

UNSETTLING SETTLEMENT

Building Mi'kmaw - Newcomer
Relationships in Unama'ki - Cape Breton

P2P-FCFA Conference for LIPs and RIF
November 26, 2025



CAPE BRETON
LOCAL IMMIGRATION
PARTNERSHIP



INTRODUCTIONS

THE IMPORTANCE OF WELCOMING AND CEREMONY

Mary Louise Bernard

- Mi'kmaw Elder
- Self-published author
- Former First Nation
Chief of Wagmatcook
First Nation



SMUDGE



HONOUR SONG

Let us be proud of who we are,
the L'Nu, the Indigenous
My family
Let's gather together
Let's be proud of our ancestry
My family
Let's help each other to do what
the creator has intended us to
do here on earth



THE JOURNEY OF THE CBLIP INTO THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION

Kailea Pedley

CBLIP Program Manager



A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE CBLIP

- Launched in 2017
- 65+ members and 2 staff
- Includes:
 - Council
 - Immigrant Advisory Table
 - Working Groups
 - Sub-Committees





From the inside cover of the CBLIP Strategic Plan (2022-2025)

The work of the Cape Breton Local Immigration Partnership takes place in Unama'ki, the unceded, traditional territory of the Mi'kmaw people. We are grateful for the Peace and Friendship Treaties.

We Are All Treaty People:

As we support the settlement of newcomers to this land, we honour and respect those who have welcomed and taught settlers in Unama'ki for generations.

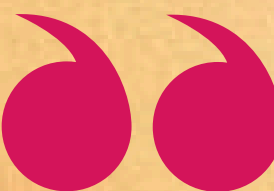
We understand our responsibility to educate ourselves and our members. As we listen and learn more, we are committed to advancing our journey toward Truth and Reconciliation and building meaningful relationships with Mi'kmaw people and organizations.



MOVING FROM STATEMENT TO ACTION

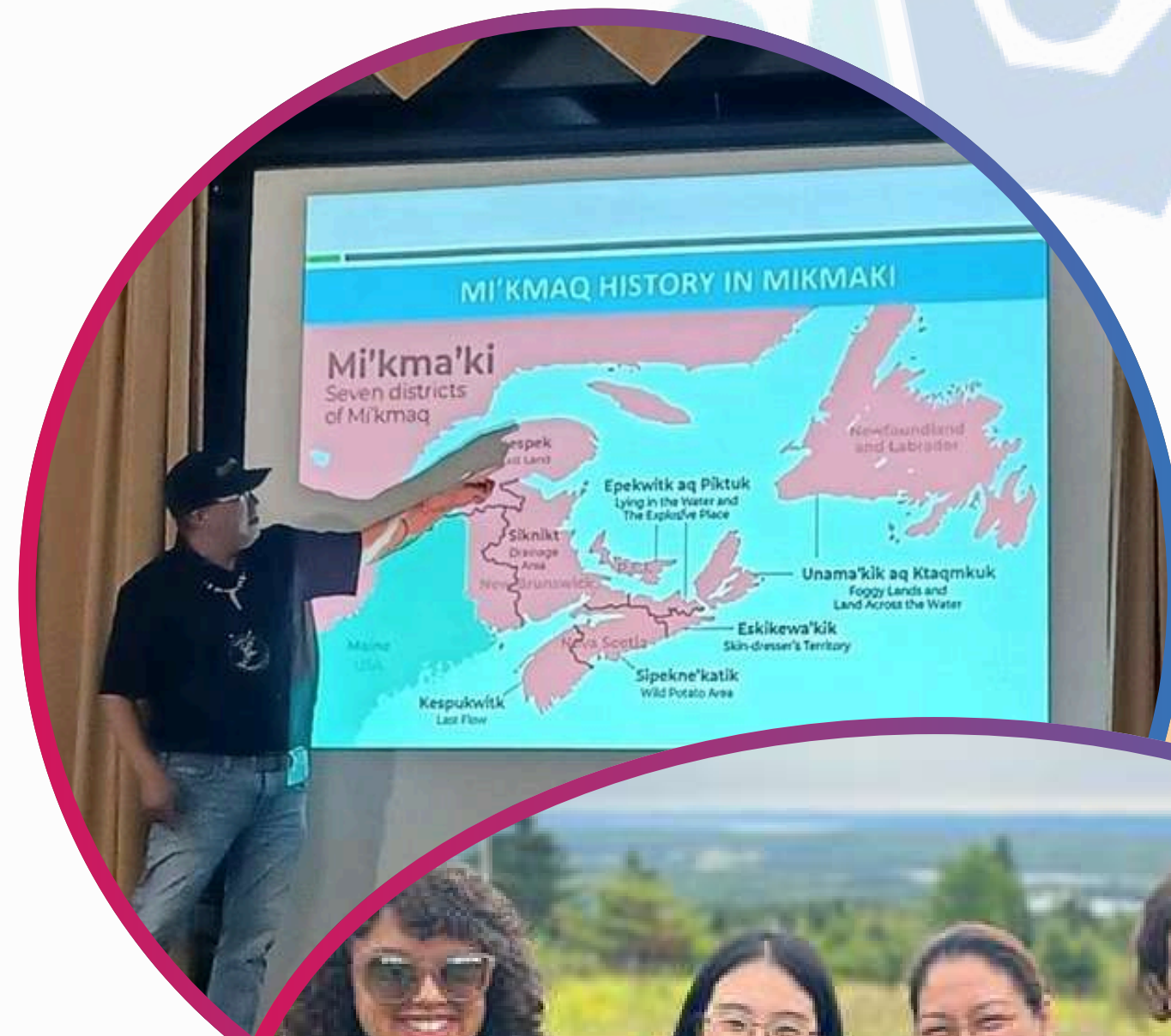
Into the purpose of a new project:

The CBLIP has stated a commitment to advance our journey towards Truth and Reconciliation and build meaningful relationships with Mi'kmaw People and organizations, but on this we have fallen short. Mi'kmaw People are the original and rightful welcomers to this Land, and we would like to reconcile this misstep



SEEKING GUIDANCE & SUPPORT

- Connecting with Robert Bernard (*The Indigenous Guide*)
- Mi'kmaw 101 training
- Gathering to debrief
- Securing additional funding support
- Forming a new CBLIP working group



DESIGNING AND NAVIGATING THE PROCESS TOGETHER

Jody Nelson
Chair
CBLIP Mi'kmaw -
Newcomer Relations
Working Group



REFRAMING THE WORK

**Responding to the offering
of a new way of thinking
about HOW the CBLIP
welcomes newcomers**

***What does it mean to welcome on
unceded, stolen Land?***

***How do we get behind Mi'kmaw
rights and responsibilities to
welcome to their territory?***

How can we unsettle settlement?



SITTING AROUND THE FIRE TOGETHER

- Modeling commitments to Peace and Friendship
- Holding space and pace
- Co-learning
- Growing the circle iteratively
- Sitting around the fire together IS the work



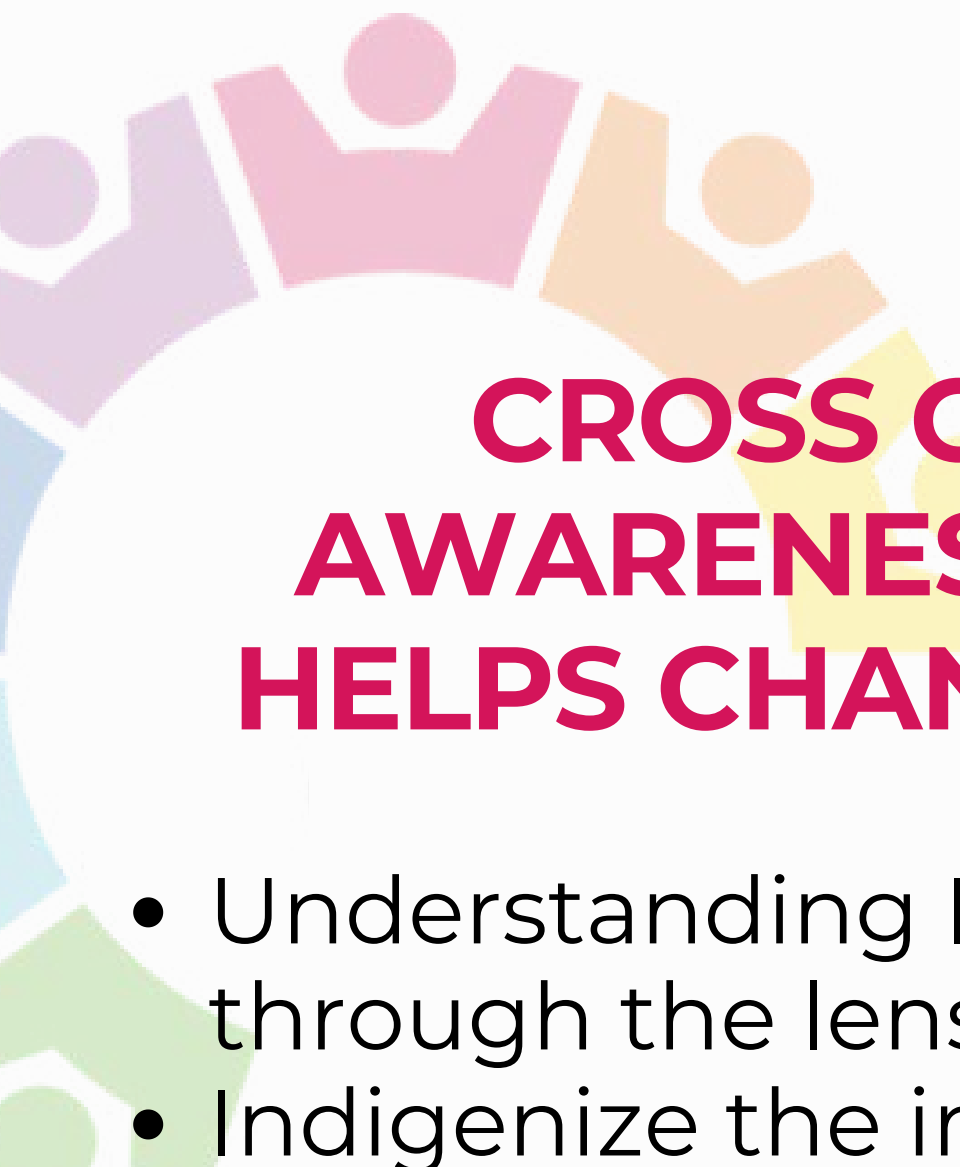
ANCESTRAL, INHERENT RIGHTS

Cultural protocols of
welcoming, cross-
cultural training, and
policy implications

Robert Bernard

- Welcoming Protocols
- Understanding Roles
- Inclusion of Mi'kmaw as the "First Peoples" of these lands
- Sharing True History
- Teaching our Children
- Honoring all Cultures





CROSS CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING HELPS CHANGE SYSTEMS

- Understanding Indigenous people through the lens of UNDRIP
- Indigenize the immigration system
- Meaningful relationships take TIME & TRUST
- Shared responsibility has to be understood & respected
- Building good relations vs. “Control”

