

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Wicubami: Honoring Alexis Nakota Sioux Ish?awimin through Kinship, Language, Spirit, and Research

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4m33f6bc>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 41(1)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Authors**

Ruttan, Lia  
Letendre, Sherry  
Letendre, Elizabeth  
et al.

**Publication Date**

2017

**DOI**

10.17953/aicrj.41.1.ruttan

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

# *Wicubami*: Honoring Alexis Nakota Sioux *Ish?awimin* through Kinship, Language, Spirit, and Research

*Lia Ruttan, Sherry Letendre, Elizabeth Letendre, Tanja Schramm-Trethowan, Fay Fletcher, Lola Baydala, and Stephanie Worrell*

The polite exchange of kinship terms of address is the outward and “visible” sign of mutual understanding, and acceptance of one’s obligation to the other. As such it is the indispensable preliminary for a successful association. At the same time it seems to bespeak wordlessly the other’s goodwill. And in that sense it is a prayer.

—Ella Cara Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life*

---

LIA RUTTAN is an independent scholar and sessional instructor. She works primarily with Aboriginal peoples in central Alberta and the Northwest Territories (Nakota, Cree, Dene, Métis), in projects that use a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. SHERRY LETENDRE (Alexis Nakota Sioux) is coordinator for the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation (ANSN) Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Network Collaborative Project and previously has served the ANSN in several departments, including Education and Heritage. Her aim through her work is to support her mother’s prayers for the community. ELIZABETH LETENDRE (Alexis Nakota Sioux), is an ANSN band councillor, former director of Education and the current director of the Administration, Heritage & Recreation Department. In all that she carries out, her ongoing focus is on fulfilling her parents’ vision for the community, especially for the children at the school. As the project coordinator for the Alexis Nakota Heritage Program during the years of the Nimi Ichinohabi Program, TANJA SCHRAMM-TRETHOWAN worked on program delivery and research. She currently teaches at the School of Environmental Sciences at Charles Sturt University, New South Wales, Australia. FAY FLETCHER is the associate dean of academic and student affairs for the University of Alberta Faculty of Extension. Her research involves health and wellness-related CBPR projects with Nakota, Cree, and Métis communities in central Alberta. LOLA BAYDALA is an associate professor of pediatrics and community engagement for the University of Alberta Faculty of Medicine. Her research focuses on using CBPR to carry out health research with Aboriginal communities (Nakota, Cree) and her work with Aboriginal communities has received award recognition. STEPHANIE WORRELL, a registered psychologist for Edmonton Catholic School District, has coordinated the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation Nimi Ichinohabi (Our Way of Life) Program.

This essay is meant to serve as an honor song for the *Ish?awimin* (Elders) from the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, without whose blessings and teachings our learning and research would not have been possible, particularly Bella Alexis, Rosalie Alexis, Stanley Alexis, Angela Jones, Effie Kootenay, Helen Letendre, and Nancy and Paul Potts. We describe their contributions to a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project on substance abuse prevention for the *doshgamin* (children) at the community school. The involvement of the *Ish?awimin* was grounded in the values and responsibilities they carry with them. Our purpose is to *wicubami*, to honor the *Ish?awimin* highly, to honor them, as in an honor song. We honor the purpose and vision embedded in the spirit, wisdom, and leadership they carry with them. We illustrate here how the teachings and blessings of the *Ish?awimin* affected the research experience. They deepened the meaning of the school-based substance abuse prevention program, culturally adapted by the *Ish?awimin* and delivered to the *doshgamin* who participated in this study.<sup>1</sup>

The principle of *wicubami*, highlighted in the title of this essay, refers to acts of honoring the *Ish?awimin* and others held in especially high regard. Our first purpose in writing is to *wicubami*, to honor the *Ish?awimin* highly, including those who went before.<sup>2</sup> On behalf of their *daguciyabi* (relatives), particularly the *doshgamin*, they were essential to the development, delivery, and success of the program.<sup>3</sup> Through relationships and activities that honored the *Ish?awimin*, including the writing of this essay, we respectfully attempt to fulfill our responsibility to return the teachings they shared.<sup>4</sup> In doing so we also honor their *dagucawa* (relatives) and the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation as a people.

Our second objective is to share their teachings with other community members, especially those who pursue academic work now or in the future.<sup>5</sup> By relying on the words, values and practices of their *dagucawa*, we hope this essay may serve as a resource for Nakota Sioux college and university students, as well as future researchers. Our third objective is to present our experience, our learning journey, to academics, both indigenous and non-indigenous, in a way that promotes respectful and productive work with *Ish?awimin* of this and other First Nations, while being fully cognizant of the need to explore and respect social, cultural, and environmental differences between nations. In carrying out these objectives we will illustrate how achieving our goals required ongoing co-learning, exchange, and mutual capacity-building between *Ish?awimin*, community members, and the entire research team.<sup>6</sup>

### DAGUCIYAMI (OUR RELATIVES): THE ALEXIS NAKOTA SIOUX NATION

The Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation is located one hundred kilometers northeast of the Canadian city of Edmonton, Alberta, on the shores of *Wakamne* (Sacred Lake), also known as Lac St. Anne.<sup>7</sup> The Alexis Nakota Sioux are the most northwesterly group of Siouan-speaking peoples. Entering Treaty 6 with the Canadian government in 1876, a reserve was established in the current location with three additional parcels of land added more recently. There are nearly 2,000 members of the nation, living both on the reserve, in nearby towns, and in the city of Edmonton. Once relying

on hunting, fishing, trapping, and small farming, today employment is found in the administration of the nation, a casino and gas bar, and other economic development partnerships. Governance processes operate according to Canadian Indian Act regulation and include a chief and council, supplementary departments, and staff members.<sup>8</sup> Guidance by *Ish?awimin*, through an Elders Senate, is important in decision-making. Currently, the nation operates its own education department, including the community school (K–10).

From the early 1900s to the 1990s, many Nakota *doshgamin* attended residential schools or, in later years, public schools in nearby towns. In the residential schools *doshgamin* experienced often harsh and always regimented conditions while receiving far from adequate education and nutrition. *Ish?awimin* still remember being punished, often abusively, for speaking their language at the schools. Later a day school was operated for elementary students but students in higher grades were bused to public schools in local communities, as they still are, where they often felt uneasy, unwanted, and shamed. The residential school system, removal of *doshgamin* from families and their placement in the child welfare system, attempts to reframe indigenous identities and autonomy as defined in Canadian law, legal restrictions imposed by the Indian Act, the influence of liquor laws, the heightened experience of incarceration, and the restriction of movement off-reserve as well as the imposition of hunting and fishing regulations, all contributed to the community's experience of social and economic hardships, loss of autonomy, and related health disparities.

## BACKGROUND: THE NIMI ICINOHABI RESEARCH PROJECT STARTING POINTS

We prioritized community research goals and protocol throughout our work with the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, including the initial organization, cultural adaptation, delivery, and evaluation of a culturally relevant version of the Botvin Life Skills Training (LST) Program at the community school.<sup>9</sup> The intent of this study, initiated by community education leaders through existing contact with one of the academic researchers and approved by *Ish?awimin* and leaders, was to look for strategies that would contribute to the prevention of substance use and abuse. It was hoped that doing so would reduce future cases of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). We decided to use the LST program, an evidence-based, substance abuse prevention project aimed at increasing knowledge, self-confidence and resistance skills, which was also suitable for cultural adaptation.<sup>10</sup> It is delivered in school settings to grades 3 through 5 and grades 6, 7, and 9. The program material for each year had to be adapted to represent and include Nakota language and concepts along with the LST material. The *Ish?awimin* were heavily involved in this effort.

