

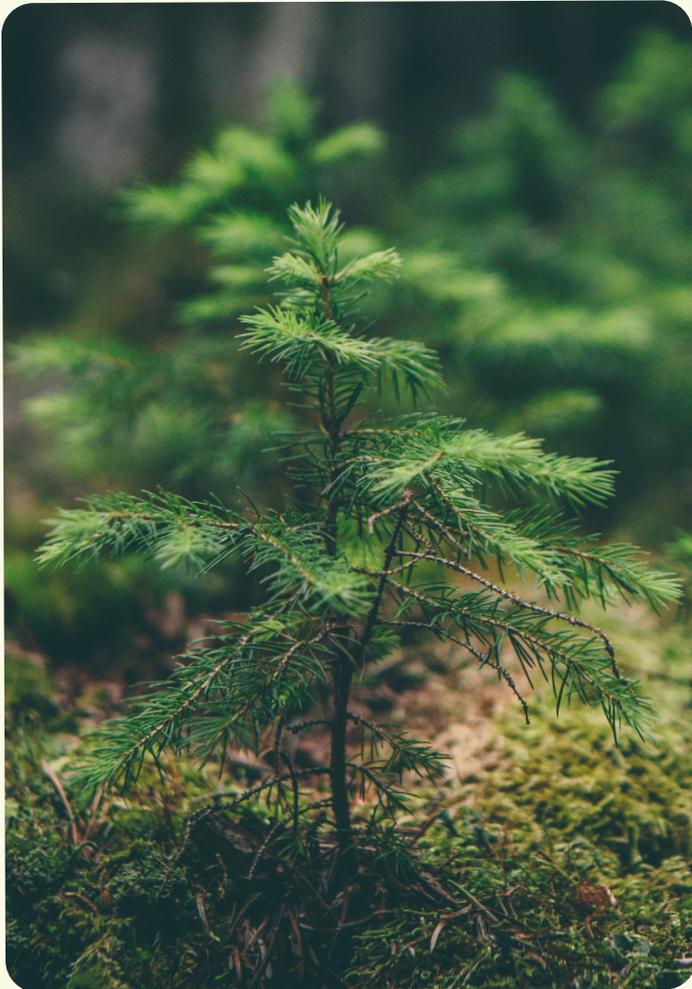


The Healing Place • Tsi Tehshakotitsiénta'  
Endaji mino-pimaadizin • Lieu de guérison

## Reconciliation and Climate Change Planting

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The Healing Place is a community green space located on the traditional territories of the Algonquin and Mohawk Nations in eastern Ontario. It was created in the fall of 2020 through a Reconciliation and Climate Change Planting event planned through collaborative partnership.

The project partners have committed to continued maintenance and expansion of the site, as well as to the creation of a Healing Place network across the province and country in order to meaningfully engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in a restorative process, creating physical places of healing while at the same time cultivating safe, ethical spaces.

More than a planting site or event, The Healing Place represents an important step forward in the journey towards reconciliation.

## The Seed: Background

The seed for this project was first planted at the 2019 Assembly of First Nation's Climate Change Summit in Whitehorse, Yukon, when Eli Enns (Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation; Cofounder, CEO, and President of the IISAAK OLAM Foundation) and Curtis Scurr (Mohawk of the Bay of Quinte; Associate Director of the Assembly of First Nation's Environment Sector) approached Larry McDermott (Algonquin from Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation; Executive Director of



Plenty Canada), pictured top left, with the idea of offsetting event participants' travel-related carbon emissions through tree planting. Larry in turn presented the idea to Chris Craig (member of Algonquins of Pikwakanagan; Senior Forestry Technician at South Nation Conservation), pictured middle left, and together they brought the idea to South Nation Conservation and the Eastern Ontario First Nation Working Group.



From there, the partnership grew, and the Reconciliation and Climate Change Planting Working Group was formed to advance the project; they committed to meeting on a regular basis to build their relationships with each other and plan the planting event.



