

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 TO 2022



FIRST PEOPLES
JUSTICE CENTER
OF MONTREAL

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BACKGROUND

The First Peoples' Justice Centre in Montreal was incorporated in January 2014, and opened its doors in the Spring of 2017.

It was created to provide a full continuum of services to support Indigenous persons in Montreal who were implicated at any stage of the justice system, including culturally appropriate and community-based prevention measures, and support during court proceedings, incarceration, and release and re-integration. This was largely in response to various studies that had revealed what many already knew, specifically that Indigenous persons are over-represented in the judicial system; they are typically embroiled and overwhelmed in a system that does not understand their circumstances and is woefully unprepared to provide a meaningful, Indigenized, rehabilitative experience leading to a balanced life.

Meanwhile, there are key court decisions that do address the specific circumstances of the Indigenous peoples of Canada, and which set out important guidelines for both judges and prosecutors. But, surprisingly few judges and prosecutors are aware of this important knowledge.

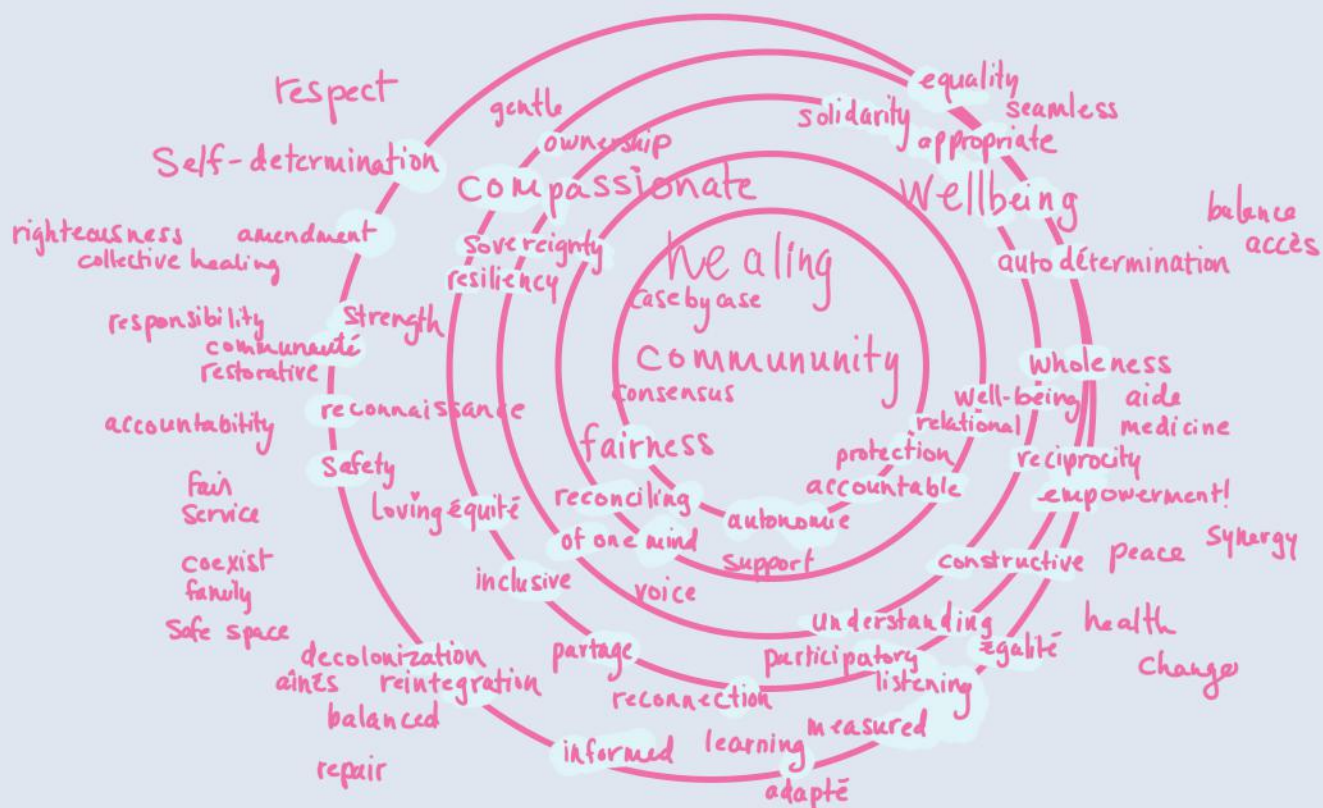
In a short period since opening its doors, the Centre hired a small team of core staff and its first Executive Director. An initial strategic plan was developed and several new program initiatives were implemented, with promising results. Funding from a variety of federal and provincial government departments was obtained, and non-government sources have been approached to support the much-needed expansion of capacity.