Rooted in both the support and direction of *Ish?awimin* and the principles of CBPR, our all-woman research team included six members: three community-based and three university-based. The community-based team members included two Nakota participants and a Caucasian woman, a *daguwa* (relative) who worked for the nation and whose child is a member. The university-based team members have Euro-Canadian backgrounds; two have connections to the community as well as

other indigenous communities. Additional university faculty and staff were involved in an early one-year pilot project, for which another Nakota woman served as a team member and facilitator. Others from the community contributed in various ways, including participation in a community meeting and focus groups, as language consultants, or in activities held at the school.

## THE NIMI ICINOHABI (OUR WAY OF LIFE) PROGRAM: ETHICS AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The revised program delivered at the Alexis Nakota School was called the Nimi Icinohabi (Our Way of Life) Program. As a team, we worked together in monthly meetings to address regular planning needs and, importantly, to explore any trust or communication issues, as well as university processes, including the requirements of ethics review, which were sometimes experienced as disrespectful. For example, one of the community-based team members offered tobacco to the *Ish?awimin* to attend our first meeting; when asked at the meeting to sign consent forms they indicated they had already given consent by accepting tobacco and by their presence; they “didn’t need to sign a paper.”<sup>11</sup> We went back to the ethics review committee and received permission to use their own forms of consent. Finally, community-based and university-based team members knew each other well after working with each other for over five years. Together we published a series of articles on program results and another set on how we addressed these and other ethical challenges that arose in carrying out the informed consent process.<sup>12</sup>

The impacts and practice of colonization are often experienced and mirrored in research practice. During the Nimi Icinohabi Program, we relied on research methodology that actively chooses *not* to replicate colonial practices and relationships.<sup>13</sup> Achieving these goals required ongoing co-learning, capacity-building, and mutual exchange between *Ish?awimin*, community members and the research team. Prior to the development of the study, the existing relationship of one of the principal investigators, a pediatrician involved in assessing special needs children, resulted in discussion with community education and health leaders regarding FASD prevention. A recommendation to seek research funding to address this issue was made. *Ish?awimin* were given tobacco protocol by these same community members and asked whether they believed we should go ahead, and, if so, would they assist us with the project. Following their approval, a similar request was made to the chief and council, who supported the project through a Band Council Resolution.<sup>14</sup>

During the process of cultural adaptation, including Nakota language use and activities based in cultural perspectives, *Ish?awimin* worked together regularly. With the assistance of a Nakota language instructor and another school staff member, they chose key cultural principles, teachings, activities, and language terms, a process that took considerable effort and discussion. For example, instead of referring to “dealing with stress,” as the LST program does, the *Ish?awimin* recommended using the concept of *tauci negedekébi* (healing the worried mind), accompanied by traditional teachings and activities while maintaining key components from the core LST program. In another

instance, the material on tobacco was broadened to differentiate the healthy uses of *idukabi* (tobacco) for cultural and ceremonial purposes versus harmful uses; cigarettes and other commercial forms were referred to as *idukabi nanabsi* (poisoned tobacco).

### *Evaluation and Results*

At the outset, a workshop attended by community members, parents, leaders, school employees, and *Ish?awimin* regarding the program and best practices for delivery by community facilitators was led by an LST trainer. It was followed by an additional day used to discuss the cultural adaptation process. As planned in the initial funding proposals, program evaluation took place through focus groups with *Ish?awimin*, facilitators and school personnel, and *doshgamin*. Following delivery of a one-year pilot project, we made use of our initial learnings and suggestions from evaluation activities to revise and further develop the Nimi Icinohabi Program material for subsequent delivery years. Similar evaluation activities were held annually. The *Ish?awimin* continued their work on curriculum material for delivery to students as they progressed through higher grades. Over an additional three-year delivery period the entire program was developed and delivered.<sup>15</sup>

To briefly summarize our results, we found, as have others, that community-led cultural adaptation can be a viable approach to program delivery with First Nations and other indigenous peoples.<sup>16</sup> We were able to bridge past mistrust of academic researchers through talking openly about this issue at team meetings and by developing relations—becoming kin. The CBPR approach was reported to be effective; it was mentioned frequently by community-based researchers as close to their own Nakota values. As part of the LST program students completed recall measures annually. They remembered the substance use prevention material taught and made gains in cultural awareness and understanding of the language used in the program. Students indicated in focus groups that they especially enjoyed the cultural aspects and the presence of *Ish?awimin* in the classroom. The *Ish?awimin* indicated that they noticed the *doshgamin* using language terms for greetings and to refer to *dagucawa* with increasing frequency, whether they met them in the school or the community. While not a goal of the program per se, they also noticed that some *doshgamin* had begun participation in ceremonies and found their involvement meaningful.<sup>17</sup>

### “AWACI” (THINK ABOUT IT): METHOD, DATA ANALYSIS, AND WRITING

The impetus for this essay came from the growing awareness of academic team members, as informed by community-based team members, of the importance of the practice of *wicubami*—of honoring others highly—particularly the *Ish?awimin*, who contributed so much. Soon after a ceremony held at the school to honor both the *Ish?awimin* who guided us and the *doshgamin* who completed the program, it was suggested that writing this essay was something more we could do. Tobacco was offered to two of the community-based researchers: they were asked if they thought writing this essay was a good thing to do to further engage in acts of *wicubami* on behalf of the *Ish?awimin*. They agreed this was a good suggestion; we then submitted the idea

to the entire research team who approved the writing of this essay. In addition to data from the earlier Elders' focus groups, built into evaluation of the delivery, for this commentary we also include data from two final focus groups held with the research team in order to discuss the contributions made by *Ish?awimin* to the project.<sup>18</sup> Prior to its submission this essay was reviewed with the *Ish?awimin*, who gave their approval.

A subgroup of the overall research team reviewed the data, the progress of the essay, and ensured proper Nakota language usage and cultural interpretation. Throughout, we were mindful of the importance of cultural protocol and values, of *wacigebi* (the act of prayer), appropriate language use, and the understanding that engaging with *Ish?awimin* and their teachings is *wakâ* (of a sacred nature). It was important to use culturally informed methods of analysis to avoid misinterpretation or misuse of information. Thus, we used an engaged and relational method which, as stressed by community researchers, emphasized one's ability to make kin, to *awakda?ucen* (to be watchful), and an analytical process that required us to *awacicen* (to think about it) in depth and together.<sup>19</sup> Thus, multiple versions of the paper and considerable discussion of language and concepts were required. We spent more time on this paper than any of the others we wrote. Community researchers explained this was not surprising; it was necessary in order to get the words right. They stressed the "heavy responsibility . . . to accurately represent and not misrepresent Alexis Nakota values, beliefs, and language," emphasizing that, "if done correctly it could be a powerful and meaningful writing that we produced together."<sup>20</sup> This proved to be the case.

Being open to the power of the Nakota words used and true to the intentions of the *Ish?awimin* was required, leading to reliance on a process that was itself *wakâ* (sacred). This included asking for help through smudging, *wacigebi* (the act of prayer), and spiritual guidance. In this nation, while community-based team members/researchers and *Ish?awimin* did not want to have their names used in direct quotations, they were comfortable having their names used in culturally appropriate forms of honoring. They viewed the knowledge shared as representing not only their own wisdom, but also as acts of *wicubami* (honoring) "those who went before" (passed on), who contributed for the benefit of all their *daguwawa* (relatives) their collectively held knowledge.<sup>21</sup> We have used direct quotation frequently throughout this paper, more than is typical in academic papers. We rely on these words in a similar fashion to the referencing used in Nakota oral knowledge systems. We also *wicubami* the power of the words and their ability to say what needs to be said, in a spiritual and relational connection, available for readers in a more meaningful manner than can be communicated through Western modes of paraphrasing.

