



**TWO-EARED LISTENING FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING:
A TWO-DAY RETREAT**

SEPTEMBER 11-13, 2025

FINAL REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Two-Eared Listening Retreat, hosted by the Relationships First NL (RFNL) team—Chief Mi'sel Joe, dr. dorothy vaandering, Sarah McDonald Moores, Lisa Charlong Norris, and Jessica Webb—and funded by the NL Department of Justice and Public Safety, was created in response to community needs identified through RFNL's work over the past three years. Rooted in RFNL's mandate to promote restorative justice across community, education, and the criminal-legal systems, the retreat offered space to 25 participants from across the province, including Labrador, and various sectors for reflection, learning, and relationship-building.

The experience has led to an invitation by participants to all in Newfoundland and Labrador to listen with two ears—to move beyond punitive and adversarial views of justice toward a more holistic understanding that understands that justice occurs when people feel worthy and interconnected and it emerges when collective healing happens and balance is achieved.

The agenda included a series of learning and sharing circles, communal meals and personal and small group reflection times.

Key learnings as reported by the participants include:

- Justice happens when all people feel worthy. Restoration begins by recognizing one's own worth and extending this sense of worth to others.
- Two-eared listening is the beginning of justice and restoration. "Through listening, we restore. Through indifference we destroy."
- True accountability is to people, not policies; this will diminish the tendency to blame.
- Healthy relationships are core to establishing just societies.
- Genuine decolonization centres relationship, reciprocity, and humanity. Without this, Indigenization of the mainstream cannot occur.
- Youth presence and participation are essential and inspiring. A strong leader invites the participation of youth and the community.
- Stories humanize; "You can't hate someone whose story you know."
- True justice is achieved when collective healing happens and balance is achieved.



Welcome and sign-in table with recommended readings.

Ways forward, as recommended by the participants, include:

- Deepen public understanding of restorative justice through public campaigns, videos, stickers, and storytelling.
- Advocate for systemic change by inviting government and institutional leadership to listen to and invest in community-driven restorative justice.
- Centre Indigenous and relational worldviews by inviting people grounded in Indigenous ways of being and knowing to lead the shift from adversarial to holistic relational approaches to justice.
- Recognize Indigenization as tokenistic until authentic decolonization grounded in relationship is prioritized.
- Include and support youth engagement at all levels of understanding and practicing of holistic restorative justice.
- Model relational collaborative leadership—we are all driving the bus.
- Keep listening and connecting through retreat experiences like this, remembering that restorative justice begins before harm occurs—when people feel honoured, heard and connected to others and their environments.



Participants reflect on their recommendations for moving restorative justice forward in the province.

The Two-Eared Listening Retreat was an experience that allowed participants to experience restorative justice as a way of being rather than a means for addressing harm. Through each of the activities, participants grew in their understanding of what it means to live “in good relation” with self and with one another. Of particular note was the feeling of honouring relations between youth and adults and “glimpsing reconciliation” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous nationalities. We hope that the teachings and connections from this gathering will ripple outward, guiding the work of RFNL and its partners in nurturing relational systems of justice, education, and community life.

FULL REPORT

The Two-Eared Listening Retreat, hosted by the Relationships First NL (RFNL) team—Chief Mi’sel Joe, Dr. dorothy vaandering, Sarah McDonald Moores, Lisa Charlong Norris, and Jessica Webb—and funded by the NL Department of Justice and Public Safety, was created in response to community needs identified through RFNL’s work over the past three years. Rooted in RFNL’s mandate to promote restorative justice across community, education, and the criminal-legal systems, the retreat offered space for reflection, learning, and relationship-building. As a team, we were grateful for the added leadership and insights provided by Elder Marie Eastman and Knowledge Keeper Sheila O’Neill throughout the event.

This report records the experience for participants, partners, and the wider public, and serves as an invitation to all in Newfoundland and Labrador to listen with two ears—to move beyond punitive and adversarial views of justice toward a more holistic understanding:

**Justice is all people feeling worthy and interconnected (dorothy vaandering, 2011).
It emerges when collective healing happens and balance is achieved (Colleen Paul, 2025).**



The view on our last morning together captured by Sheila O’Neill.

On Thursday, Sept 11, 2025, people began arriving at Max Simms Memorial Camp just before 4:00 PM with overnight bags in hand, ready to participate in two days of learning, practicing, and deepening their experience of two-eared listening and restorative justice in their role as leaders in Education, Community, Criminal-Legal, Healthcare, & Government contexts.

All participants in RFNL’s *Restorative Justice in Newfoundland and Labrador: A catalogue, summary, and history* (July, 2024) had been invited several weeks earlier by Chief Mi’sel Joe and RFNL with the intention of creating opportunities for people to practice Two-Eared Listening, the central concept of a much larger 2-day provincial Gathering held in November 2021. Twenty-five people accepted the invitation, with approximately equal numbers identifying as Indigenous and non-Indigenous. While most, including four youth, were connected with either traditional or non-traditional education systems in the province in some way, seven were associated with other contexts.

This was the fourth event in the Two-Eared Listening Series, each designed to nurture an understanding of what it means to listen with intention, recognizing that the sound that we process with our minds becomes meaningful and transformative only when it is enhanced by the heart. On Saturday morning, participants left shortly after 11 AM, each expressing how this was an important and transformative experience of how two-eared listening allowed for authentic engagement with truth and reconciliation.

