

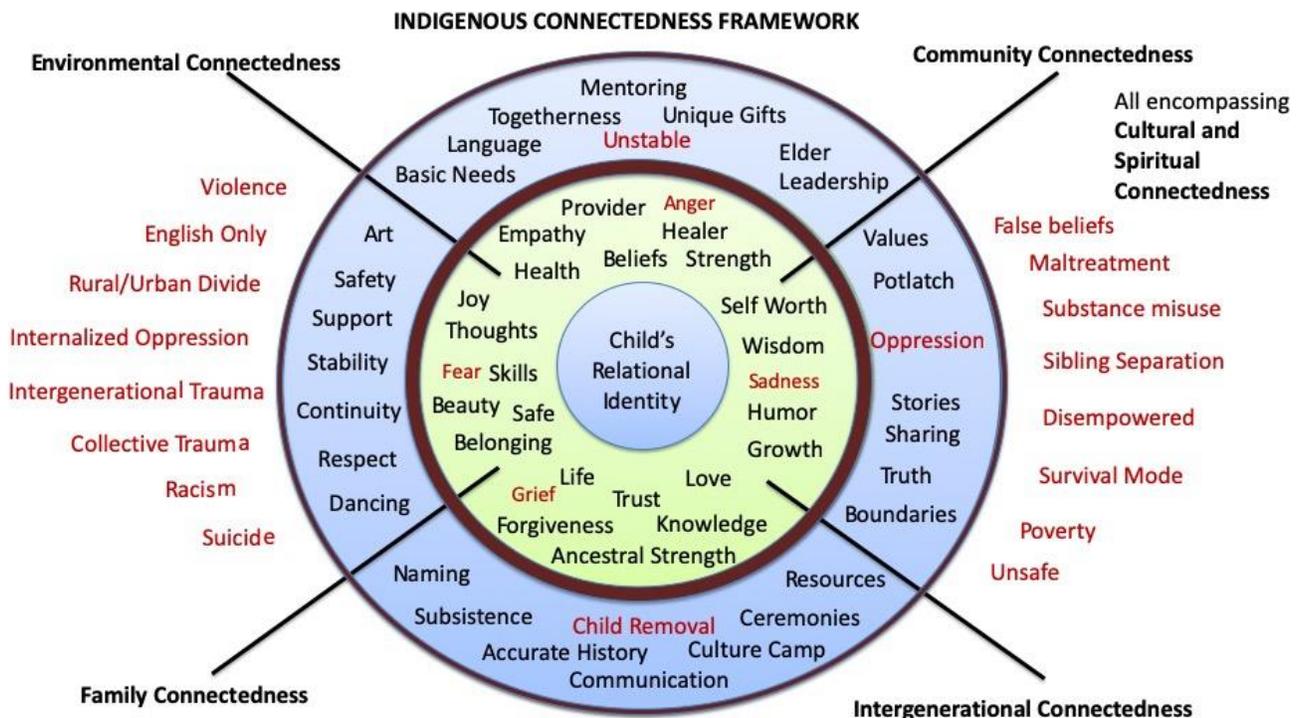
Commission on Native Children Panel

8/20/21, 4:15-6 p.m.

Biography- My name is Jessica Saniguq Ullrich, Inupiaq, MSW, PhD. I fulfill the following roles: Daughter of Cathie and Gordon (both deceased), Granddaughter of Nancy Felton (Senungetuk), Mother of Uiganna and Atqaq, Tribal member of Nome Eskimo Community, descendant of Native Village of Wales. Assistant Professor at University of Alaska Anchorage School of Social Work. Previous Alaska child welfare trainer, supervisor, ICWA specialist, and frontline social worker. Healer of my own childhood trauma. Future ancestor. I love our sacred children.

Testimony

I'm grateful for this opportunity to share what I'm learning about **what promotes the wellbeing of Indigenous children**. I attempt to capture key concepts, relationships and mechanisms of wellbeing in this Indigenous Connectedness Framework:



This updated Indigenous Connectedness Framework is based on 25 Alaska Native foster care alumni, foster parents, and relative caregivers that shared their knowledge and life experience pertaining to child wellbeing. **Children need relationships with family, community, ancestors/future generations, the environment and to culture/spirit.** When children have these connectedness relationships, it helps them *know who they are and where they come from* in order to form a relational identity. The outer blue circle captures examples of the ways these relationships are developed and maintained. The inner green circle represents the child's concept of self in relation to others. The red words on the outside are traumas, challenges and oppressions that can become forms of disconnectedness with self and others. The hope is to keep those traumas from becoming a false identity or a trauma/victim/perpetrator identity.

The following are some of the main lessons learned from the knowledge bearers:

1. **We must listen to and acknowledge the stories of trauma, pain, and oppression.** The process of relational wounding won't stop unless we truly listen to the ones with lived experience. Their wisdom and guidance can provide solutions to the issues we face.
2. **We need to discontinue the relational wounding and support relational healing.** Many Indigenous spiritual/cultural modalities provide sources of healing and strength for repairing disconnectedness.
3. **All children should know who they are and where they come from.** Indigenous Connectedness is central to the formation of a relational identity that helps us be in right relationship with ourselves and others.

Recommendations:

1. We need **relational frameworks** to guide the way policies are created, interpreted and practiced.
2. We must **listen to people with lived experience** within the systems we wish to transform.
3. In many ways, child removal compounds the trauma instead of alleviating it. **We need funding shifts to happen within child welfare** so kinship care and prevention become the norm instead of foster care and adoption.
4. **The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) should be upheld.** The Indigenous Connectedness Framework is aligned with the intention of this policy. A child removal based system will always create challenges for the achievement of ICWA's goal.
5. **The current Family First Prevention Services Act is too difficult to tap into** as a funding source because of western/colonial definitions of "evidence-based practice." Different standards need to be formed and created for tribal programs to fund their prevention efforts.

I would be happy to provide more information or references upon request.
Thank you for the work you are doing to uplift our sacred children.



Jessica Saniguq Ullrich

Email: jsullrich@alaska.edu

Phone: 907-301-2779