We met with the *Ish?awimin* just prior to submitting this paper. *Wacigebina* (after prayer) one of the community-based researchers asked if they wanted to see any changes in the paper and its message. She took them through a discussion of the key values we included and described how the paper would be sent out for publication. Later, other community members, relatives, and the chief, also a *daguwawa*, shared a meal with us and contributed further to the discussion and honoring process.



## ISH?AWIMIN: OUR KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

The *Ish?awimin* who worked on this project are known for their unique abilities and gifts. One was known for quietly helping families through difficult times, another as a gifted storyteller, and others as knowledgeable about community history. One woman is a ceremonial singer, while others were known for trapping and bush skills, or for taking in community children who needed care. The *Ish?awimin* not only worked hard when raising their own children, but most were raising or had raised grandchildren. Many of them shared the gift of humor; others are appreciated for speaking up when directness is needed. All could speak languages besides their own, including Cree, French, and English, but all preferred to speak in “the tongue they were given” and frequently did so at research activities, focus groups, and other meetings.<sup>22</sup> They possessed a strong sense of their own *xamcashda* (identity), despite what they had experienced in residential schools, and they emphasized the importance of children learning the language, an aspect of knowing who they were.

*Ish?awimin* approved the project at the outset; decisions that affect the community are usually made with the benefit of their knowledge. As described by a community researcher, they “are always present when there’s something to decide . . . anything they do, they bring them . . . you learn that somebody’s older than you, you just respect them . . . it’s just embedded in us.”<sup>23</sup> Respect for *Ish?awimin* is based in the significance of their shared knowledge and children are encouraged to listen. Community-based team members had been taught that “somebody that has lived longer than you, that has gone through more than you—knows more than you . . . you would be foolish not to respect their knowledge.”<sup>24</sup> *Ish?awimin* asserted their responsibility by emphasizing the importance of community ownership in the project because “it will be us that done it.”<sup>25</sup> This meant that we needed to follow their direction. For example, in one instance, academic researchers, attempting to meet university and funding deadlines, pushed to proceed too rapidly. Speaking for all, one of the *Ish?awimin* asked the researcher, “What, are you on a racetrack?”<sup>26</sup> In doing so, she brought the process back in line with community standards and intent. Pride in and ownership of their work on the cultural adaptation and delivery of the *Nimi Icinohabi* program was strong. As this same woman indicated, “if we do this work [ourselves], it will help tell them [the children] who we are, where I belong.”<sup>27</sup>

The direction of *Ish?awimin* during the *Nimi Icinohabi* Program was tied to the values, lifeways, language, and self-identified needs of the Alexis Nakota Sioux people in ways that furthered results and learning for all involved. Through their prayers and presence in the classroom, the *Ish?awimin* grounded the *doshgamin* in the classroom teachings. Their initial and ongoing approval of the project ensured support by leaders and parents and validated the community-based team members’ participation in the project. It also deepened the understanding by academic research team members of kinship and spirit in research and placed what we were doing in the context of *waká*. *Ish?awimin* made sure essential values, knowledge, and actions were integral to what we did and how we did it. They wanted their *dagucawa* to have this knowledge “for



their people to live,” for their people to “*gigdabicen*, to wake up,” and for their people to “know who they are.”<sup>28</sup>

## ISH?AWIMIN, NAKOTA LANGUAGE AND CONCEPTS, AND THE RESEARCH TEAM

Currently, most middle-aged and older people speak their language. *Ish?awimin* describe the language as a gift from Ade Wakâ (the Creator), embodying all that is fundamental to the *xamcashda* (identity) of the people.<sup>29</sup> In this way it is considered a high priority by the *Ish?awimin*, essential to the future of the *doshgamin*. The community has worked extensively with *Ish?awimin* and linguists to develop a language program for the community school. Language classes delivered by fluent speakers and supplemental programs such as the Nimi Icinohabi Program are delivered. The current research success is rooted in the earlier achievements of the language program, a community-university research partnership directed by Alexis *Ish?awimin*.<sup>30</sup>

Although ten *Ish?awimin* worked on and directly influenced the research project and curriculum development, given the collective nature of community knowledge, the term *Ish?awimin* implies respect for, and contributions by, other current *Ish?awimin* and those that went before as well. At their request, we don't reference personal names in the many quotations from *Ish?awimin* and community-based researchers.<sup>31</sup> In person we referred to the *Ish?awimin* by either correct kinship terms in Nakota, or in English, as “Grandma” or “Grandpa,” followed by their personal names. By making kin, throughout the research project and the writing of this paper, we honor the *Ish?awimin* and also all their relations.

We rely on and honor many of the key words and concepts emphasized in the language. These words are alive with spirit, knowledge, and kinship and influenced the learning of all research team members over the course of the research.<sup>32</sup> Nakota words of respect, greeting, relationship, and appreciation were used from the outset by community-based researchers in all meetings and communications; over time, they were adopted by the rest of the team. Prayers by the *Ish?awimin* or Nakota team members were offered in the Nakota language at all meetings. Nakota speakers on our research team used the language in meetings to discuss complex issues and then translated their thoughts into English. Through the more complex Nakota concepts chosen for the Nimi Icinohabi Program and work with the *doshgamin*, university-based researchers came to gradually understand that being open to the power of the language, both in relational and spiritual senses, was important to program success.

## ANOROB DAN: VALUES IN PLACE AND PRACTICE

The term *anorobdam* has three parts: “First, it means to *inazhi*—stop whatever you are doing; second, *narobda*—listen with your spirit; and third, *awakdaa'u*—be ready to learn, especially if it was at a ceremony.”<sup>33</sup> All were required for us to work together and to learn from the values shared by the *Ish?awimin*. Given the practice of involving *Ish?awimin* in all important community decisions, the first guiding principle the

university-based researchers learned from community-based researchers was that Elders are always present for us; their vision must be heard, honored, and carried out. Therefore, carrying out research depended on the presence, approval, and guidance of the *Ish?awimin*. Further, as younger *dagucawa*, the community-based team members had a responsibility to assist them to achieve their vision and goals. If their vision coincided with the research proposed, we could go ahead. To proceed, the values that this principle was based on needed to be understood. As a community-based researcher explained, her own motivation for involvement was to fulfill the vision of the *Ish?awimin*: “what is most important right now is developing and delivering the program for the kids; that is the motivation of the Elders, which must be respected.”<sup>34</sup>

We *wicubami* (honor highly) the *Ish?awimin* for everything they do, including research. They honor what they were taught themselves, by practicing *wahogicubi* (kinship relationships), *ushicanabi* (compassion), and *gicinubami* (to honor and respect each other), while *wacige inimicen* (living a prayerful life). These values are shown not just by what you do, but also through listening, observing, and the use of language. Understanding the importance of these beliefs and the actions involved took time and guidance for the university-based team members. Community-based researchers were active but patient instructors. By watching and listening throughout the project, they also, spoke about experiencing additional learning from the *Ish?awimin* themselves. One community-based researcher described how she understood more about the “importance of *awakdaa?um* (to be watchful) for what Ade Wakâ (the Creator) shows to us or has in mind for us.”<sup>35</sup> We honor our *Ish?awimin* for four essential values they carry with them at all times, explored below.

