

# Roots of resilience: A research project in Kahnawake



**MORGAN KAHENTONNI  
PHILLIPS**

*SPECIAL TO THE EASTERN DOOR*

As a community researcher working with the National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research, which is part of the Culture & Mental Health Research Unit at the Jewish General Hospital and McGill University, I want to inform the community about a research project, the Roots of Resilience Project that is ongoing in Kahnawake.

I recently completed a BA Honours in Anthropology and will be continuing on to a Master's this fall. During my studies, I became interested in this research project after learning about it from a community member who helped create it,

and is a student pursuing a PhD.

Did you say research? As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori Scholar) states, "research is one of the dirtiest words in Indigenous communities." Let's face it, it is. We've all heard stories of non-Native researchers coming into our communities, asking lots of questions and leaving, never to be heard from again. This left community members wondering what ever happened to that data that was collected? What did they write about us? Oftentimes outside researchers interpreted the data with their perspectives, prejudices, and stereotypes, writing things that offended us and did not appropriately reflect what we had to say. But it doesn't always have to be the way that research is conducted, not if Indigenous researchers create our own research projects, or are involved in a study from start to finish.

In research terms, being involved in a study means that we participate and contribute to the research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, report writing, community reporting, writing of scholarly journals and conference presentations. More and more Indigenous researchers and

scholars of today are playing key roles in research projects in order to ensure that an Indigenous perspective is given a voice, and to ensure that the research benefits our communities.

Take KSDPP for instance, it began as a participatory research project that not only created jobs and encouraged the pursuit of higher education, but it brought awareness, diabetes prevention interventions, and much more to this community. The same could be said about Indigenous Access McGill (IAM), which recently has been created at the McGill School of Social Work as a direct result of research conducted in Kahnawake and Kanehsatake regarding the Aboriginal Certificate in Social Work. IAM is a service now offered to Indigenous students who need help in applying to social work and health science programs in university and support during studies. For more information contact Michael Loft at, iam.socialwork@mcgill.ca, or 514-398-2129.

The research project that I am involved with is called Roots of Resilience: Stories of Resilience, Healing and Transformation. It's an interna-

tional project involving some of Canada and New Zealand's Indigenous people. The aim of this project is to examine resilience from Indigenous perspectives by collecting stories of community and personal experiences of doing well despite challenges. Why? Oral history and storytelling have played significant roles in our worldview and cosmology. The goal is to gather stories of what has helped resilience, healing and healthy living. These stories can then be shared with others so that they can learn from them. It can also help identify ways of promoting resilience and healing in each of the communities involved. Keep in mind that many Canadians still think we live in teepees, so as Indigenous scholars, we feel it is important to teach the world about who we are, from OUR point of view rather than from an outside researcher's point of view. Ultimately, through this research we hope to identify interventions and initiatives that can promote resilience and healing in each community.

This project has been approved by Onkwatakari'táhtshera Health and Social Services Research Council. To date, focus groups have taken place

with three different age groups within the community; one or two more may take place. A Community Advisory Group has been formed to help guide the research and is made up of four individuals from Kahnawake.

The next step of the project is to interview individuals in the community to gather stories of personal experiences or your story of doing well despite challenges. I am inviting anyone who is interested in sharing their story of resilience or interested in learning more about the project to contact me. Once all the data has been collected, the research team (consisting of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers) along with the Community Advisory Group, will collaborate to analyze the data and work toward developing ways of sharing the information so as to benefit the community.

If you have any additional ideas on how this research can benefit this community or if you would like to participate in this project, please contact me at kahentonni@yahoo.ca. For general information about this project and other Roots of Resilience projects see [www.mcgill.ca/resilience](http://www.mcgill.ca/resilience).