

Land Acknowledgments from my Perspective.

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A formal land acknowledgement is a protocol practiced to demonstrate respect and recognition to the local Indigenous peoples. To build respectful relationships, acknowledging the land is an important part of reconciliation. Little Bear (2013) states that the recognition of territory provides for the following:

- Acknowledges history and recognizes the original inhabitants and continuing stewards of the land,
- Shows respect for the first peoples of the territory,
- Demonstrates in-respect, in-relation, in-reciprocal pedagogy,
- Acknowledges and makes visible Indigenous people who have been silence, invisible, and marginalized, yet are the original inhabitants and caretakers of the land, territory and ecology,
- Is a decolonizing action that acknowledges the important relationship with land versus the historical actions that separated Indigenous peoples from the land.

Questions we should ask ourselves is *why* am I acknowledging the land? What is my connection to this land? What is our history? What is the connection and significance of this land for the Indigenous communities? In my opinion you do not need to include a land acknowledgement in your email signature to demonstrate your respect to the first nations of that land. What is more important is your intent. Acknowledging the land is a respectful protocol but it should not be done like you are reading off a script. When you learn about the injustices Indigenous peoples have faced you begin to recognize that Indigenous people have not had the same access and opportunities to resources as other Canadians. By decolonizing our Social Work practice this way we are helping to make space for Indigenous peoples who were originally not included. There are many opportunities to acknowledge the land such as at: graduations, awards ceremonies, first day of class, orientations, conferences and more.

Land acknowledgments are one of the many ways to show respect within Indigenous communities. As a member on the Indigenous Social Work Advisory Committee (ISWC) for the ACSW I wanted to introduce this topic to our membership for us to reflect on how we can continue to our role in reconciliation. Historically Social Workers have played an oppressive role in Indigenous communities by removing children from their homes without the consent from their families or bands (60's scoop). In my experience there is still fear and distrust of Social Workers which means we have to take extra steps to ensure our Indigenous clients feel safe. To help our clients feel safe we can learn and practice protocols, learn about the culture, traditions, language, community, and all the wonderful things that make Indigenous peoples strong and resilient but also the not so wonderful things that happened such as Residential Schools and the intergenerational impacts it has had. Engaging in protocols like acknowledging the land and offering tobacco or a gift shows you respect Indigenous worldviews and knowledge and that knowledge transfer can continue. As Social Workers, we cannot let "Reconciliation" become a buzz word or water down term in our practice.

If you are unsure ask your cultural liaison, or reach out to us on the ISWC. Part of our work for the next year is to providing learning opportunities for Social Workers on how to build and strengthen relationships with Indigenous individuals, families, and communities.

I also encourage you to connect with an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper, and or community member directly to learn more about the culture, protocols, language, land, teachings, and history in your treaty area. Please keep in mind that Alberta is a vast province with many different nations, communities, and tribes.

Some practical tips for acknowledging the land

- Practice the phenological pronunciations for the nations who's traditional territory you are on,
- Research the traditional / treaty lands you are on,
- Reflect about your connection to this land
- Think about the Indigenous peoples who cared for the land,

If there is anything you take away from this article it is that land acknowledgments are more than reading a script at graduations- it's about being respectful to Indigenous peoples and communities with authentic intent.

Hai Hai (Thank you)

Ekosi,