*Wahogicobi (kinship relationships) are the foundation of who we are. Kinship is our way of being, as expressed in what we do and how we speak to each other.*

Similarly to other Siouian-speaking peoples, Nakota community members believe that you are always a *daguwa* (a relative) first—that *xamcashda* (identity) as a people is embedded in and defined by *wahogicubi* (kinship relationships).<sup>36</sup> Using kinship terms today reminds community members of the cultural importance of their relationship with each other and of the mutual and ongoing importance of supporting and honoring relatives. As explained, “kinship terms are used to give respect, to make connections among families in the community, and to define our place in our society.” As well “when using kinship terms, it’s saying I love you, respect you, I’m addressing you with those feelings . . . and that responsibility.”<sup>37</sup> Relying on proper *wahogicubi* strengthens an ongoing connection which is both practical and spiritual; it “encourage[s] relatives, to help each other” as “your relative is someone that sits right next to you or your community member [and is] someone you can count on.”<sup>38</sup>

In living the concept of *baxe dagugicebid* (all are related), it is through *wahogicubi* (building and reinforcing kinship relations) that *Ish?awimin* “make relatives” with each other, the leaders, the children, other beings, and with other people that they interact with frequently.<sup>39</sup> The lives of the *Ish?awimin* expressed *wahogicubi*, illustrating

how they had learned from a young age that you must never forget to care for and show respect for your *dagucawa*. As they carried out activities for the community and in their contributions to the research project they used kinship terms in all their interactions. When taking in children or orphans to raise, “they took on that kinship responsibility, they tried to guide the children and to show them who they were supposed to become.”<sup>40</sup> *Ish?awimin* were concerned that the *doshgamin* and young people were not using kinship terms regularly and engaging in kinship relationships as before. This was something they stressed in adapting the Nimi Icinohabi Program, explaining that “if you don’t use those words, you don’t teach them, they don’t hear that . . . father, mother, auntie. When you lose that connection . . . they don’t hear us. If you don’t use those words you lose connection to your relatives.”<sup>41</sup>

*Igibi Ish?awimin daguciyami ushicanabi (We, as Elders, must show compassion for our relatives) and ucagebicen (help them) so that future generations may live well.*

*Ish?awimin ucagebicen* (help) their *dagucawa*, the people of the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, in many ways, all of which they carry out with *ushicanabicen* (compassion). They frequently expressed *ushicanabicen* for the challenges facing young parents and children. One of the community-based researchers spoke about how she learned to carry out acts of *ushicanabicen* by watching her *Ina* (mother). Some of her *Ina*’s brothers and sisters struggled and some died young, so when “their children needed that compassion and help, she took them on and always helped them.”<sup>42</sup> Another community-based researcher added, “this is part of the Nakota kinship way but, more specifically, it is part of showing compassion in what you do and in the responsibility of helping relatives—the action itself is also a form of *wacigebi* (prayer).”<sup>43</sup>

By sharing their wishes with leaders and by assisting in community activities *Ish?awimin ucagebid daguciyabi* (Elders help their relatives) in whatever way they can. *Ushicanabicen* and *ucagebi* includes sharing what was passed on to them. *Ish?awimin* carry teachings, stories, and ceremonies which connect the past to the present. This knowledge comes from their own experience of receiving *ushicanabicen* and blessings from their *dagucawa*. Now, in that time and space of past, present, and future, they’ve “been given responsibility to make that cycle continue to the next generation and that keeps going.”<sup>44</sup> This helps the *Ish?awimin* fulfill their duties to others by helping them, not only materially or emotionally, but also spiritually. Nakota *Ish?awimin* do this by sharing knowledge and information, by guiding decision-making, and through *wacigebi* (prayer) and ceremony, all carried out with *ushicanabicen*.

*Wacige inimicen (To live a prayerful life): A prayerful life is important in everything we do.*

An essential aspect of Nakota identity connected to *ushicanabicen* that was repeatedly affirmed by *Ish?awimin* is the importance of *wacigebi* to well-being in all one’s relations and in whatever you do. With *wacigebi* also comes the gift of humility. As one community-based researcher explained, “the Elders ask Creator for help all the time, [they

remind us] you cannot think that you can do it by yourself.”<sup>45</sup> *Ish?awimin* describe the words spoken in prayer as both more powerful and also kinder when spoken in their own language. *Wacigebi* leads to and from *ushicanabicen* and *ucagebicen daguciyami* (helping your relatives) in many ways. When they pray, *Ish?awimin* feel and maintain their connection to the old ones who have passed and to Ade Wakâ (the Creator). In this way, they touch the people’s minds and hearts in a way that embodies truth. Both *Ish?awimin* and community-based researchers stressed to university-based researchers that both research and life outcomes will be stronger if you have faith, let go of what you think you know, understand that sacrifice may be called for, have patience, and *wacige inimicen* (live a prayerful life). In reviewing her thoughts on important aspects of the Nimi Icinohbi Program and work with *doshgamin* in the school, one of the *Ish?awimin* described how:

My niece here [the classroom facilitator] . . . she asked me to open prayer for the kids. So, she told them to listen. And I talked to them first, because we can’t just . . . say a prayer and [then] leave the kids without talking to them. So, I said that prayer was meant for us, for all of us people. We have to [pray], whatever you do in a gathering, before you talk to anybody. Like today, I tell them that, “You have to pray.” And the kids that’s what I told them. I have to tell you [children] why we smudge, the smudge is for us as Indians. Like in our tribe we use the smudge . . . before you are able [prepared] for prayer. And that is why my grandfather always says, “When you inhale it, that force, that smell, that medicine . . . it fills your mind and gives you—when you breathe it, it fixes on your heart, [it goes] towards your heart and body. It fixes you up, gives you strength.” That’s what my grandfather always tells us . . . that’s what I told the kids.<sup>46</sup>

This Elder’s motivation for involvement in the research project came from wanting to share her grandfather’s teachings through her *wahogucubi* (kinship relations) with the *doshgamin*. Honoring your relative’s beliefs in teaching with spirit and engaging in *wacegebi* meant “trusting the Creator to go in the hearts and minds of the children for their benefit.”<sup>47</sup> Additionally, using the appropriate language terms allows the words to serve as an aspect of *wacegebi*.

*Gicinubami* (to honor and respect each other) and *wicubami* are wakâ (of a sacred nature): Something good for all of us will come out of honoring our *daguciyami* (relatives).

Another essential value is the importance of *gicinubami*. While hard to define in English, *gicinubami* refers to showing honor, appreciation, and respect in one’s interactions with others, or the practice of honoring each other in language and action. *Gicinubami* is built on the principle of *wahogicubi*, the use of kinship terms for building relationships. Both *gicinubami* and *wicubami* are essential to maintain the reciprocal kinship connections in the community. *Gicinubami* is differentiated from *wicubami* in that it refers to acts of honoring *Ish?awimin* or others held in particularly high esteem, often implying an element of spiritual respect.

A strong example is *wicubami* for both their actions and the knowledge they share, often in ceremonial ways. As a community-based researcher explained: “we are so grateful for that knowledge we want to give even the coats from our back for that . . . [we want] to show recognition for our Elders for all that they’ve carried that no one else has.”<sup>48</sup> Treating *Ish?awimin* and others well though the practice of *gincinobami* was something learned early, serving as “character building before you even left the house.” For example, “as a child, I saw that whenever Elders and visitors came they gave them something to eat and drink. They take good care of each other. They give them their very best.”<sup>49</sup>

When you act in ways that do things to show honor for another, your connection with your *dagucaya* (relatives) is significant and ongoing. The sacredness of that relationship is identified within the words used and the actions taken and brings credit to both the recipient and the giver. *Gicinubami* may be shown in a variety of ways, including simple activities that without fanfare show your respect, or it may include, on behalf of another, giving something to others in their name or putting on a feast for the community or even a sports event on behalf of the one being honored. Certain kinship relationships illustrate specific forms of honoring; for example, sisters often particularly assist their brothers and the role of *mishipan* (sisters-in-law) is to help each other as a form of honoring each other.<sup>50</sup> *Ish?awimin* stress that practicing *gicinobami* is essential to the *wicozani* (well-being) of the *doshgamin* and future generations, so that they may remain as Nakota. Learning this behavior and the associated values through behaving as a good relative brings honor to nation, *Ish?awimin*, *doshgamin*, and family groups.