An initial strategic plan had been developed for the period 2018 – 2022, and steps have been taken, including expanding staff and the development of partnerships with government sponsored programs intended for Indigenous persons involved in the legal process.

While there were many promising steps, there were some important internal changes including reconfigurations on the Board and the departure of the original Executive Director. Taking into account these important developments, the Board was able to integrate valuable lessons and benefit from the original plan.

The Board and the members of the staff met in November 2018 to update the environmental scan and refine the focus of the Plan. Given the rapid speed of the developments since 2017, both externally and internally, the Board limited the new Strategic Plan to the 3-year period 2019-2022. In the fall 2019, there were several new Indigenous Board members elected during the AGM, two new staff members came on the team as well as an Elder and a cultural support to conduct healing circles, and the FPJCM launched its advisory committee, an external group of Indigenous people with experience and knowledge in different fields who could give an outside opinion and guidance on the direction and operations of the center. Then, in December 2019, the Board met again to update the draft plan and created this updated plan.

JUSTICE IS HEALING, COMMUNITY, RESPECT, WELL-BEING AND SELF-DETERMINATION.



In December 2019, the Board and staff of the FPJCM got together and here is what they felt best represented the concept of justice:



OUR VISION IS

Strong Indigenous communities that have access to Indigenous community-led justice processes rooted in decolonization, healing, respect, and Indigenous law.

OUR MISSION IS

To support, inform, and empower Indigenous people navigating the justice system and to offer holistic and culturally appropriate Indigenous justice services to the diverse Indigenous population living in Montreal.

To create alternative Indigenous community-led justice processes rooted in Indigenous values in partnership with the Indigenous community in Montreal.

OUR VALUES ARE

Respect, justice, dignity, and compassion.

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO USE OUR SERVICES:

The Indigenous people who use our services are seriously impacted from trauma resulting from the well-documented effects of Canada's history of colonialism, including the intergenerational trauma from the residential school experience.

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY:

- a) Inuit represent more than 50% of the total.
- b) Cree are the 2nd most represented group.

GENDER:

about 50/50 men and women, with slightly more men. The FPJCM has served several people who identify as trans or two-spirit.

AGE RANGE:

- a) Men: 25 – 38
- b) Women: 25 – 55, with a greater number more towards the higher age

Many of these persons have had previous experiences under government care programs, including Youth Protection and especially foster care. For many, this has obviously been a negative and harmful experience, often outside of their community and cultural context.

Language proficiency: predominantly Inuktitut and English, with some French.

Social status: many are parents with children, but most are not living with their children.

Many have challenges with substance use and most have housing issues, or are in homeless situations. Few have any meaningful employment history. Most have had frequent issues with the justice system in their recent past, including as victims/survivors. Several have been, or are, involved in sex work.

IMPROVING OUR KNOWLEDGE OF OUR SERVICES USERS:

To better serve our community and to identify ongoing needs for systemic change, it is important for the FPJCM to improve our data-collect and evaluation frameworks. This plan calls for increased data-collection, as well as to explore the ways in which we collect data and do research, valuing our Indigenous service-users and incorporating respectful, Indigenous practices into our research methods.

Our service users must be the primary beneficiary of having good data, including both individual data and collective data.

Ideally, data gathering will continue for an extended period after the person leaves the justice system to gather knowledge on recidivism, systemic barriers, healing, and resiliency.