The name of the site, The Healing Place, was born from a comment made by Abraham Francis (Mohawk from Akwesasne; Environmental Services Manager for the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne), pictured bottom left, regarding how forests are seen as safe and healing places by many, especially so by Indigenous peoples. Additionally, the name speaks to both the medicinal applications and traditional uses of the species planted there. The name also reflects the opportunity and necessity to build relationships and heal some of the pain that systemic oppression and violence towards Indigenous peoples has caused throughout Canada's history.

## The Roots: Governance



From the start, the intent of this project was more than simply planning a planting event; rather, it was – and still is – about creating and maintaining a space of healing. As such, following a few initial meetings, project partners recognized the need to invest in a governance structure that accommodates Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of transferring knowledge, tradition, and ceremony.

The Working Group dedicated several meetings to discuss governance structure and negotiate how two different First Nation ways could be incorporated. Following these discussions, the group adopted components of both traditional Algonquin and Haudenosaunee ways of governance, which have always been practiced out of respect for each other and all creation (and have become second nature to South Nation Conservation).

The overall success and impact of The Healing Place was contingent upon a strong root system – a governance structure founded upon ethical space, two-eyed seeing, and the concept that all voices are equal and important. The following methodology guided all project activities:

- **Begin each meeting with a traditional opening.**  
Ceremony is a major part of all First Nations gatherings; conducting a prayer, smudging, or both is a way for all to become united in the same space, mind, heart, and spirit.
- **Pass the feather.**  
This allows all the opportunity to speak and be part of a circle as equals.
- **Use the Two Row Wampum Belt, One Bowl One Spoon Wampum Belt, the Friendship Belt, and the 1764 Royal Proclamation Belt as a guide.**  
There is a need to identify that the group is non-political, and to create ethical space where all can be comfortable not to worry about retribution of words spoken during group gatherings.
- **Flexible governance.**  
Ensure various voices are heard and skill sets are used efficiently. Accommodate needs of both oral Indigenous and western written knowledge transfer systems.
- **Group consensus.**  
All share a common end goal, and each member has equal opportunity to participate in discussion and decision making.
- **End each meeting with a traditional closing.**  
This allows us to collectively express our gratitude for the opportunity to share our responsibilities for the continuation of all life and learn from each other.

Despite needing to convene virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Working Group was able to meet regularly without sacrificing traditional ceremony elements.

## The Trunk: Partnership



The Healing Place is a unique project in many senses. It is the first local project of its kind where so many different partners and perspectives have been unified around a collective impact.

This project brought partners from Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and different First Nations backgrounds together, building upon the positive beliefs and stories that each group shares and facilitating both Indigenous-to-non-Indigenous and Indigenous-to-Indigenous knowledge transfer.



Also unique, the establishment of The Healing Place relied upon equal parts relationship building and project management, with heavy focus placed upon creating trust between partners. The partnership formed through The Healing Place is an ongoing entity, and is made up of:

- Algonquins of Pikwakanagan
- Mohawks of Akwesasne
- Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation
- Assembly of First Nations
- Plenty Canada
- South Nation Conservation
- Forests Ontario
- Ontario Power Generation

Though each partner contributed unique resources and insight to the group, all worked together collaboratively to support the development of the governance structure, explore how reconciliation and two-eyed seeing could guide event planning, work to incorporate Indigenous teachings directly into the planting site plan, and discuss how The Healing Place could continue to engage community members, support the sharing of stories, and act as an educational resource long after planting.



“*When we put trees in the ground, we create more than just a physical forest that we see. We create an environment in which the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual are all cultivated – they are all honoured, they are all part of that experience. When we do something like that together, we bond and become stronger in our relationships.*

*At one level, this planting event is a small gesture; at another level, it's hugely important. It brings a number of partners into the process, it allows us to tell our stories as we see them, and it gives us an opportunity to learn from each other and to help others learn about what's really important. To me, that is reconciliation.*”

Larry McDermott

## The Branches: The Site and Event



The Healing Place, planted on September 23, 2020 (National Tree Day), stands on the traditional territories of the Algonquin and Mohawk Nations in Shanly, Ontario. The 89-acre site, located on South Nation Conservation property, is home to several grassland Species at Risk, including the Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, and locally significant Gorgon Checkerspot butterfly.