## NAKOTA TEACHINGS ALIVE IN RESEARCH AND RESEARCHERS

By celebrating the profound impact of the guidance, direction, and responsibilities of the *Ish?awimin* on our research journey, we have explored the values they illustrated every day and how these values were applied, influencing the research in significant ways. Because the values presented above were embedded in the research, we learned that they shaped its meaning, process, and outcomes in profound ways, some of which we discuss below.

**“Research is an opportunity to carry out our responsibilities.”** That *Ish?awimin* saw this project as a way to fulfill their responsibility to future generations was illustrated repeatedly. They *ushicanabiced* (showed compassion) and spent time in *wacegebi* for the young ones who did not know their *xamcashda* (identity), language, and kinship responsibilities and suffered because they felt lost. The *Ish?awimin* believe that through use of the language, words come to be understood to “live within you as relatives.”<sup>51</sup> Words are understood both to enact their own meanings and to act upon us. As emphasized in the project’s cultural adaptation of the classroom material, the facilitator, a community-based team member, used these strong words in her teaching. She began by referring to all the *doshgamin* by the appropriate kinship terms in relation to her, expected them to do the same, and then went on to reinforce more complex concepts in subsequent years.

Meaningful research could not take place without the support and involvement of *Ish?awimin*. We could not have begun this research without *Ish?awimin* approval; without them, we could not have carried out the cultural adaptation nor could we have ensured that the *doshgamin*, their parents, and all team members felt safe. As a community-based team member shared, she would not have participated without the involvement of their *Ish?awimin* due to the negative legacy of research in aboriginal communities. She also explained that even if she had agreed to participate without their approval, the results would not have been the same. The *Ish?awimin* and the community-based team members would have held back. Their prayers and relationships were required to work on behalf of the *doshgamin*, to address challenges that arose, and for team members to take risks that allowed for capacity development. At a media announcement regarding the receipt of funding, the presence of *Ish?awimin* ensured community-based researchers were comfortable presenting information alongside Alberta government officials. *Ish?awimin* often supported their *daguwa* (relatives) at academic conferences by attending, saying prayers and speaking. They supported team members by teaching and stressing key values throughout, including highlighting the need “to be *awakdaa?u*, to be watchful, not to always think about what the people are saying, but what God is doing.”<sup>52</sup> They did not hesitate to speak up when they believed we were heading in a direction that was not in line with their values and wishes.

The presence of *Ish?awimin* was instrumental to the maintenance of a positive learning environment in the Nimi Icinohabi Program classroom, one where the children felt comfortable. The *Ish?awimin* noticed that when they smudged and prayed in the classroom the *doshgamin* calmed right down. This sense of calmness, drawn on from the *Ish?awimin* along with *wacigebi* (prayer), was important not only to the *doshgamin* but also to the community-based researchers who spoke of their own learning from the *Ish?awimin* during the project. They described how the “good words”<sup>53</sup> brought forward by the *Ish?awimin* during the project increased their own understanding of the teachings. Thus, the growth of both community and university-based researchers was enhanced in light of the obvious integrity of the *Ish?awimin* and led to increased respect for and comprehension of their traditions of protocol, inquiry, learning, and ethics.<sup>54</sup> Their support, prayer, and teachings were the foundation on which we operated, they tied together past, present, and future, supported team members development, and even contributed to healing intergenerational wounds.<sup>55</sup>

***Cizha Icacoyobi* (making relations): placing research within the framework of *wahogicubi* (building kinship relations) is required.** Protocol is understood by community members as “a way of doing, a way of knowing, and a way of being.”<sup>56</sup> The opportunity to carry out *wahogicubi*, building and reinforcing kinship relationships through use of proper terms and by being a good relative, was integral to why and how the *Ish?awimin* worked together to adapt and assist in the delivery of the Nimi Icinohabi Program. They wished to honor their connection with and duty to the *doshgamin* through *wahogicubi* (building kinship relations), a responsibility that is *wakâ* (of a sacred nature). Community-based researchers explained that they always made kin; it was how they did things and was required to work together with the



university-based researchers with ease. Through the practice of protocol, one of the university-based researchers, whose grandfather had had a good relationship with the people of Alexis, learned that that connection allowed her a place to begin to act as a *daguwa* (relative). University-based researchers came to realize that, through their connection to the community on behalf of the *doshgamin*, they also became *dagucawa*.

Using proper kinship terms with the *doshgamin* and others at the school was viewed as a start to teaching the principles of *wahogicubi* to the *doshgamin*. Through using a process of kinship as instruction, the *doshgamin* would know their place in relation to each other. They would feel “at home as a relative” amongst their people, for “when you practice the [kinship] terms and the responsibility [they imply], you automatically know your place and the ways of organizing yourself in a loving, respectful way.”<sup>57</sup> Learning the terms is connected with learning kinship responsibilities, something you learn “only after you feel it in here [your heart].”<sup>58</sup> By using the language of kinship, the children also understood “that they have to listen to *Magushin* (grandmother) as she’s greater in wisdom than them . . . so right away they’re attentive.”<sup>59</sup> The program facilitator, one of the community-based team members, was not only their instructor; she let the children know that *dagucayed* (all were her relatives), reinforcing the cultural expectation of *giciunubami* (honoring each other). The children were encouraged to use Nakota kinship terms not only at school, but also with their families and in community settings.<sup>60</sup>

The experience of the research team illustrated that the Nakota kinship way of building relationships is alive. In our team meetings, community-based members always referred to each other by using kinship terms. Later, the terms *daguwa* or *dagucawa* were used to refer to university-based members of the working group. The primary academic researchers were each honored as a relative: one was taken as a *mita* (younger sister) by one of the community-based researchers, and the other was given the name Wocashi Wiya (Brave Heart Woman) by the *Ish?awimin* in acknowledgment for her hard work. These researchers gradually came to understand that the use of these terms entailed relationship, recognition, and ongoing responsibility.

***Gicinubami* (the practice of honoring others) builds relationships needed for carrying out research.** *Gicinubami*, carrying out acts of honoring each other, was initiated by community-based team members. They explained that the practice of *gicinubami* is taught to *doshgamin* through observation and by living up to your family’s expectation that you behave in a way that shows respect. In their own childhood, it cemented identity and relationships across the community understood as vital to revitalizing culture and community. Today the principles involved in *gicinubami* and *wicubami* contribute to the process of “awakening our spirits.”<sup>61</sup> Practicing these acts reinforces connections and along with *wahogicobi* (building relationships by using kinship terms), encourages the community to *gigdam* (wake up), to help each other maintain well-being despite social and political challenges.

During the research project university-based researchers came to understand that the practice of *wicubami* involves not only offering cultural protocol and gifts to the *Ish?awimin* for their blessings and direction, but that we honor, in multiple ways, their wishes, work, and words. Thus, they were honored for their contributions on several



occasions throughout the research period. For example, nearly life-sized posters were produced for display in the community school featuring each Elder and key language terms and lessons from the program as expressed in their own words. When the research was completed, the *Ish?awimin* and *doshgamin* from grades 3–9 who had participated in the program were honored through a pipe ceremony, eagle feather presentations, drum songs, and words given by political and spiritual leaders. Each of our teachers, the *Ish?awimin* were given gifts that showed that we “took them highly.”<sup>62</sup>

Through practice of *gicinubami* and of *wicubami* for *Ish?awimin*, the teachings of *Ish?awimn* who had passed were frequently recalled. They were honored through the recollection of their words by living *Ish?awimin* and by community-based team members. As *Ish?awimin* and community-based team members illustrated that the need for acts of *gicinubami* and giving the best that we have in our actions was a way of being, university-based researchers began to understand that the Nakota way of being must be respected. In this vein, a young singer, one of the participants in the program, engaged in an act of *wicubami* on behalf of the *doshgamin* for the *Ish?awimin*. Accompanied by adult drummers, he sang the best that he had in an honor song that he wrote, “Grandmother’s Song.”