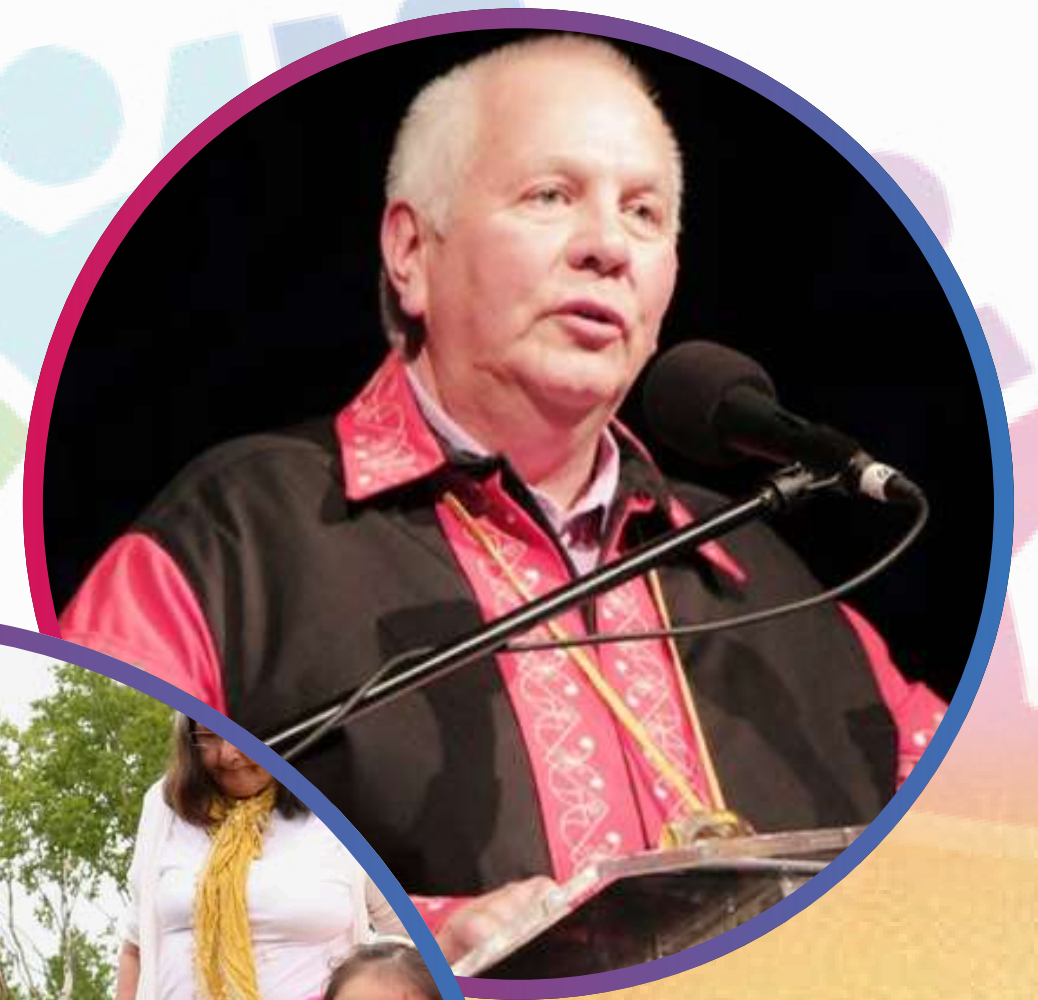
DECOLONIZING IMMIGRATION



TRUTH & RECONCILI-ACTION

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Ensuring Indigenous people in Staff/Advisory/BOD Roles
- Welcoming Protocols are fully implemented within policy
- Cross Cultural Awareness Training for all immigration staff (including senior levels)
- Supports for Welcome Events to celebrate all culture/s