WE WILL BE INCREASING DATA-COLLECTION ON:

1. Gender.
2. Age.
3. Nation: which nations and communities are they coming from? How long have they been in Montreal? Why are they here?
4. Involvement with government care (foster care), with as much related data as possible, i.e. in an Indigenous home or non-Indigenous; for what period of their lives?
5. Languages used most regularly.
6. Social status, especially the situation of single parents, including how many children and where they are. Also, their social network and chosen families in Montreal.
7. Health status, including substance use, wellbeing and other issues.
8. Housing status.
9. History of involvement with the justice system.
10. Current source(s) of income.
11. Academic achievement, including employment training and relevant life experience.
12. Employment history and lived experience.
13. Life goal(s)

The Centre's current data is, as stated, very preliminary and derived mostly from direct contact with our service users.

It is believed that there are many Indigenous persons in the greater Montreal area that are already implicated in the justice system that are unknown to the Centre, and who do not know about the Centre or the unique services we offer. This includes many who are currently incarcerated.

It is a strategic objective of this Plan to begin gathering the data that will provide the Centre with a valid, up-to-date profile of the full demographic of Indigenous persons in the justice system in Montreal, and more specifically where they are in the system, including incarceration.

This information will also enable the Centre to position its services at key intervention points to better help these persons, like those placed on probation and those being released from prison, or first-time offenders.

INFORMATION T I O N SHARING WITH KEY PARTNERS

To provide the best possible options for the community, the Centre works with several partners, including various funders. While ensuring full respect for and protection of privacy and confidentiality, there are still numerous ways in which very pertinent data can be developed and shared among key partners as a basis for continuous improvement in coordinated support services for the beneficiaries. This is also an important consideration in developing the required data.

THE FPJCM'S STAKEHOLDERS

THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY OF MONTREAL

The Indigenous community of Montreal is diverse and resilient. Indigenous peoples value their families, including chosen families, as difficult as some of these relationships may be. These challenges often result from intergenerational trauma.

In the case of many of our service users, their family is not present; they are often back in their communities or there may be alienation stemming from histories of violence. When possible and with the willing consent of our service users, the FPJCM involves the families to support our clientele to work towards health and balance as they define it.

The Indigenous community which we serve uses services such as the Native Friendship Centre and Projets Autochtones du Quebec (PAQ) to find community. This plan calls for ongoing collaboration with local services for the benefit of our clientele.

