

***Giiwe*. An Indigenous-led Model for Inter-organizational Homelessness Prevention**

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Abstract

Preventing people from experiencing homelessness is a complex task requiring the coordination of multiple actors. There are various frameworks for homelessness prevention; however, there is no published example of an Indigenous-led model. We present the *Giiwe* model for interorganizational collaboration on homelessness prevention. Led by M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre in Owen Sound, Canada, *Giiwe* hosts in-person meetings that use ceremony, Indigenous knowledges, discussion, and follow-up actions to improve coordination among existing services and increase awareness of Indigenous contexts. *Giiwe* has successfully improved coordination among a network of over 20 Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations. Funding and policy contexts that mandate partnerships on Indigenous homelessness could benefit from ceding space for initiatives that affirm Indigenous knowledge systems and multi-epistemic forms of collaboration.

Introduction

In the Global North, there has been a progressive paradigm shift in homelessness programs and policy from emphasizing crisis services to prioritizing prevention efforts (Culhane et al., 2011; Dej et al., 2020; Fowler et al., 2019; Lindblom, 1991; Mackie, 2014). Preventing people from experiencing homelessness is a complex task requiring the coordination of multiple actors (Dej et al., 2020; Nichols & Doberstein, 2016). For this reason, collaborative approaches to homelessness prevention are increasingly studied (Borysow & Furtado, 2014; Buchnea et al., 2021; Fowler et al., 2019). Various terms refer to such collaborative efforts, including “systems approaches” in the homelessness literature (Fowler et al., 2019; Nichols & Doberstein, 2016);

“intersectoral approaches,” or “intersectoral action” in health-related fields (Borysow & Furtado, 2014; MacDonald & Roebuck, 2018); and “working group,” “committee,” “network,” “coalition,” or “table” in community-led practice contexts (Buchnea et al., 2021). There are conceptual differences between systems approaches and intersectoral action. For instance, the former is closer to the sciences of complexity, systems thinking, and cybernetics (Midgley & Richardson, 2007); and the latter aligns with concepts like health equity and the social determinants of health (Ndumbe-Eyoh & Moffatt, 2013). To bridge such academic and community concepts, in this paper, we use the terms “inter-organizational” and “collaborative” to emphasize the multidirectional, interdependent, and multi-level relationships among networks of individual, collective, and institutional actors that are involved in sustaining and changing the conditions that allow homelessness to exist over time and place.

For the context of Indigenous Peoples, examining the conditions that create and sustain homelessness necessitates attending to Indigenous-specific contexts, priorities, and worldviews. For example, colonialism and systemic racism have been identified as root causes of Indigenous homelessness that materialize through policies, practices, and distribution of resources (Buchnea et al., 2021; Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Patrick, 2014; Thistle and Smylie, 2020; Oelke et al., 2016). The impact of colonialism on homelessness is illustrated by notable inequities among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. For example, in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples accounted for 3% of the population and 20% of those experiencing homelessness (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Similarly, in Canada, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) represent about 5% of the population and nearly 30% of people experiencing homelessness (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019). Despite recognizing inequities among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples concerning homelessness, Indigenous-specific

considerations for homelessness prevention and reduction strategies are rarely discussed, with notable exceptions (Bomberry et al., 2020; Buchnea et al., 2021; Lawson-Te Aho et al., 2019; Vallesi et al., 2020).

Attending to Indigenous priorities in the context of homelessness prevention includes considering efforts toward Indigenous resurgence, self-determination, and land repossession. For instance, a self-determined definition of Indigenous homelessness in Canada goes beyond the lack of appropriate housing to highlight the importance of “All My Relations” for the health and well-being of FNMI at individual, family and community levels (Thistle, 2017). The emphasis on All My Relations speaks to the relationships between FNMI individuals, families, and communities with the land, water, animals, kin, place of origin, culture, language, spirituality, and identities that need to be addressed in homelessness responses (Thistle, 2017). Furthermore, there is an increased recognition that the most effective programs and policies for preventing and reducing Indigenous homelessness are developed through Indigenous leadership that takes into account trauma-informed, historically-rooted, culturally-specific, and collaborative approaches (Buchnea et al., 2021; Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2019; Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Oelke et al., 2016; Patrick, 2014; Thistle and Smylie, 2020; Vallesi et al., 2020). Nonetheless, to the author’s knowledge, there is no previously published example of an Indigenous-led homelessness prevention model. Such models could provide vital guidance for communities across the globe who are seeking to prevent Indigenous homelessness from happening.

In this paper, the authors aim to share and discuss a model for Indigenous-led collaborative homelessness prevention that operates in Owen Sound, a small urban centre surrounded by a large rural area in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. For this purpose, we reflect on *Giiwe*, an initiative led by M’Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre (M’Wikwedong) and

supported by researchers affiliated with the Centre for Environmental Health Equity (CEHE). M'Wikwedong offers the *Giiwe* model to other Indigenous communities who may be interested in modifying the model according to their context—including renaming the model—or incorporating some of its components into their practice. Additionally, our discussion of the *Giiwe* model intends to support the creation, evaluation, and implementation of programs and policies that embrace Indigenous-specific worldviews and decentre modern Western assumptions on reality, knowledge, and collaboration. While the bulk of our manuscript draws on FNMI and Canadian sources, our choice of theoretical frameworks facilitates discussing the potential implications of this model for Indigenous Peoples internationally.

The paper is structured as follows: we provide a literature review on the emergence, state, and challenges of FNMI involvement in inter-organizational responses to homelessness. Then, we present the theoretical lenses through which we discuss the *Giiwe*. We present relevant typologies of homelessness prevention and relational approaches to inter-organizational work. We also detail a metaphor on bricks and threads to illustrate the diverse worldviews that may underpin inter-organizational collaboration. Subsequently, we present the *Giiwe* model and map common participant responses to it in the context of the bricks and threads metaphor. Finally, we discuss *Giiwe*'s policy and practice implications, highlighting the need for policies and programs that make room for the contributions of Indigenous knowledge systems.