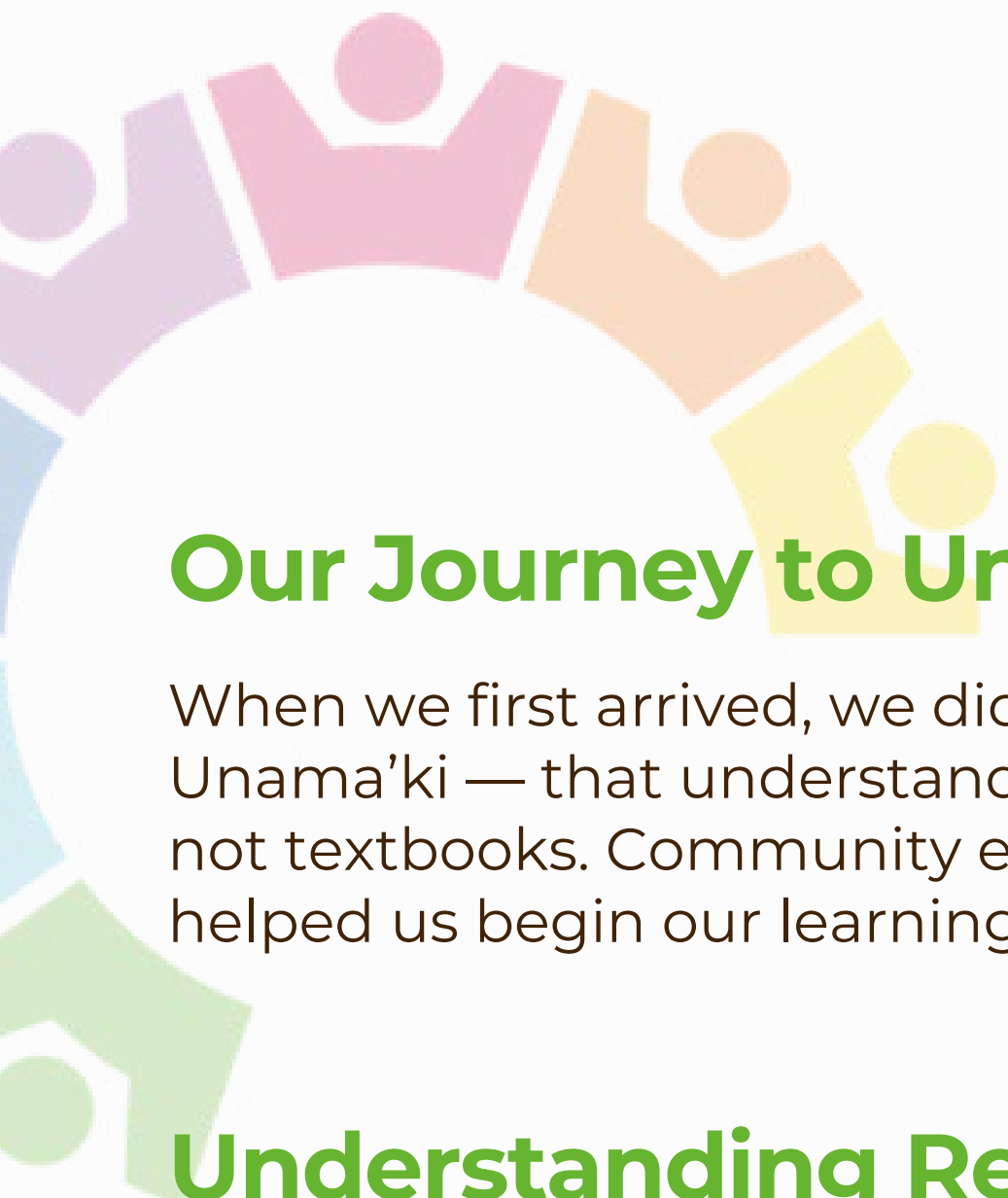
NEWCOMER PERSPECTIVES ON THE RECONCILIATION LEARNING JOURNEY

Des Ong & Leslie Fu

Immigrant Advisory Table (IAT)

- Newcomers born outside of Canada, currently residing in Unama'ki-Cape Breton
- Leslie originally from China, arrived in 2021
- Des originally from the Philippines, arrived in 2019





Our Journey to Unama'ki

When we first arrived, we didn't know we were coming to Unama'ki — that understanding came slowly, through people, not textbooks. Community events and shared conversations helped us begin our learning journey

Understanding Reconciliation as Newcomers

- Listening
- Learning
- Respecting
- Connecting



From Learning to Action

- Reflecting on our own cultures and how we show up in this place.
- Learning the stories, culture, and history of Mi'kma'ki.
- Acting with care, respect, and humility in the spaces we share.
- Walking together — continuing to learn, unlearn, and grow in relationship.
- Remembering that we each have a role in healing and reconciliation.



CONTACT

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