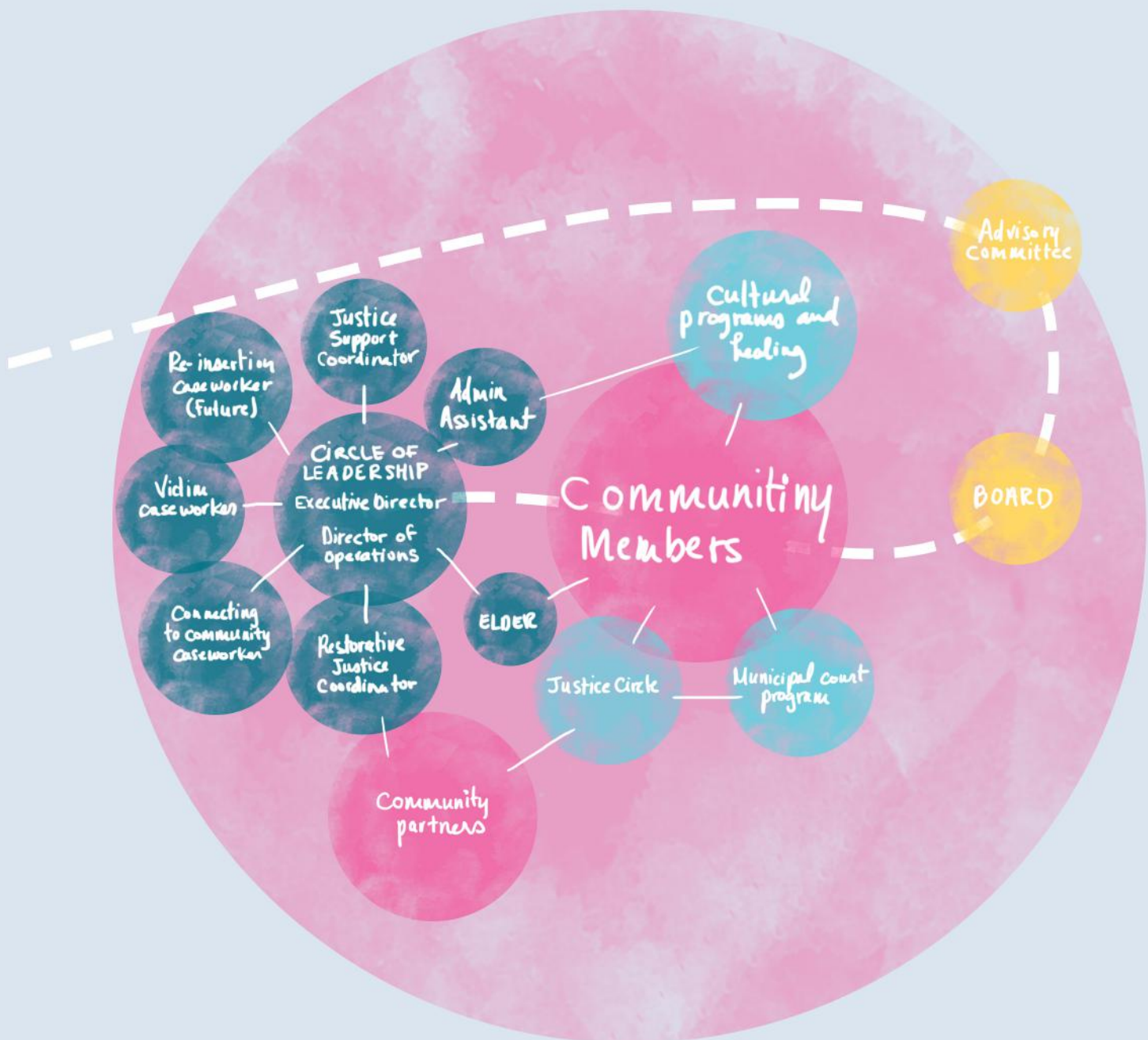
GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

The contributions of sustainable funding from all three (3) levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal, is critical to the work and success of the Centre. In the future, the FPJCM will work in collaboration with Justice Quebec to develop a diversion program at the provincial court.

THE JUSTICE SYSTEMS

The overwhelming number of the FPJCM's service users deal with the municipal justice system due to a disproportionate amount of ticketing by the SPVM and STM and minor criminal matters. It is critical to the wellbeing of our clientele that the FPJCM work in close collaboration with this justice system. Furthermore, a key part of this plan is to increase restorative and alternative options for Indigenous people going through the federal and provincial justice system.

OUR PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH TO OUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:



ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

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THE OPPORTUNITIES

I. A more informed, knowledgeable and supportive environment within the justice system and non-Indigenous sector:

Thanks to the good work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its Report, especially calls to action #27–32, 36-38, 40 and 42, there is an evident desire among a growing number of persons, including those in the justice system, to develop better outcomes for Indigenous persons in the justice system, including in Montreal.

In Quebec, the release of the report of the Viens Commission calls for many changes in the justice system to improve the lives of Indigenous people in this province.

THE EFFECT IS FURTHER ENHANCED WITH CANADA'S SIGNING OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (UNDRIP).

I. There is more openness and willingness in the courts to be educated and to develop and adopt Indigenized options that can provide more appropriate and effective solutions, including an alternative Indigenous justice system and a designated Indigenized court (TRC #42).

II. The Centre can educate the judges, prosecutors and lawyers dealing with Indigenous cases.

III. The Ministries of Justice and Public Security are open to better solutions to over incarceration.

IV. Local educational institutions to partner with Indigenous groups and the community in these types of initiatives.

2. Emerging legal decisions and directives: the courts, including the Supreme Court, are showing a better understanding of the history and realities of Indigenous persons in Canada and setting forth more appropriate guidelines and obligations for the courts with regards to Indigenous persons, such as the Gladue decision. There is an opportunity for the FPJCM to undertake a better education of judges and prosecutors in Montreal to be better equipped with these tools.