Indigenous knowledge was interwoven into every aspect of The Healing Place, including species selection, site design, and graphic representation. In total, over 250 culturally significant trees, shrubs, and other species were planted according to a design by Chris Craig based on the medicine wheel and other cultural considerations.

Like the circle of life, the medicine wheel has no beginning and no end. The four pillars of life (mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical connections) and cardinal directions are represented in the wheel's spokes. Each colour of the wheel (white, yellow, red, and black) reflect the four elements all life depends upon: fire, earth, air, and water. Plant species and their locations were selected intentionally based upon cultural considerations.

- The east, where we enter and leave the circle, is also the entrance and exit to the site. Each direction is marked by a culturally significant tree: Red Oak in the north, Sugar Maple in the east, White Cedar in the south, and White Pine in the west.
- Medicinal herbs and berries such as strawberries, raspberries, red currant, white currant, gooseberries, and black berries were planted in the centre of the site.
- Seven trees were planted in the interior of the wheel and 13 along the exterior of the wheel to represent the seven Grandfather teachings and the 13 moons, respectively.
- An outside ring of Eastern White Cedars enclose the site, providing a quiet, safe place for self-healing.
- The land-based culture of Indigenous people intrinsically incorporates the presence of endangered tree species, such as the Butternut, and keystone tree species, such as the Sugar Maple, that ultimately promote biodiversity.



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*This is a story that we tell; this is going to be a healing story that has many lessons, has many teachings for future generations. We're not just the descendants of our ancestors, we are future ancestors as Indigenous peoples, as people of this land.*

**Abraham Francis**

Twenty-five community and First Nations partners gathered to help plant The Healing Place. The planting event commenced with a traditional opening ceremony featuring a drum circle, smudging, offering of tobacco, and the Words Before All Else. The majority of the event was live streamed on Facebook for those unable to attend. It should be noted that interest in participating in this event was extremely high, but attendance had to be limited due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Funding from Assembly of First Nations, TD Bank Group, Enbridge Gas, and Ontario Power Generation was integral in supporting the establishment of The Healing Place. The site was donated through the Ecological Gift Program by John Gruntke with the intention to preserve ecological integrity.

## The Forest: Vision for the Future



Truly, The Healing Place is more than a planting site or green space. It's about acknowledging and celebrating the connection between land and Indigenous culture. It's about stimulating difficult but important conversations. It's about beginning to restore land, health, language, and relationships. It's about working together to co-create an alternative future.

Our vision is simple: A network of Healing Places across the country where community members from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds can come together and participate in the healing process of reconciliation, so that we may all learn how to move forward together. We will work towards this vision by continuing to maintain, expand, and identify opportunities for education on this site, while also carrying the idea to other communities.

Planting can support reconciliation only when it meaningfully engages all involved in a participatory manner. As such, it is each of our responsibilities to work together. As a group, we have made a long-term commitment to The Healing Place and the continual learning that comes with it; we have made a commitment to the concept of feeding the bundle and polishing the belt. We recognize that this is not a project with an end date, but rather an eternal lesson with its own heartbeat.

[Join Us On Our Journey](#)

To learn more and get involved with The Healing Place, **contact EMAIL.**

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When I first heard ‘The Healing Place,’ three things immediately stood out. One is the cultural side of it: the medicinal applications and traditional uses of the species that are being planted. The second part is the healing aspect of our natural environment – planting trees, growing the forest, carbon sequestration, and what that all means from a climate change perspective. Finally, within the broader concept of reconciliation, this is an opportunity to build relationships and to spread awareness that will help us look in an unfiltered, unvarnished way at our past and help heal some of the pain at a larger, cross-cultural scale. The word healing has so many applications and is so appropriate for this initiative.

Scott Jackson

Director of Indigenous and Stakeholder Relations for Forests Ontario