FNMI Involvement in Inter-organizational Homelessness Responses

FNMI-led initiatives on homelessness prevention are positioned within a longer history of leadership and community building in urban settings. Canadian urban centres were established through historic and ongoing attempts of land dispossession, dishonouring treaties, cultural genocide, and imposition of heteronormative and patriarchal values (National Inquiry into

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Yellowhead Institute, 2019). After the second world war, there was a rapid and sustained increase in the number of FNMI living in urban centres (Peters, 2002). With growing FNMI urbanization, FNMI created grassroots groups and organizations to foster a sense of community and provide support. For instance, the Friendship Centre Movement catalyzed the establishment of urban FNMI infrastructure and programming, including leveraging responses to housing inadequacy and homelessness as one of its central priorities (Langford, 2016; National Association of Friendship Centres, 2021). Despite such efforts, FNMI living in cities continue to experience and confront anti-Indigenous racism in the housing market, as well as in the social service, health care, and government sectors (Abele et al., 2012; Peters, 2006; Turpel-Lafond & Johnson, 2020; Langford, 2016), with additional barriers for women and girls, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, youth, and those living with disabilities (Rodrigues et al. 2020; Kidd et al., 2019; Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2019).

Considering the historical and ongoing settler colonial violence inflicted on FNMI, it is no surprise that FNMI organizations report several challenges in collaborating with non-FNMI organizations (Environics Institute, 2010; Bomberry et al., 2020). The literature thus points to an urgent need to improve relationships and coordination between FNMI and non-FNMI organizations to better respond to homelessness and prevent it from happening. Such tasks will require greater leadership roles for FNMI organizations within collaborative work and the adoption of FNMI protocols and methodologies (Buchnea et al., 2021; Thistle & Smylie, 2020; Oelke et al., 2016). Unfortunately, the academic literature discussing FNMI-led collaborative homelessness prevention initiatives in Canada is scarce. Existing examples name some of these collaborative initiatives and describe some of their activities but do not discuss their approach to

inter-organizational collaboration (Abele et al., 2012; Bomberry et al., 2020; Fitzmaurice, 2012; Hanselmann & Gibbins, 2005), with the exemption of gray literature reports that outline some principles for engagement with FNMI partners (City of Toronto Shelter et al., 2018; Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, 2019). We offer Appendix I to provide a snapshot of such initiatives from the information we could gather from the organizations' websites and public reports. Among the initiatives listed in Appendix I, it is worth noting that the reported initiatives are predominantly based in large urban centres, with little information about smaller communities and rural areas. In international contexts, there are a few examples of Indigenous-specific models for responding to homelessness in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand (Lawson-Te Aho et al., 2019; Vallesi et al., 2020), but such examples lack the leadership of an Indigenous organization in their implementation.

Although there is no clear picture of the extent to which FNMI organizations participate in inter-organizational initiatives on homelessness reduction, there are indications that the involvement of FNMI is actively pursued across Canada. For instance, Reaching Home, Canada's homelessness strategy, expects collaboration between FNMI and non-FNMI representatives within its Community Advisory Boards, which are in charge of prioritizing local initiatives (Infrastructure Canada, 2022). However, it is known that FNMI organizations often feel tokenized or excluded from collaborative homelessness initiatives (Buchnea et al., 2021). For example, FNMI may report they were invited to join a collaborative initiative with already set agendas, non-FNMI leadership, and Western collaboration approaches (Bomberry et al., 2020; Oelke et al., 2016). This context leaves little space for FNMI organizations to affirm their leadership and address the specificity of Indigenous homelessness in Canada.

Theoretical Frameworks

Internationally, there are several definitions and models of homelessness prevention (Apicello, 2010; Culhane et al., 2011; Dej et al., 2020; Lindblom, 1991; Nicholas & Henwood, 2018; Shinn et al., 2001). In this paper, we highlight typologies and approaches to homelessness prevention developed in Canada (Dej et al., 2020; Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Nichols & Doberstein, 2016; Oudshoorn et al., 2020) due to their geographical alignment with the context of the *Giiwe* model. Outlining the elements of these homelessness prevention typologies is meant to support the reader in understanding the type of intervention *Giiwe* represents within a broader landscape of homelessness prevention initiatives. Additionally, we present a metaphor about bricks and threads to convey the type of worldviews that guide *Giiwe*'s operation.

Homelessness Prevention Definition, Typologies, and Relational Approaches

Dej et al. (2020) defined homelessness prevention as the “policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness” (p. 402). These authors proposed a typology for homelessness prevention to propose a common language on the nature of homelessness prevention and assist in accumulating an evidence base to refine existing interventions and policies. The typology is rooted in public health prevention frameworks that distinguish between diverse types of prevention, including primary (e.g., diminishing all people’s risk of experiencing homelessness and strengthening protective factors), secondary (e.g., targeting those at high risk of experiencing homelessness), tertiary (e.g., supporting people to maintain housing stability), and quaternary (e.g., addressing unintended consequences of homelessness prevention and reduction initiatives). The typology is formed by six interdependent elements—structural prevention, systems prevention, early intervention, eviction prevention, housing stabilization, and empowerment—that operate more effectively when

integrated within cohesive homelessness and social support systems (Dej et al., 2020; Oudshoorn et al., 2020). Due to the focus of this paper on collaborative approaches to homelessness prevention, it is important to unpack the systems prevention element. Dej et al. (2020) specify that systems prevention acts on the institutional failures contributing to the risk of homelessness. The strategies associated with this form of prevention include enhancing service access, removing service barriers, and discharge planning from institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and child protection (Dej et al., 2020).

There is also scholarship that does not intend to classify types of homelessness responses but discusses relational approaches to inter-organizational collaboration that share some similarities with the *Giiwe* model. Relational approaches highlight the value of human relationships as the basis for catalyzing new ways to see housing-related issues from multiple viewpoints and foster innovative action. For example, Bopp et al. (2016) used communities of practice to cultivate policy learning and programmatic systems change; and Phipps et al. (2021) used innovative methods for individuals with lived experience with housing inadequacy to share their knowledge with people working in professional roles through participatory action research activities that incorporated First Nations teachings, theatre-based exercises, and ample unstructured time to explore new ways of understanding housing issues. Proponents of relational approaches to inter-organizational coordination emphasized the importance of meeting as people rather than as agency representatives; reflecting on the extent to which people collaborate to better understand system gaps and policy biases; and creating the human connections that will guarantee that collaborative work is prioritized and followed through (Bopp et al., 2016; Phipps et al., 2019).