3. The Centre's track record and image in the community is positive: The FPJCM has made significant and effective progress in its short history, and this is helping establish its credibility as the key resource for its targeted beneficiaries, and with other key stakeholders, including funders.

4. Increased staff and stability: In recent months, the FPJCM's total staff has grown and the FPJCM began working regularly with an Elder to provide support to staff and clientele. The FPJCM's leadership has taken steps towards improving retention of staff by clarifying and simplifying workplans and roles, allowing paid time for personal development such as personal therapeutic work, and encouraging a better work-life balance to prevent burnout. Having increased staff also takes the burden off of the existing staff by making workloads more reasonable. This also means that the FPJCM can provide more and better services to its clientele, including a caseworker dedicated to community service hours and another dedicated to working with victims of past harms.

5. Indigenous leadership and framework of the FPJCM: This includes either hiring one Indigenous Executive Director or splitting the leadership role to create a more circular model at the top. This also means relying on Elders and the Advisory Committee for guidance. Having more of an Indigenous framework also means more cultural programming, including land-based healing.

6. Funding: TRC call to action #31 specifically calls for federal and provincial governments "to provide sufficient and stable funding" to support community actions that "will provide realistic alternatives to imprisonment" for Indigenous persons.

There are opportunities for more funding, including from new sources who want to invest in innovative and Indigenous processes leading to better outcomes for Indigenous persons and communities. The Centre is the lead organization for those involved in the justice system in Montreal.



7. Information technologies: The Centre can use information technologies to inform and to network with beneficiaries and partners on a timely, user-friendly basis.

The Centre could have key information made available and provided in home communities to better inform and equip persons before they move to Montreal.

8. Learn from and share with others: The Centre is already actively looking at what other organizations are doing in Canada, and will continue to exchange with and learn from the successful initiatives and innovations in other provinces and communities.

9. Academic partnerships: Most universities, law schools and law societies take seriously the calls to action from the TRC, including #27 and 28, to ensure lawyers receive proper cultural and legal training to better equip them to deal with and participate in the changes necessary to ensure just outcomes for Indigenous persons.

The Centre has good opportunities to contribute to, and benefit from these initiatives, including partnering with local law schools to better educate judges and prosecutors.

10. Partners in social innovation: The McConnell Foundation, and others, have taken a sincere interest in contributing their expertise and considerable resources to Indigenous organizations who are seeking innovative social solutions in addressing Canada's relations with Indigenous persons and communities, including those involved in a culturally impoverished justice system.

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1. Knowing our community: As identified above, the FPJCM needs to develop and maintain a relevant, accurate, timely and user-friendly data bank covering its current and potential clientele, including the large numbers with whom it has no direct contact so far, e.g. those in corrections institutions. This will require establishing trustworthy agreements and protocols with various organizations.

2. Connectedness: It is not enough to know who the beneficiaries are; they also need to know who the Centre is and what it can do with and for them. The Centre needs user-friendly, timely ways to establish and maintain connectedness.

3. Partnerships: Given the complexity of the situation of many community members and the scarcity of resources, the Centre needs to continue to develop and sustain highly effective, mutually beneficial partnerships with key partners, especially within the Indigenous community in Montreal and with the justice system.

4. Changing mind-sets: Notwithstanding the growing understanding and awareness among many, there is a major need to address the understanding and mind-set of some judges and prosecutors so they can better understand and become more effective in producing better restorative outcomes for community members.

5. Building allyship: As with all change, it is a challenge to convince key partners, including funders, to buy-in and invest in better options with and for the beneficiaries, and for everyone's benefit.

6. Social and racial profiling: Due in part to ignorance and prevailing beliefs, social and racial profiling continues to be all too pervasive including in the justice system, prisons, and in the larger community. The Montreal police force (SPVM) and security in the metro system (STM) continue to regularly profile the Indigenous community.

7. Populism, public ignorance and indifference: The general ignorance and apathy of the public, and the rise of populism is a growing concern. Poorly informed citizens fear change and difference.

8. Implementation: The implementation of this relevant and ambitious Plan will be a considerable challenge, including effective, mutually-beneficial collaboration with key partners.