Carrying out research “in the presence of *wakâ*” (the sacred) deepens research results. Another lesson learned was the importance of spirituality, not just for the community, but for the research. One of the university-based team members described how she had learned “how important it is to get guidance from the Elders to make sure that we are going in the right direction and [also for] getting their prayers.”<sup>63</sup> Spirit was evident in the work of all of the *Ish?awimin* and community members. One of the community-based team members indicated that she felt that while not everyone understood this process initially all the team members came to this place in their own way. One of the *Ish?awimin* offered teachings regarding the importance of a calm and steady spiritual foundation in everything one carries out with intention, which we learned through our growing awareness of her almost constant state of *wacigebi* (prayer), including *wacigebi* for the program’s success and the well-being of all involved. It could not be otherwise given that the project was understood as for the benefit of the *doshgamin* and thus for the entire community. The future could not be a good one unless connected with the past within a context of *wakâ* (sacredness). For example, several of the *Ish?awimin* commented that they noticed the calming effect of smudging, *wacigebi* (prayer), the Nakota language on the *doshgamin* when they were assisting in the Nimi Icinohabi classroom. The facilitator noted that their very presence comforted the children and enhanced the involvement of the *doshgamin*.

Similarly, fully carrying out cultural protocol was important not only to request *Ish?awimin* assistance and to show respect, but also because from the beginning it set a firm commitment to situate the project in spirituality. A community-based researcher spoke about how her *ina* (mother), one of the *Ish?awimin*, “always puts a question in your mind or your heart to make you think, think about God, what would he want? Not what I would want . . . but what he would want for everything to work out.”<sup>64</sup> In this context, another Nakota team member stressed that when “you accept that [tobacco protocol], you’re accepting it in the presence of *Wakâ*” (the sacred).<sup>65</sup> Further,

when you work in this framework you're not just receiving the "benefit of the Elder's knowledge and advice but also getting their prayers."<sup>66</sup> Blessings coming from these prayers were intended not just for the children and community members but for the whole research team. We found that without this grounding, our work would have resulted in both less research significance and less meaning to the community.

Discussing why the program and the team's relationships worked so well, a community working group member reminded the team that, "I cannot stress enough the importance of spiritual prayers our Elders offered before the project even began. To us, this is the very sacred act and commitment and the key to any successful relationships not only with Western institutions but with all relations that we journey with in our lives."<sup>67</sup> This spiritual base disrupts Western assumptions and places ethics, behavior, and commitment, not simply in academic research ethics, but in the spiritual context of the nation. It lives at the center and allows growth outward. In working with the *Ish?awimin* and the *doshgamin* in carrying out this project, and in everything else she does, a community researcher emphasized, "I answer to Ade Wakâ [the Creator] first."<sup>68</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Practicing the values presented in this essay is an aspect of addressing colonization and assimilation. As one of the community-based team members described, "when I grew up the thing to be was to be just like the *wachizhubi* (white people)."<sup>69</sup> Carrying out research with integrity and spirit meant being proactive in reversing ways in which a colonizing history has impacted the practice of *wicubami* as well as the practice of research. In this case, *Ish?awimin* enjoyed the opportunity to work together on the language and cultural adaption to carry out their responsibilities to the *doshgamin*. They loved being in the classroom with the *doshgamin*, something they found personally healing.<sup>70</sup> And they were proud that their involvement in the project made it their own and spoke back to colonial research practices.

Development for all team members came through growing understanding that practicing *wahogicubi* and by engaging in thoughtful, compassionate, and honor-filled relationships, ceremonies, and cultural processes was an essential aspect of doing research together. Awareness that our experience was guided by *Ish?awimin* and their connection with Ade Wakâ through prayer was, and is, a powerful teaching, allowing us to take the care required to produce this essay. It took much longer and involved more intense listening, considering, and checking understanding of key concepts than any other article the team has published. A community-based researcher explained that this was not surprising, given that "we're talking about the *magushibin* and *mitaushibin*, you know the grandmothers and grandfathers, and it's honoring them. In honoring them you don't just put something together and say, 'Oh, I'm doing this in honor of the Elders . . . the process of honoring somebody takes time, planning, you know, so it seems like it's supposed to take some time."<sup>71</sup> Another community-based researcher stressed how "these words, used in our language, have a spirit and the power to change

us,” and by using them in this essay we would “put something good out there” for the community and for future readers.<sup>72</sup>

Hence, the effort, emotions, care, and spirit involved in writing this essay as a form of honor song are not unusual. *Awacicen* (thinking about it) guided by past and current *Ish?awimin* is an expected part of the process of *wicubami*: honoring those who are held in high regard. We say, “*Ishnish*” (thank you) to our *Ish?awimin* for all they did.

Following the approval by the *Ish?awimin* of this essay’s intent, keywords, and concepts, the Elder who gave the final prayer reminded all present that while the paper and the beliefs stressed in the Nimi Icinohabi Program and the process of *wicubami* were all good, there was still much work to do to help the community; she expected us to get on with it. Two years later, new programs focused on the values presented here are being developed.

### *Acknowledgments*

We thank Brenda Kootenay and Kathleen Alexis for their early work in the cultural adaptation and pilot program. The Alexis Nakota school staff, and particularly, Betty Sewlal’s effort and support helped us proceed. Many others contributed, both leaders and community members, and to all of them we say *Ishnish*. *Mitakuye oyasin* (all are related).

### NOTES

1. This is a good description of *Ish?awimin* and their importance: “When you look at our Elders, they’re the closest ones that have a relationship with past relatives, past teachings. So not only are they advisors, knowledge keepers, counselors or what have you. They’re also [immersed] in spirit, in spirituality. They have this connection and continued relationship with past relatives, and they continue to pray. They’re bringing with them what was left and taught to them and transferring it to the next generation”; see “Elders Consent Focus Group, 1,” 10 (Edmonton, AB, 2010).

2. The nature of this honoring relationship is *wakà* (sacred), as held within the meaning and use of the word itself. In using this term to honor the *Ish?awimin* we mean that “we take them highly, that we acknowledge them for their knowledge and for their long life and that we appreciate all their service to their people.” Final meeting notes, Feb. 17, 2017, Edmonton, AB. This also an aspect of why we capitalize the words “*Ish?awimin*” and “Elders.”

3. Although ten Elders are acknowledged here, many others, both past and present, contributed to the collective body of knowledge. The words of the *Ish?awimin* were understood as of one voice, even when different perspectives were presented. As one community-based team member described it, “the door was open for them and ten stepped forward, so that’s why we always make sure to honor the ten that made that commitment, but that doesn’t mean the rest of them [other Elders] are not fulfilling their responsibility.” In this commentary, while *Ish?awimin* and community-based team members were comfortable having their names used as a form of recognition, at their request we have not used specific personal names to reference quotes from community-based team members or *Ish?awimin*. It was stressed that this is collective knowledge not to be attributed to one person, and to do so would feel uncomfortable. This is not the case in all indigenous communities, however, and researchers must check to ensure proper protocol is confirmed in every nation and community.

4. As one community-based participant described, “this article it’s about honoring our Elders . . . this article is to honor them and I’ve been praying and just asking for direction. And its emotional,

to me it's such an emotional article." "Wicubami Sub-Group Meeting," Fay's Tape, January, 2015, Edmonton, AB.

5. For instance, one of the authors was motivated in part by comments of an Alexis Nakota Sioux university student in a course she taught. The student described how she found it very difficult to complete papers for her Native Studies courses as her people were almost invisible; there was very little literature available on them.