Bricks and Threads Metaphor

Jimmy et al. (2019) offer a metaphor about bricks and threads that has been previously used to engage Indigenous artists in conversations about the tensions and opportunities of collaborating with non-Indigenous institutions. The bricks in the metaphor share qualities frequently attributed to modern Western thought, whereas the threads resemble characteristics that are common to various Indigenous knowledge systems. The bricks and threads are not meant to represent non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. Indeed, Jimmy et al. caution that many Indigenous peoples may use “brick sensibilities” to navigate their daily lives within contexts that face the legacies of colonialism and that some non-Indigenous peoples have managed to embrace “thread sensibilities.” Thus, Jimmy et al. (2019) recommend readers see this metaphor as a tool for thinking about institutional contexts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaboration rather than as an objective description of reality or people.

Brick sensibilities divide reality into bricks that help people delineate different world elements. Bricks can be organized according to their type and hierarchies. Similarly, relationships among organizations are structured around mandates and professional hierarchies. Brick sensibilities assumed that everything that exists can be described through language. These assumptions lead to interventionist approaches to change in which mapping the bricks of the world helps humans engineer solutions that will foster adequate social relationships among humans. Brick sensibilities are objective-oriented, prefer fast solutions, and often align with Western approaches to collaborative homelessness prevention and substantive ontologies (i.e., views of reality that see discrete entities as the fundamental forms of reality).

Thread sensibilities see a world composed of relationships that are symbolized as threads. Threads are interwoven, so it is difficult to know where one aspect of reality ends and the other

starts. Humans may be seen as one being of Creation that relies on the work of all other beings to sustain their lives. Relationships among organizations are valued due to a sense of interdependency and a search for collective well-being. When facing an issue, knowledge can have practical uses (e.g., helping someone get something they need) and metaphorical applications (e.g., it is up to everyone to find their meaning in stories). However, there will always be aspects of reality that will remain unknown, and sometimes the best knowledge will not come from humans but other living, non-living and spiritual beings. In collaboration contexts, thread sensibilities may embrace slow-paced and non-interventionist approaches to change that prioritize maintaining balanced relationships. It is assumed that only relationship-building can create the collective capacities needed to imagine shared actions and solutions. Thread sensibilities resonate with some commonly shared features among Indigenous knowledge systems and other relational ontologies (i.e., views of reality in which relationships among entities as more fundamental than entities themselves).

We acknowledge that using a metaphor as a theoretical lens is not a dominant strategy in modern Western scholarship. From such a standpoint, theory often attempts to explain reality through discrete variables and their relationships. Contrastingly, metaphors are open to multiple interpretations, and people may apply them how they see fit. Given the international audience of this journal, the bricks and threads metaphor can offer readers the flexibility to take from it what makes sense for their context and knowledge traditions. In our case, the bricks and threads metaphor offers accessible language to convey the idea that modern Western thought is not the only way knowing and being in the world, and that inter-organizational collaboration models like *Giiwe* can be better understood through the FNMI worldviews and experiences that have informed its development.

Methods

This paper builds on five years of collective experience designing, implementing, evaluating, and adjusting the *Giiwe* model. A developmental evaluation during *Giiwe*'s first year supported M'Wikwedong in pilot-testing this model (Sanchez-Pimienta & Masuda, 2019). *Giiwe*'s developmental evaluation explored the relational aspects of inter-organizational collaboration through qualitative research methods. Evaluation activities included 13 semi-structured interviews and two sharing circles with *Giiwe* participants, participant observation in *Giiwe* activities, and analysis of administrative logs. Evaluation findings were reported back to the *Giiwe* Coordinator regularly to inform project design adjustment and to all *Giiwe* participants to affirm project successes and areas of opportunity for future development. The *Giiwe* model continues to be adjusted according to the input of M'Wikwedong staff, *Giiwe* participants, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, individuals who have lived experience with homelessness, and CEHE researchers. In this section, we situate the intervention setting, the authors' positionality, and the emergence of the *Giiwe* model.

Intervention Setting

The city of Owen Sound and its surrounding region have seen tangible examples of colonial land dispossession and racism, but also First Nations leadership, resurgence, and land stewardship (McLaren, 2005, 2007). The area in which M'Wikwedong operates is part of the *Saukiing Anishinaabekiing*—the territory of Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON), a collective of both Saugeen First Nation and Chippewas of Nawash First Nation. However, due to treaties 45 ½, 67, 72, 82, and 93 (Saugeen Ojibway Nation, 2016), the Canadian state now claims jurisdiction over the area where M'Wikwedong operates. Notably, in 1857 treaty 82 displaced the Nawash village—the largest SON settlement of the time—to leave more space for the growth of the settler

community of the Sydenham Township, today Owen Sound (McMullen, 1997). Despite the forced relocation of the Nawash village, the Saugeen Ojibway and Indigenous peoples from other nations have established their home back in the region, such that they are deeply woven into the social fabric of the city, albeit often not visibly so from the perspective of the settler community.

Among the 21,341 inhabitants of Owen Sound, 890 reported FNMI identity according to the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2019). As is common in other Canadian jurisdictions (Environics Institute, 2010; Rotondi et al., 2017), FNMI service providers perceive that the size of the FNMI population in Owen Sound is underestimated. Since Owen Sound is the regional hub for employment, education, health and social services, there is a significant flux of FNMI in Owen Sound, which includes SON members who live on-reserve or other FNMI who visit Owen Sound for personal, leisure or business reasons. Common flows into homelessness in this region include hospital discharge, prison releases, and the inability to live on-reserve. Evidence shows that SON members continue to face overt and covert forms of racism in the Grey-Bruce region (Henderson, 2014; McLaren, 2007). In the housing context, the expression of anti-FNMI racism includes racist assumptions about the ability of FNMI to be “good tenants” and a lack of accommodation of cultural practices such as extended family visits or traditional medicine use (Phipps, 2019).