9. Stability: There is a challenge of maintaining stability for the FPJCM, particularly with regards to staff retention, ensuring that there is always someone on the staff who can write funding proposals and reports and manage finances. Ensuring there is knowledge transfer and that new staff maintain the values and vision of the organization.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

PRIORITY ONE:

Empowering Indigenous people to navigate the existing justice system

Actions:

- 1.** Increase healing and culture-based programs, including land-based programming.
- 2.** Develop and expand holistic services along the continuum of the justice process from prevention to assistance to victims/survivors, and support to those who are incarcerated.
Build reintegration and aftercare program, increase culture programming, and increase the number of staff working on diversion.
- 3.** Develop meaningful partnerships with other service providers in order to fill in gaps in services and avoid duplication of services.
- 4.** Improve data-collection and evaluation of our services and needs of our clientele. Increased knowledge of Indigenous people in the justice system in Montreal, whether or not they are already an existing clientele of the FPJCM. Partner with relevant existing research projects that also fulfill our needs and interest including Celine Bellot's research on profiling at the Université de Montréal and
- 5.** Advocate for needed systemic change, through training, committee work, and partnerships with a focus on public institutions and the SPVM.

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PRIORITY TWO:

Indigenizing and culturally-adapting the justice system

Actions:

1. Build a justice circle with Indigenous community members.
2. Increase diversion from the court system to the FPJCM.
3. Improve relationships with judicial actors at provincial and federal levels.
4. Awareness and education of judicial actors on Indigenous realities.
5. Consolidate the specialized Indigenous court process at the Municipal Court.
6. Carry out a consultation process with our clientele.
7. Participate on working committees focused on law reform and justice alternatives.

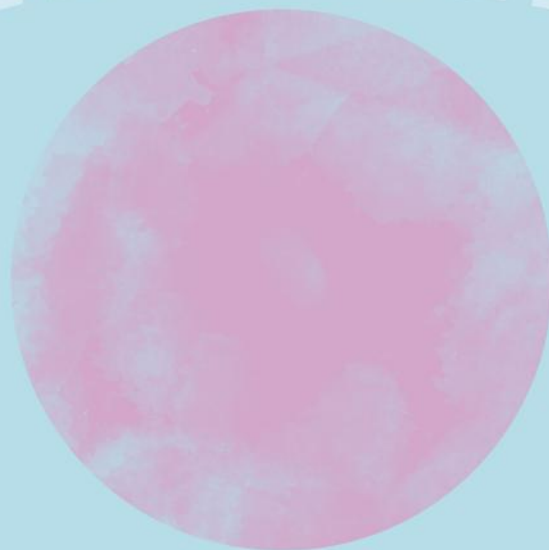
PRIORITY THREE: THE CREATION OF AN INDIGENOUS JUSTICE MODEL

Actions:

- 1.** Develop Indigenous organizational structure at the FPJCM. This may mean having one Indigenous Executive Director, or a more circular model of leadership with a general director and director of operations with guidance from Elders, the advisory committee, and the Board.
- 2.** Increase healing and culture programs, including land-based programs and ceremony. Increase Elder presence at the FPJCM up to one or two days per week.
- 3.** Explore and define Indigenous justice with the help of community, local Elders, board, and advisory committee.
- 4.** Involve community members in this process.
- 5.** Learn from other communities who have successfully implemented Indigenous justice models.

PRIORITY FOUR: IMPROVE THE FPJCM'S INTERNAL GOVERNANCE, STABILITY AND STRUCTURE

- 1.** Develop and formalize fair and effective internal governance policies, including human resources, financial, and board policies, as well as updating ByLaws as needed.
- 2.** Improve the election processes and transition for Board members.
- 3.** Improve stability, capacity, and commitment of personnel, including staff retention, ensure yearly salary increase to account for cost of living and employee motivation, health and mental health benefits, stability within the management of finances, and the hiring of Indigenous leadership.
- 4.** Continue working with the Advisory Committee to ensure commitment to Indigenizing the FPJCM and working within Indigenous frameworks and values.
- 5.** Explore options and ultimately find a larger office space for the growing Centre that suits the needs of the community and mandate.
- 6.** Diversify funding and revenue sources, and increase fundraising now that the Centre has charity status.



FPJCM