strength-based and social entrepreneurship approach is based on MINE – Mothers International Network of Empowerment.
- Principles of the SMC align with traditional Indigenous women's ways.







***“Together we are stronger”***

**Peer and Kokum support at the Saskatoon Mothers’ Centre**

# Activities

- provision of nutritious snack and meals
- *Non-violent Communication* book club
- pre-employment skill development
- *Nobodies Perfect* parenting classes
- community social activities and events
- mother-to-mother breastfeeding peer support
- sewing circles
- talking circles for sharing and healing

# Partnerships

**The Saskatoon Mothers' Centre Board partners with the Saskatoon Health Region and other local community organizations to:**

- develop sustainable infrastructure focused on meeting needs of Indigenous women.
- support grant writing activities.
- develop peer hosting and facilitation skills.
- support nutrition and food safe preparation skills.
- support breastfeeding peer support program.

# Maternity Care Talking Circles: Background

- Birth stories shared during breastfeeding peer support sessions, include stories of trauma and racism.
- Board members collaborate with Saskatoon Breastfeeding Matters to respond by developing sharing circles.
- First session held on National Aboriginal Day.

# Maternity Care Talking Circles

- Mothers, SMC board members, the SHR director of maternal care and managers are invited to attend
- Celebration of the season changes begins with sharing of a potluck dinner
- Elders offer traditional teachings, smudging and prayers to create a sacred space
- Talking stone provides participants with space to be heard; what is said stays in the circle.

# Impacts

## **-creating a culturally safe space for dialogue and healing.**

- Indigenous women and sharing stories that speak to issues of cultural safety; being “invisible, profiled and powerless”.
- Talking Circles connect mothers with Saskatoon Health Region staff to hear birthing stories and are a catalyst to improve maternity care services.
- Saskatoon Health Region’s Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) coalition working to implement culturally responsive policies and practices in the new Saskatchewan Children’s Hospital.

# Future Directions:

- developing opportunities for social entrepreneurship, to support SMC goals of self-sufficiency and financial sustainability.
- increasing the number of Talking Circles to promote healing for women.
- engaging grandmothers in traditional parenting classes.
- providing prenatal classes for young Indigenous women and their partners.
- developing an Indigenous Doula training program.
- participating with First Nations University of Canada and University of Saskatchewan in community-based research.