The Grey-Bruce region has a longstanding tradition of inter-organizational collaboration, with committees that focus on falls prevention, climate change, healthy communities, physical activity promotion, violence prevention, a drug and alcohol community strategy, and a poverty taskforce with a housing-specific sub-committee. Notably, before *Giiwe*'s inception in 2018, no FNMI-specific collaborative initiatives were operating in Grey-Bruce. However, after the release

of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015)—which investigated the impacts of residential schools in Canada—FNMI organizations experienced a spike in requests for collaboration, as all sectors of Canadian society were called to act on reconciling their relationships with FNMI. Despite such increased interest in collaboration, FNMI organizations in Grey-Bruce could find it difficult to get involved in inter-organizational initiatives due to busy schedules, an overload of participation invitations, concerns about tokenistic involvement, and limited space to discuss FNMI-specific needs and preferences.

Organizational Context and Author Positionality

M'Wikwedong is an urban FNMI organization that, as of 2022, delivers about 17 social support programs to FNMI and other interested community members who live off-reserve in Owen Sound and the Grey-Bruce region. Almost all M'Wikwedong staff and board members identify as First Nations or Métis. *Giiwe* is an Indigenous-led model because it is run and administered by M'Wikwedong. The CEHE is a research laboratory with researchers and trainees affiliated with the University of Victoria, Queen's University, and the University of Toronto, Canada. This laboratory centres on community-driven knowledge and practices to understand and act on the causes of environmental health inequity, with a research portfolio in areas related to housing, decolonial health promotion, and human rights.

The authors of this paper hold various Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds and experiences with colonialism. Diane Giroux is the *Giiwe* Coordinator at M'Wikwedong. As a French-Canadian person, Diane receives guidance from M'Wikwedong staff, Elders and Knowledge Keepers from SON and other FNMI to plan and facilitate *Giiwe* activities. Paul Nadjiwan is Anishinaabe from Chippewas of Nawash First Nation. Paul is a Traditional Knowledge Keeper who advises *Giiwe*'s engagement with Traditional Knowledge and Practices

from the perspective of his nation. Renee K. Abram is Haudenosaunee from Oneida Nation of the Thames. As the Executive Director of M'Wikwedong, Renee provides strategic guidance on the programmatic development of *Giiwe*. From CEHE, Jeff Masuda is a Japanese-Canadian academic with expertise in environmental health equity. Jeff advised *Giiwe's* initial program design and oversaw the developmental evaluation of *Giiwe*. Carlos Sanchez-Pimienta is a Mexican *mestizo*—a non-Indigenous identity category that occupies a position of privilege in relation to Indigenous Peoples—with mixed Indigenous and Spanish heritage but little information about the originating communities of his ancestors. Carlos has been a grant writer and developmental evaluator for *Giiwe*, and currently supports this initiative through consultancy and model drafting. Because *Giiwe* is a model that seeks to improve coordination and understanding among FNMI and non-FNMI organizations, we believe that our diverse backgrounds, knowledge traditions, and personal talents have been fundamental for the ample buy-in of this model in Grey-Bruce.

Model Creation

The impetus to create *Giiwe* stemmed from M'Wikwedong's work assisting individuals involved with Canada's criminal justice system in 2017. M'Wikwedong's Court Worker faced challenges in finding support from external organizations, particularly those of single adult men that experienced mental health challenges and drug use. Even though several local organizations could offer housing, food, clothing, and transportation-related support, M'Wikwedong found it difficult to liaise with such support services. For this reason, M'Wikwedong's Court Worker spent a considerable amount of her time securing basic living support rather than addressing the mandate of her position. Similar stories of discomfort among FNMI staff in other local organizations were common. There was a sense that coordination among FNMI and non-FNMI

organizations needed to improve. Individuals experiencing homelessness were a priority for M'Wikwedong due to the severe negative impacts that homelessness can cause.

As a gesture of gratitude to M'Wikwedong for supporting his master's thesis fieldwork, Carlos volunteered to write a funding application for a M'Wikwedong-led project to tackle this issue. M'Wikwedong staff connected Carlos with FNMI and non-FNMI social service staff for him to seek guidance in the creation of the funding proposal tailored for a provincial government funding stream. As a result, the funding application focused on bringing together FNMI and non-FNMI organizations to foster trusting and coordinated relationships and share knowledge on FNMI contexts and priorities. Upon funding receipt, M'Wikwedong hired Diane as the Program Coordinator. The project name was inspired by "*Giiwe*" an Anishinaabemowin word that may be translated to 's/he goes home' (The Ojibwe People's Dictionary, 2015).

The *Giiwe* Model

Through the lens of the homelessness prevention typology of Dej et al. (2020), *Giiwe* could be understood as a collaborative initiative that centres on systems prevention. As such, *Giiwe*'s overall goal is to better coordinate existing institutional policies, programs, and services that may benefit Indigenous home seekers, both within and outside the homelessness-specific sector. To walk towards its goal, *Giiwe* focuses on (1) sustaining a M'Wikwedong-led partnership on collaborative homelessness prevention that prioritizes FNMI knowledge and approaches to collaboration; (2) sharing knowledge about FNMI-specific contexts, history, needs, and priorities, from the perspective of Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, service providers, and individuals with lived experience with homelessness; and (3) improving institutional coordination and awareness of the nature and extent of existing support services, including FNMI-specific programming.

The core activity of this model is hosting in-person meetings called “*Giiwe* Circles” that last two to three hours each. The frequency of the *Giiwe* Circles has ranged from monthly to quarterly over the years, including periods when *Giiwe* activities were suspended to redirect its resources to COVID-19 housing relief efforts during 2020 and 2021. The organizations that work with *Giiwe* extend outside of the homelessness sector to include any interested organization and individuals who may play a role in supporting FNMI when they are seeking to find or sustain their housing. Additionally, in light of the Indigenous definition of homelessness in Canada (Thistle, 2017), organizations that may support the connections of FNMI with community, land, kin, spirituality, and other desired services may also join *Giiwe*. The sectors currently involved in *Giiwe* include housing provision, utility bill support, mental health, legal support, public health, health care provision, FNMI-specific services, children and youth services, harm reduction, women's support, emergency first responders, police, natural areas, community funding, and government.