6. See Fay Fletcher, Daniel McKennitt, and Lola Baydala, "Community Capacity Building: An Aboriginal Exploratory Case Study," *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 5, no. 2 (2007): 9–31, <http://www.pimatisiwin.com/uploads/842173554.pdf>. Mutual capacity-building was evident in this project: community-based researchers worked with the university-based researchers to help them understand proper protocol, community values, and ethics that conflicted with university ethics review, and the need for spirituality at a meaningful level in research. Much of this mutual learning took place in monthly team meetings, where the research team discussed planning and progress, ethical and cross-cultural issues and feedback on issues that the *Ish?awimin* directed community-based researchers to explain to university-based researchers.

7. See Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation website, <http://www.alexisnakotasioux.com/>. The current name of this nation is the "Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation." The exact origins of the community are not fully known, although each family group has stories about this. Historically, many of their ancestors were referred to as Assiniboine or Assinipwat based on Cree terms referencing Stone People, terms which were then picked up by fur traders and other Europeans. Until recently "Stoney" was in common use (based on the English translation of the Cree). Still preferred by some, the Alexis people also used *Is'ga*, a Siouan word thought to reference "translators" or "mixed peoples." Until recently, Elders cautioned community members not to refer to where they came from or speak about their people, probably due to fear of government response to their earlier travels (where they came from) and earlier travel off-reserve that required a pass from the Indian Agent. As well, the practice of ceremony was frowned on by missionaries and illegal under the Indian Act (amended 1951) as was any political organizing, both resulting in a need to go "underground." Some division amongst the community originated in these historical circumstances can still be felt today, reinforcing the need for emphasizing kinship values as stressed by the *Ish?awimin* (Elders).

8. The Indian act refers to the Canadian statute first passed in 1867, revised periodically and is still in effect. It defines legal status, regulates band organization and the rights and restrictions of Indian persons and collectivities. See Shin Imai, *The 2010 Annotated Indian Act and Aboriginal Constitutional Provisions* (Toronto: Carswell Legal Publications, 2009).

9. Gilbert J. Botvin and Kenneth W. Griffin, "Life Skills Training: Empirical Findings and Future Directions," *Journal of Primary Prevention* 25, no. 2 (2004): 211–32, <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOPP.0000042391.58573.5b>; Gilbert J. Botvin, Kenneth W. Griffin, Elizabeth Paul, and Araxi P. Macaulay, "Preventing Tobacco and Alcohol Use among Elementary School Students through Life Skills Training," *Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse* 12, no. 4 (2003): 1–17, [https://doi.org/10.1300/J029v12n04\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1300/J029v12n04_01).

10. Gilbert J. Botvin with Lori Wolfgang Kantor, "Preventing Alcohol and Tobacco Use through Life Skills Training: Theory, Methods, and Empirical Findings," *Alcohol Research and Health* 24, no. 4 (2000): 250–57, <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh24-4/250-257.pdf>.

11. "Elders Focus Group," Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, AB, June 6, 2007.

12. For discussion of results, see Lola Baydala, Betty Sewlal, Carmen Rasmussen, Kathleen Alexis, Fay Fletcher, Janine Odishaw, Merle Kennedy, and Brenda Kootenay, "A Culturally Adapted Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Program for Aboriginal Children and Youth," *Progress in Community Health Partnerships* 3 (2009): 37–46, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.0.0054>; Lola Baydala, Fay Fletcher, Stephanie Worrell, Tanya Kajner, Sherry Letendre, Liz Letendre, and Carmen

Rasmussen, "Partnership, Knowledge Translation, and Substance Abuse Prevention with a First Nations Community," *Progress in Community Health Partnerships* 8 (2014): 145–55, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2014.0030>.

For discussion of ethical issues addressed, see Lola Baydala, Fay Fletcher, Lia Ruttan, Stephanie Worrell, Liz Letendre, Sherry Letendre and Tanja Schram, "'Why Do I Need to Sign It?' Issues in Carrying out Child Assent in School-Based Prevention Research with a First Nation Community," *First People's Child & Family Review* 6 (2011): 99–113, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2013.0015>; Lola Baydala, Stephanie Worrell, Fay Fletcher, Sherry Letendre, Liz Letendre, and Lia Ruttan, "'Making a Place of Respect': Lessons Learned in Carrying Out Consent Protocol with First Nations Elders," *Progress in Community Health Partnerships* 7 (2013): 135–43, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2013.0015>; Fay Fletcher, Lola Baydala, Liz Letendre, Lia Ruttan, Stephanie Worrell, Sherry Letendre, and Tanja Schram, "'No Lone Person': The Ethics Consent Process as an Ethical Dilemma in Carrying Out Community-Based Participatory Research with a First Nations Community," *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Indigenous and Aboriginal Community Health* 9, no. 2 (2011): 323–48, [http://www.pimatisiwin.com/uploads/jan\\_2011/04.1FletcherBaydala.pdf](http://www.pimatisiwin.com/uploads/jan_2011/04.1FletcherBaydala.pdf).

13. Marlene Brant Castellano, "Ethics of Aboriginal Research," *Journal of Aboriginal Health* 1, no. 1 (2004): 98–114, [http://www.naho.ca/jah/english/jah01\\_01/journal\\_p98-114.pdf](http://www.naho.ca/jah/english/jah01_01/journal_p98-114.pdf); Lia Ruttan, "Exploring Ethical Principles in the Context of Research Relationships," *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Indigenous and Aboriginal Community Health* 2, no. 1 (2004), <http://www.pimatisiwin.com/uploads/1055773587.pdf>; Linda Tuhawi Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press, 1999); and, for example, Richard W. Voss, Victor Douville, Alex Little Soldier, and Gayla Twiss, "Tribal and Shamanic-based Social Work Practice: A Lakota Perspective," *Social Work* 4, no. 3 (1999): 228–41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/44.3.228>.

14. The chief indicated that we needed to approach this traditionally, as it was for the *doshgamin*, by following proper protocol to first see if the *Ish?awimin* approved the project before going to the Chief and Council. The Chief and Council approved the project and then submitted a Band Council Resolution (BCR) as required in the Indian Band Council Procedure Regulations.

15. It was delivered to grades 3–6, as well as to grades 7, 8 and 9. Grades 3 and 7 are more extensive and provide a base for subsequent years.

16. See Phillip A. Fisher and Thomas J. Ball, "Balancing Empiricism and Local Cultural Knowledge in the Design of Prevention Research," *Journal of Urban Health* 82, no. 2–S3 (2005): iii44–iii55, <http://doi.org/10.1093/jurban/jti063>; Les. B. Whitbeck, "Some Guiding Assumptions and a Theoretical Model for Developing Culturally Specific Preventions with Native American People," *Journal of Community Psychology* 34, no. 2 (2006): 183–92, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20094>; and Les. B. Whitbeck, Dan R. Hoyt, Jerry D. Stubben, and Teresa LaFromboise, "Traditional Culture and Academic Success among American Indian Children in the Upper Midwest," *Journal of American Indian Education* 40, no. 2 (2001): 48–60.

17. For instance, while sweats, pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, and other ceremonial events take place on the reserve, students were not pushed to attend. These choices were up to them and their families; each family's ways were respected.

18. Annual focus groups were held to discuss the projects progress. A final interview on their experience was completed with most of the *Ish?awimin*. All these activities were audiorecorded and transcribed with their oral consent.

19. *Awaakdaa'u* refers to being watchful by using your senses to pick up on what's going on around you, including at a spiritual level.