The *Giiwe* model includes five core elements that help understand the facilitation approach of the *Giiwe* Circles. Our depiction of the *Giiwe* model resonates with the Anishinaabe medicine wheel, also known as the gifts of the four directions (Bell, 2013; Nabigon, 1999). The *Giiwe* model aligns with the model of balance provided by the medicine wheel teachings and their encouragement to form relationships and work in teams with peoples that have diverse gifts (Brant-Castellano, 2000). We draw on Anishinaabe teachings because *Giiwe* operates in the *Saukiing Anishinaabekiing*, and most of its invited speakers are from SON or other Anishinaabe Nations. However, it is worth noting that the *Giiwe* model has successfully accommodated the participation of other FNMI, including Haudenauonee and Métis speakers. Thus, the *Giiwe* model could be characterized as “multi-epistemic” because it is designed to foster respectful

engagements among people who operate within diverse knowledge systems. Our description of the *Giiwe* model also leverages from the bricks and threads metaphor to map common participant responses to model components depending on their affinity with substantive or relational worldviews. We offer Figure 1—which should be read clockwise starting from the east—to illustrate the *Giiwe* model. We proceed to describe each element of the model:

[Please insert Figure 1 here]

- **FNMI leadership.** FNMI leadership is at the centre of the model, as FNMI-led initiatives and policies tend to provide better results in reducing and preventing FNMI homelessness (Oelke, 2016). Brick sensibilities, with their desire for context-free knowledge and practices, may struggle to understand the need for an FNMI-led initiative on homelessness prevention in a region that already had a multi-agency initiative tackling housing. However, thread sensibilities cannot ignore the links between Indigenous homelessness and settler colonialism. Instead, those operating from thread sensibilities may affirm need for FNMI leadership and self-determination as the core element in the model. In connection with the four direction teachings, FNMI leadership represents the Inner Fire that propels collaborative action with trust, respect, and courage (Nabigon, 1999), values that are needed to address FNMI and non-FNMI relationships in contexts that have been negatively impacted by colonialism.
- **Ceremony.** *Giiwe* Circles start with an invited Elder or Knowledge Holder offering introductory words, a prayer, a song, or a smudging ceremony. The beginning of each *Giiwe* Circle may vary according to the specific cultural tradition of the facilitator. Previously invited Knowledge Holders and Elders have stated that their openings and closings help to honour all of Creation, bind participants at a spiritual level, ask for

spiritual guidance for the work to be done, and contribute to creating space for a successful meeting. Such contributions align with the Eastern gift of vision (Bell, 2013). When seen from thread sensibilities, ceremony emphasizes the importance of spirituality, non-human relationality, and non-human knowledge. Those operating within bricks sensibilities may be used to secular approaches to inter-organization collaboration and struggle to understand the contributions of ceremony within the *Giiwe* Circles.

- **FNMI Knowledge Sharing.** Following the meeting opening, an invited speaker shares knowledge on a topic of relevance to the intentions for that *Giiwe* Circle. For instance, topics addressed in the past include the history of Turtle Island (North America) from an Anishinaabe perspective, the history of land dispossession and community displacement of the Saugeen Ojibway, the power of the circle, the interconnectedness of all things, the Indigenous definition of homelessness, and the Seven Grandfather teachings. The invited Elder or Knowledge Holder may take as long as they need to share their knowledge, usually finishing around the middle of the session. This component resonates with the teachings of the Southern direction, which offer the gift of time and emphasizes relating to that which one sees (Bell, 2013). Given the ethnocentric tendencies of modern Western thought, this component emphasizes the need to allocate the time that is needed to hear FNMI knowledges. Those operating from brick sensibilities may feel frustrated if the connection between the shared knowledge and the session's intent is not explicitly clear. Conversely, those operating from thread sensibilities may encourage other participants to listen intently and seek their meaning in what is being shared.
- **Unstructured and Structured Conversations.** *Giiwe* offers opportunities for unstructured interactions among its participants by offering a meal at each session. Meal-sharing is

meant to be a space for participants to build relationships with each other through an informal setting. Strengthening the personal relationships among participants is an indirect approach to improving inter-organizational coordination that hopes to increase the chance of FNMI to access the support they seek. Additionally, *Giiwe* offers opportunities for structured dialogue using the sharing circle methodology, also called learning circle (Nabigon et al., 1999). Sharing circles are facilitated by an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Holder or the *Giiwe* Program Coordinator. All attendees can speak freely for as long as they wish. When it is someone's turn to speak, that person holds a talking stick or feather while the rest remain silent, listening. Once that person has finished, they pass the object to the next person until everyone has had at least one chance to speak. When using Anishinaabe protocol, the object is passed clockwise. This structured format contributes to levelling professional hierarchies because all participants contribute to the sharing circle as equals. Themes discussed at *Giiwe* Circles include priorities for inter-organizational collaboration on FNMI homelessness prevention, collaboration on ongoing initiatives, and updates on new support services and policies relevant to Indigenous homelessness. *Giiwe* Circles may also use open-ended conversations instead of a structured sharing circle. For example, when *Giiwe* moved to an online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a few participants were asked to provide updates on their work, while the last part of the session was open to any participant to speak.

Giiwe Circles are meant to be non-judgemental spaces for all attendees to ask questions and seek guidance from FNMI. Despite *Giiwe*'s approach, there are instances in which conflict may emerge. While conflict tends to be evaded within collaborative work, it also

has the potential to foster transformative change (Buchnea et al., 2021, Nabigon et al., 1999). For this reason, if a conflict arises during a *Giiwe* Circle, the *Giiwe* Coordinator follows up to try and resolve the issue in a way that contributes to dismantling the systemic barriers that FNMI may face in their encounter with institutional actors. *Giiwe*'s approach to unstructured and structured conversations resonates with the teachings of the West, which offer the gift of reason to figure out matters of interest (Bell, 2013). In this regard, the bricks and threads metaphor helps to map potential responses to group discussions. Brick sensibilities may seek consensus because it is assumed that the correctness of knowledge relies on its correlation with an independently occurring phenomenon. This orientation may result in overlooking some perspectives for presumably being less correlated with the independent phenomenon in question. Conversely, thread sensibilities may admit a plurality of truths because people's knowledge is seen as situated, insufficient, and interdependent.

- **Follow-up Actions.** Structured and unstructured conversations often identify areas for service creation, inter-organizational coordination, capacity building, and policy improvement. Such ideas need time outside of the *Giiwe* Circles to gather interested people around them to plan and pursue their completion, whether those initiatives are coordinated by M'Wikwedong or not. Examples of *Giiwe*-led initiatives include the collaborative creation of new services for FNMI. Similarly, partner-led initiatives may involve setting up cultural competency training sessions for staff with the assistance of the *Giiwe* Coordinator. The Follow-up Actions component of *Giiwe* connects with the Northern direction teachings, emphasizing that one can realize their vision through movement (Bell, 2013). In this direction, significant challenges can exist for those

operating within thread sensibilities. Indeed, many of the organizational channels to leverage inter-organizational initiatives are framed within brick sensibilities (e.g., funding opportunities, policies). This situation forces thread sensibilities to be “boxed” into containers that brick sensibilities can readily understand. However, collaborative action also provides opportunities to seek relationships in which both brick and thread sensibilities are “braided” so that they can provide their best gifts towards a shared goal without transforming one to fit the other (Jimmy et al., 2018).

***Giiwe*'s Achievements**

In this section, we highlight *Giiwe* contributions to FNMI leadership in inter-organizational collaboration, FNMI and non-FNMI coordination, awareness of FNMI contexts, social service policies, and service creation. Perhaps *Giiwe*'s most significant achievement is having founded and sustained the only FNMI-led inter-organizational collaboration in the Grey-Bruce region. Seeing FNMI leadership in *Giiwe* has been empowering for many FNMI staff, community members, and individuals with lived experience who see themselves in this initiative. Similarly, non-FNMI staff members often see *Giiwe* as a valuable source of guidance for addressing the FNMI-specific considerations of their work. The local buy-in that *Giiwe* has achieved is illustrated by its growth. *Giiwe* started with 11 institutional partners in 2018, and its work was limited to Grey County. In 2019, *Giiwe* expanded to Bruce county by request of organizations that wanted to join the initiative. In 2022, *Giiwe* brings together over 20 core organizations of the Grey-Bruce region and liaises with SON housing and social service organizations. *Giiwe*'s mailing list reaches over 150 individuals, and the most well-attended *Giiwe* activities have gathered over 60 participants. Additionally, local buy-in is also exemplified

by the generous financial support of Grey County, Bruce County and other local organizations that have contributed toward *Giiwe*'s core funding.

Regarding FNMI and non-FNMI coordination, *Giiwe* participants have reported a stronger sense of coordination among their organizations. *Giiwe* improved coordination by identifying go-to individuals at each participating organization, clarifying the preferred communication methods of each organization (e.g. email vs cellphone), and hosting a community space where participants can provide periodical updates on homelessness-related programming and opportunities. *Giiwe*'s participants have reported a perceived increase in the number of referrals supporting FNMI. After witnessing the relational benefits that *Giiwe* can bring to FNMI and non-FNMI coordination, some *Giiwe* partner organizations have requested M'Wikwedong's support in hosting ad-hoc *Giiwe* Circles for their organizations or sector. Indeed, the *Giiwe* Coordinator has organized NUMBER *Giiwe* Circles for family services, community safety, and community funding organizations. The positive feedback from these activities suggests that the *Giiwe* model may be successfully adapted to address FNMI and non-FNMI coordination in areas different than homelessness.

Giiwe has fostered increased awareness about FNMI knowledges, history, experiences, and practices. For example, *Giiwe* participants have reported increased knowledge about the intersections between settler-colonialism and service provision in the context of Indigenous homelessness. *Giiwe*'s FNMI participants have emphasized that pursuing reconciliation requires an ongoing commitment to hearing the perspectives of FNMI on service provision. Indeed, some *Giiwe* participants have built relationships with FNMI guest speakers and invited them to share their knowledge within their organizations. Similarly, the *Giiwe* Coordinator has supported non-FNMI organizations in hosting NUMBER staff training sessions for their staff.

Regarding policy, *Giiwe* follows a non-interventionist approach consistent with thread sensibilities. For example, the *Giiwe* Coordinator compiled a list of ideas for organizational improvement that FNMI speakers shared at *Giiwe* Circles. While the list could be seen as a series of recommendations, in consultation with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, M'Wikwedong chose to name the list *Shko Naaniibwida* in Anishinaabemowin, which can be translated to “Standing Strong Together” (link OR Appendix OR Supplemental File I). *Shko Naaniibwida* offers a series of ideas that each organization can consider, interpret, and act on if they choose to. *Giiwe*'s indirect approach to policy change is also exemplified by some *Giiwe* participants who, motivated by the *Giiwe* Circles, have developed and implemented FNMI-specific policies for service delivery within their organizations with the hopes of reducing service barriers and improving access. *Giiwe*'s embracement of thread sensibilities does not prevent M'Wikwedong from adopting collaboration channels that may be more closely related to brick sensibilities. For instance, staff rotation is a barrier to the slow-paced and relational approach to inter-organizational coordination. For this reason, M'Wikwedong has offered *Giiwe* participants a Memorandum of Understanding template should they wish to establish institutionalized channels of coordination between their organization and M'Wikwedong.

Finally, *Giiwe*'s contributions have gone beyond the systems prevention level. For example, a *Giiwe* Circle fostered momentum for M'Wikwedong and another FNMI organization to join forces and create a new program that addressed a gap in FNMI housing outreach. Both organizations successfully obtained funding for two full-time Homelessness Outreach Workers, rent supplements, and emergency funds. Serendipitously, the new collaborative program was already running when the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic hit. This program was essential to respond to an increase in housing-related requests. As a result, the number of households

served doubled from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 (M'Wikwedong, 2021). M'Wikwedong has also collaborated with other organizations in Grey-Bruce to receive funding from the Designated Communities stream of Reaching Home. Being part of Canada's homelessness prevention strategy would have allowed organizations in Grey-Bruce to bolster their housing and homelessness-related programs. Unfortunately, their application was not successful.