20. "Wicubami Sub-group Meeting: Fay's Tape." In this commentary, we have not used specific personal names to reference quotes from community-based team members or *Ish?awimin*. Rather, when collective knowledge is referred to, we reference them as a whole together with the dates of

our work together. In other instances, quotes are from community-based team members, members of the nation, which come from notes taken at team meetings or of working groups writing papers together; the working group and dates are referenced but personal names are not used. This issue was discussed several times at team meetings. It was stressed that because this is collective knowledge it is not to be attributed to one person; to do so would feel uncomfortable. This is not the case in all indigenous communities, however, and must be checked to ensure proper protocol is confirmed in each community.

21. A common expression used to refer to relatives who are deceased but still held in mind.

22. A common expression referring to speaking one's own language. It also holds the spiritual sense of being given the language in a sacred way.

23. "Wicubami Sub-Group Meeting, Fay's Tape."

24. "Focus Group, Elder's Contributions," 10, 2010, Edmonton, AB.

25. "Elders Focus Group," Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, June 6, 2007.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. These words are commonly used to refer to the need to bring the people into health, in line with their own values and for the *doshgamin* who took part in this research project.

29. The terms *wakâ* and Ade Wakâ cannot be translated easily into an English understanding and it may not be appropriate to do so. However, *wakâ* refers to being sacred or having a quality of sacredness, while Ade Wakâ refers to "the most sacred," or the Creator. *Xamcashda* refers to identity, particularly, as First Nation's persons. The *Ish?awimin* stressed the importance of knowing their language to *xamcashda* (identity). Another aspect of this is that they describe speaking to the *doshgamin* in their language as "kinder," rather than in English, which is experienced as inherently "harsher" or less connected to *wakâ*.

30. Corrie Lee Rhyasen Erdman, "Stress in Stoney," MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1997, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk3/ftp04/mq24613.pdf>.

31. We use the terms *community-based researchers* and *community-based team members* synonymously in this commentary, as well as *university-based researchers* and *university-based team members*.

32. Although English was the primary language used, the Nakota language was heard in every activity in this project. There was not a team meeting, focus group or interview where the language was not spoken. It was translated or summarized when needed. Many of the Nakota words used in this paper can be understood at different levels, but all have something to offer at every level of understanding. As a community-based researcher reflected, "now we are marking them [the terms] as significant in developing a conception of Nakota values. For us fluent speakers those (spoken words/concepts) are text, those are our ideas. There must be a reason we are writing in this format now [in the community and in this paper]." The spellings used come from work on the written language system carried out by these and other Elders along with Dr. Eung-Do Cook and Corrie L. R. Erdman, now taught in the school. While there is discussion in the community about the best way of maintaining the language, the *doshgamin* can read what they learn in school. Our team members honor the work that their parents and other *dagucawa* (relatives) did on maintaining language. Using language terms and concepts in the culturally adapted manuals was very important to the *Ish?awimin* and community-based researchers. They believe that the language still carries the spirit, still carries connection to who they are and that *doshgamin* will come to experience this as they "wake up" as Nakota people. However, the spellings used in this article, are not identical to spellings used in other related communities and there are variations within the community. All terms used in this article have been presented and spelled by community-based researchers; we have focused on using the words correctly in context rather than on orthography.

33. "Minutes, Nimi Icinohabi Team Meeting," April 13, 2007, Edmonton, Alberta.



34. Ibid.
35. "Wicubami Sub-Group Meeting, Fay's Tape."
36. See Ella Deloria, *The Dakota Way of Life* (Rapid City, SD: Mariah Press, 2007); Beatrice Medicine, *Learning to Be an Anthropologist and Remaining "Native": Selected Writings*, ed. Sue-Ellen Jacobs (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001); in Waziyatawin Angela Wilson's book, her relative, Uŋkaŋna (Grandfather) Eli Taylor, a Dakota elder from the Sioux Valley Reserve in Manitoba, tells a story about an encounter of three young men with a spiritual being who teaches them how to live: wisdom to take home with them. One of the messages they received was to "have compassion for one another, know your relatives, respect them and treat each other as relatives." See Wilson, *Remember This! Dakota Decolonization and the Eli Taylor Narratives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), (81).
37. "Nimi Icinohabi Research Team Communication," e-mail to Lia Ruttan, n.d.
38. "Elders Focus Group," Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, AB, June 6, 2007.
39. A common expression referring to the need to affirm kinship or make kin with all with whom you interact in a connected way.
40. "Meeting Notes, Article Proposal," July 5, 2011, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, AB.
41. "Notes, March 27 Community Workshop," March 27, 2007, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, AB.
42. Ibid.
43. "Nimi Icinohabi Research Team Communication," e-mail to Lia Ruttan, n.d.
44. "Meeting Notes, Article Proposal," July 5, 2011, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, AB.
45. "Nimi Icinohabi Research Team Communication," personal communication to Lia Ruttan, n.d.
46. "Elders Consent Focus Group 2," Edmonton, AB, February 4, 2011.
47. "Minutes, Team Meeting," Edmonton, AB, April 13, 2007.
48. Fletcher, "Final Elders Interviews 2," Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, AB, June, 2011.
49. "Alexis Young Women's Focus Group," Edmonton, AB, July, 2012.
50. "Wicubami Sub-Group Meeting, Fay's Tape," Ibid.
51. An expression that means that the words connect and assist you, just as *dagucawa* (relatives) do.
52. "Elders Consent Focus Group 2."
53. A common expression related to the value of words with special meaning or *wakâ* (sacredness).
54. See Lola Baydala, Stephanie Worrell, Fay Fletcher, Sherry Letendre, Liz Letendre, and Lia Ruttan, "Making a Place of Respect': Lessons Learned in Carrying Out Consent Protocol with First Nations Elders," *Progress in Community Health Partnerships* 7, (2013): 135–43, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2013.0015>.
55. We are speaking of teachings, learnings and blessings that took place and influenced the well-being of community-based team members, *doshgamin*, and *Ish?awimin* themselves. Several *Ish?awimin* spoke of their experiences in residential schools as a part of their motivation to adapt the program. This especially was related to their emphasis on language. One spoke of being kept in a very small room by herself for a month as a "punishment" for speaking her language, something she had never spoken about previously. Their openness helped the community-based team members address their reactions and how they had been influenced and introduced the story of these experiences to the *doshgamin*.
56. "Focus Group, Elder's Contributions."
57. Further, "when you learn the terms you learn the responsibilities. And the responsibility part comes only after you feel it in here [your heart]." One researcher told of how her parents advised her that "when you have that respect and give it, you make people [relatives] . . . hold them in esteem, then they'll build that trust and work with you;" see "Meeting Notes, Article Proposal."
58. A common expression indicating you can't really know it until you feel it deeply, in the heart.



59. Fay Fletcher, "Final Elders Interviews," 1, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, AB, June, 2011.
60. When this occurred, Elders took it as sign that their vision was succeeding.
61. As a community-based team member described it: "more is coming together now to encourage us to wake up our spirit, something like 'Wake up, it's time to wake up, *wiya, wiya gita*—woman, woman get up!"
62. A common expression used by community members to indicate great respect.
63. "Focus Group, Elders' Contributions."
64. Ibid.
65. "Focus Group on Consent/Parental Consent Process," November 27, 2009, Edmonton, AB.
66. "Focus Group, Elders' Contributions."
67. "Nimi Icinohabi Research Team Communication," e-mail to Lia Ruttan, n.d.
68. "Elders Consent Focus Group 2."
69. "Wicubami Sub-Group Meeting, Fay's Tape."
70. For instance, "I go not only to make the kids feel better but also to make myself feel good, by talking to the kids it makes me feel better"; see "Alexis Elders Focus Group—Analysis," Nov. 23, 2011, Edmonton, AB.
71. "Wicubami Sub-Group Meeting, Fay's Tape."
72. "Nimi Icinohabi Research Team Communication," e-mail to Lia Ruttan, n.d.