Discussion

In this paper, we presented the *Giiwe* model, its core components, and achievements. Through the lens of Western frameworks on homelessness prevention and inter-organizational collaboration, we characterized *Giiwe* as a systems prevention initiative that takes on a relational approach to improve social service access for FNMI living off-reserve in a small city surrounded by a large rural area. Additionally, we introduced the bricks and threads metaphor to help readers grasp potential differences in how inter-organizational collaboration approaches may operate through substantive and relational ontologies. The *Giiwe* model is undoubtedly inspired by relational ontologies as evoked through the thread metaphor. For this reason, our account of the components of the *Giiwe* model emphasizes FNMI-non-FNMI relationships, spirituality, FNMI knowledges, opportunities for collaborating across knowledge systems, and the relevance of fostering adequate relationships before taking action. Our account of *Giiwe*'s achievements highlighted the ability of this model to act as a platform of inter-organizational FNMI leadership, foster improved coordination among FNMI and non-FNMI organizations, enable the creation of collaborative FNMI-specific services, increase awareness of FNMI knowledges and contexts, and promote the adaptation of FNMI-specific policies for service provision.

Our presentation of the *Giiwe* model draws from our collective experience designing, implementing, evaluating, and refining this program since 2018. Our insider account of the

Giiwe model did not aim to quantify its impact quantitatively. Rather, we intended to use diverse theoretical lenses to situate and discuss the specificity of the *Giiwe* model within contexts where a modern Western view of reality is often taken for granted. We found the metaphor of brick and thread sensibilities (Jimmy et al., 2019) helpful in highlighting potential differences between modern Western and Indigenous knowledge systems in the context of inter-organizational initiatives on homelessness prevention. However, our use of the bricks and threads metaphor is not without caveats. When applying this metaphor to specific knowledge systems, it is important to remember that components of brick and thread sensibilities may interact in any given program or policy, whether such initiatives stem from a particular Western or Indigenous context. Further, it is essential to reflect on the possibilities and constraints of language. Our writing of this paper in English privileges a brick sensibility since English is a noun-oriented language that is consistent with substantive ontologies. Contrastingly, Indigenous languages such as *Anishinaabemowin* are verb-based and likely better able to convey the relationships and movements assumed by relational ontologies.

This paper offers four main contributions to an existing knowledge base on systems and intersectoral approaches to homelessness prevention (Apicello, 2010; Culhane et al., 2011; Dej et al., 2020; Lindblom, 1991; Nicholas & Henwood, 2018; Shinn et al., 2001). First, *Giiwe* adds to international examples of Indigenous-specific homelessness prevention models (Lawson-Te Aho et al., 2019; Vallesi et al., 2020), and methodological approaches proposed for collaboration with FNMI in the context of housing and homelessness (City of Toronto Shelter et al., 2018; Shelter Support and Housing Administration, 2019). On this regard, the contribution of our paper is to present, to our knowledge, the first published example of an Indigenous-led model for interorganizational homelessness prevention. In doing so, our paper acts on previous policy

recommendations on Indigenous homelessness published in this journal. Indeed, Oelke et al. (2016) suggested Friendship Centres could play a key role in facilitating cultural safety and collaboration between FNMI and non-FNMI organizations. In Canada, this model may interest organizations involved in funding, designing, or implementing collaborative homelessness prevention initiatives, whether they are part of Reaching Home or not. Internationally, the *Giiwe* model may be of interest to funders, policy-makers, and social service organizations that are involved in homelessness initiatives that mandate Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships.

Second, our paper addresses a gap in systems and intersectoral approaches in a small urban centre surrounded by a large rural area. The context in which the *Giiwe* model operates is thus favourable for establishing and sustaining relationships among staff and organizations that may play a role in homelessness prevention. The *Giiwe* model may not be equally effective in larger urban areas where it may be more difficult to improve collaborative inter-organizational work by nourishing person-to-person staff relationships. Further research may explore the applicability of the *Giiwe* model for larger urban areas. As a limitation of our first two contributions, it is worth noting that the most of sources we have cited in this paper come from English-speaking countries linked to the British Empire, including Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and Canada. Contributions from nations that are or were subject to the French, Spanish, and Dutch Empires may have different insights to offer.

The third contribution lies in the originality of the theoretical lens we used to examine homelessness prevention. The existing literature draws on public health prevention models originally designed to address health issues (Apicello, 2010). For the context of Indigenous homelessness, theoretical orientations that directly engage with colonialism and coloniality allowed us to question the universalization and naturalization of a modern Western view of

reality in homelessness prevention. Through the brick metaphor, we localized the bulk of system and intersectoral approaches to homelessness in the realm of brick sensibilities. Similarly, the thread metaphor allowed us to convey the specificity and contributions of the *Giiwe* model in ways that may better resonate with Indigenous knowledge systems from across the globe. This contribution has significant implications for Indigenous policy and practice in contexts where a modern Western view of reality is dominant. If Western institutions are serious about embracing Indigenous knowledge systems, the view of reality within which programs and policies are created, implemented, and evaluated needs to be pluralized so that those operating from thread sensibilities have more room to flourish.

The fourth essential contribution of this paper lies at the intersection between the *Giiwe* model and relational approaches to inter-organizational coordination stemming from Western scholarship (Bopp et al., 2016; Markoff et al., 2005; Phipps et al., 2020). Both approaches privilege paying attention to how relationships among people impact coordination among organizations that can play a role in preventing homelessness. However, there are also significant differences. Indeed, the *Giiwe* model embraces some aspects of thread sensibilities that were absent in the Western relational approaches, such as engaging with spirituality and non-human relationality through ceremony, embracing metaphoric uses of language, and establishing an explicitly multi-epistemic collaborative space where both brick and thread sensibilities may contribute their strengths. Conversely, Western relational approaches tended to emphasize alternative concepts such as service integration, health equity, mutuality, authenticity, and learning across professional differences. Our comparison of relational approaches to homelessness prevention that build on thread and brick sensibilities is not meant to inquire whether there is an approach that is inherently better than the other. Rather, our dialogue

between relational approaches to inter-organizational collaboration emphasizes that attention to relationality is vital when addressing complex issues like homelessness and inter-organizational coordination.

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Figure 1

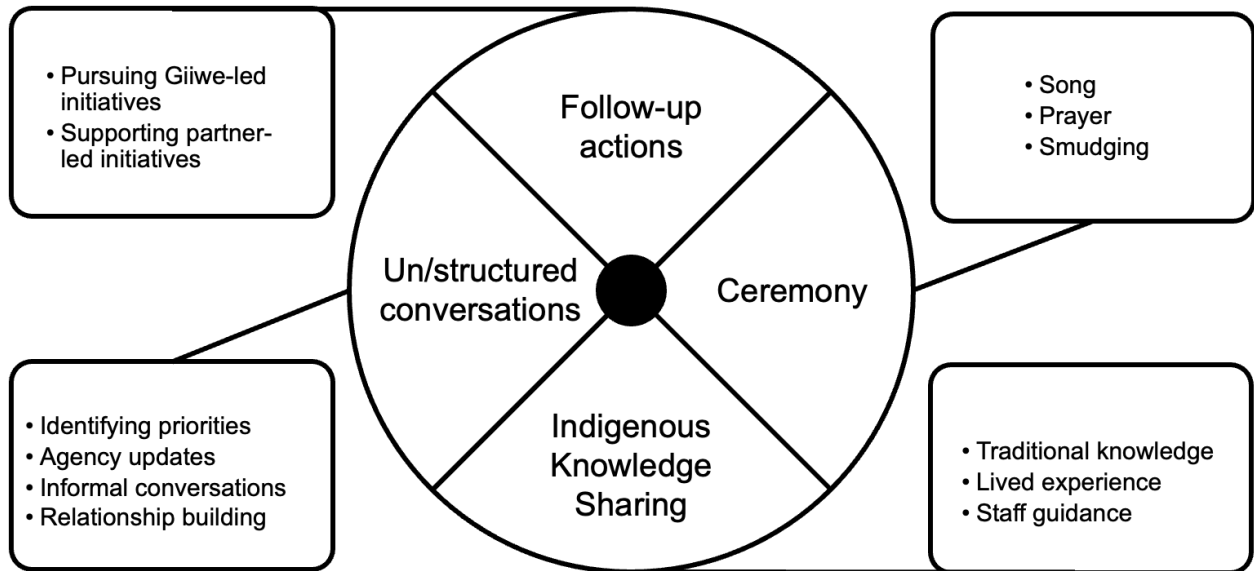


Figure 1. The Giiwe model for systems/intersectoral homelessness prevention

Appendix I

Name and location	Homelessness	Highlights
Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness (ASCHH) Calgary, Alberta	Homelessness-specific committee	*Has operated since 1999 and in 2011 had 50 committee members from both FNMI and non-FNMI organizations (ASCHH, 2011) *Published a plan to end FNMI homelessness in Calgary (ASCHH, 2012)
Indigenous Homelessness Steering Committee Metro Vancouver, British Columbia	Homelessness-specific committee	*Works with other organizations in a systems-based approach to addressing homelessness for the Greater Vancouver Region (Greater Vancouver Community Homelessness Plan, 2020) *Created a homelessness community plan articulating policy priorities (Doberstein, 2016)
Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board Toronto, Ontario	Homelessness-specific advisory board	*Composed of seven FNMI organizations, it assists in decision-making to ensure that the needs of the FNMI homeless individuals are met (Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle, n.d.)

<p>Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC)</p> <p>Metro Vancouver, British Columbia</p>	<p>Council with a housing and homelessness subcommittee</p>	<p>*Brings together 22 FNMI organizations and has a thematic roundtable focused on housing and homelessness. (MVAEC, n.d.)</p> <p>*Its actions revolve around developing a plan to address the root causes of homelessness, analyzing gaps in homelessness services, and evaluating collaboration (MVAEC, n.d.)</p>
<p>Montreal Urban Aboriginal Strategy Network (MUASN)</p> <p>Montreal, Quebec</p>	<p>Network with a housing and homelessness subcommittee</p>	<p>*Published a report on FNMI housing needs and preferences (Latimer et al., 2018)</p> <p>*Published a report on recommendations for the wellbeing of FNMI experiencing homelessness (Tam et al., 2020)</p>
<p>Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Council (TASSC)</p> <p>Toronto, Ontario</p>	<p>Council with work on housing and homelessness</p>	<p>*A research, policy and advocacy organization formed by 18 FNMI member organizations (TASSC, 2022)</p> <p>*Published reports on engagement strategies (City of Toronto Shelter et al., 2018), improving social service delivery for FNMI (TASSC and Well Living House, 2019), and the homelessness experience of Two-Spirit, LGTB*QIA Youth (TASSC, 2014)</p>

<p>Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle (WIEC) Winnipeg, Manitoba</p>	<p>Circle with work on housing and homelessness</p>	<p>*Involves 21 FNMI organizations and includes a priority area on access to housing (WIEC, 2019)</p>
<p>Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition (OAC) Ottawa, Ontario</p>	<p>Coalition with work on housing and homelessness</p>	<p>*Has successfully achieved policy changes to housing allowance eligibility criteria (OAC, 2019), and involved in point-in-time homelessness counts (OAC & The City of Ottawa, 2022).</p>
<p>Inuvik Interagency Committee Inuvik, Northwest Territories</p>	<p>Committee with work on housing and homelessness</p>	<p>*Network of over 30 FNMI and non-FNMI organizations operating since the early 2000s (Christensen, 2013) *Published two reports on the state of homelessness in their region (Christensen, 2013)</p>
<p>Ottawa's Aboriginal Working Committee (AWC) Ottawa, Ontario</p>	<p>City Advisory Committee</p>	<p>*Founded in 2007, it comprises nine non-FNMI organizations and ten FNMI organizations (City of Ottawa, n.d.) *Reported achievements include increased funding on case-management and improvements to Housing First services (OAWC, 2018).</p>

Toronto's Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee (AAC) Toronto, Ontario	City Advisory Committee	*Formal advisory body to Toronto's City Council and composed of fourteen organizations serving FNMI in Toronto (City of Toronto, n.d.). *Collaborated with city departments to provide permanent affordable housing for FNMI residents in the downtown's core (Abele et al., 2012).
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