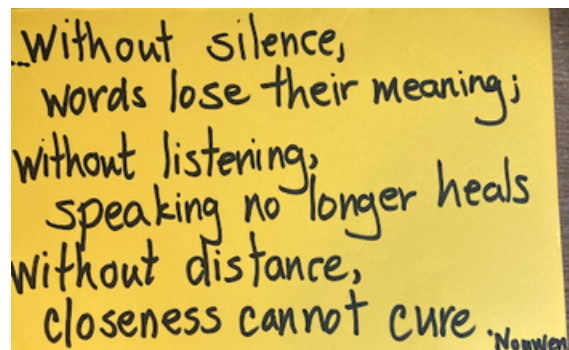
While this report will not be able to fully articulate how this event unfolded and what the full impact was, it will attempt to convey the importance of the experience, and calls on all levels and departments of government—municipal, provincial, and national—as well as citizens of NL, to recognize that when *authentic* collaborative Indigenous and non-Indigenous leadership join together, societies can embody truth and reconciliation that will transform our current contexts and those for generations to come. While this may sound lofty, this experience demonstrates what is possible.

For a description and details of the background of Two-Eared Listening: Restorative Justice for NL, along with summaries of each of the events, see www.twoearedlistening.com. At these events, a dominant theme emerged, namely the desire of people to engage in circle dialogue to experience two-eared listening, Indigenous leadership, and holistic restorative justice. This retreat event sought to meet that growing interest. Chief Mi'sel Joe, along with dr. dorothy vaandering, planned and facilitated the event with support from the RFNL team Sarah McDonald, Lisa Charlong, and Jessica Webb. It included gathering to share meals provided by Max Simms camp staff, a series of five whole group dialogue circles, outdoor dark and medicine walks, and informal conversations. See Appendix A for retreat agenda and details. What follows is an overview of the five circles and their impact.

REVIEW OF RETREAT EXPERIENCE

Opening Circle (Thursday evening): Participants gathered in a large meeting room and chose a chair to sit in that was part of a large circle where everyone could see each other well and no one was identified as more significant than another. The space in the circle was open. Chief Joe and dorothy welcomed everyone to the Gathering, reiterating that our purpose was to explore and experience two-eared listening and identify potential directions for the implementation of restorative justice in NL. Going around the circle consecutively in the direction of the sun, each participant was invited to share their name and where they were from. A second round invited them to share what happened to prompt them to come. And a third round invited them to reflect on the artwork on the cover of their agenda and speak to what resonated with them. Participants were reminded that whether they shared or passed, the 2-eared listening protocol should guide their speaking and their listening:

- Listen with intention
- Be open to receiving new learning
- Suspend judgement
- Purposefully engage in (re)conciliation



A quote placed at the retreat entrance and shared in Circle.

The circle concluded with an invitation to experience a walk in the dark alone or with a partner, and/or to share an evening snack before heading to bed.

Learning Circles #1 & #2 (Friday Morning): After gathering to share a breakfast meal together, we reconvened in circle and were invited to participate in a smudge led by Chief Joe, a time of reflection and prayer, setting intentions for engaging in the day with openness of mind, eyes, ears, mouth, heart, and body. Our first learning circle followed this. Chief Joe introduced the concept of restorative justice and then showed the 15-minute video *Justice Restored*, which describes Conne River's restorative justice approach to addressing harm when it occurs in the community.



Artwork by Anne & Rachel Cortez (2021).

This was followed by a circle inviting people to pose questions and share what they observed, and brief teachings by both Chief Joe and Dorothy Vaandering on the foundations of restorative justice. A shorter, second Learning Circle followed a short break, during which Chief Joe described the Mi'kmaq holistic life framework and core teachings of love, honesty, humility, respect, truth, patience, and wisdom.



Participants learning and listening together with two ears and open hearts.

Learning Circle #3 (Friday afternoon): Rain prevented the planned Medicine Walk, Listening to the Earth. Instead, participants reconvened in a circle again and were invited by Dorothy to participate in 'the stick activity,' a 'talking' circle without spoken words. A large bag of sticks from the forest was placed in the middle of the circle, and participants were invited, one at a time, going around the circle as directed earlier, to do something with the sticks. They were also reminded they could pass if they

wanted to. However, throughout the activity, no one could speak. Though puzzled initially, participants engaged by dumping out the sticks, arranging them in beautiful designs, pictures, or words, adding to one another's contributions, or taking them apart to create their own. The circle would end when everyone in the circle passed for one complete round. For one hour and forty-five minutes, the sticks were arranged, rearranged, put into the bag and taken out of the bag. What was revealed was a visual expression of what often occurs while communicating verbally in a group that is attempting to work out a common plan. There was joy, satisfaction, and deep frustration as one person created, several people added, and then another would come and dismantle the work that had been done. Participants sat in rapt attention to each other's actions and were relieved when finally everyone passed. After a short break, a sharing circle was held which allowed everyone an opportunity to express in words what they had experienced. Significant insights were shared regarding how the activity illustrated the challenges involved in working together as a group in authentic, meaningful, and collaborative ways. Chief Joe, who had never participated in a circle like this, said, "We just played with sticks together for 1 hour and 45 minutes. I haven't done that since I was a kid!" In later reflection, he described how this creation and dismantling of sticks illustrated the experience of Indigenous peoples of NL who had created beautiful societies and cultures, only to have them destroyed by non-Indigenous settlers. As with so many of the Mi'kmaq efforts to rebuild, it may only be a matter of time before their work is destroyed again as the dominant non-Indigenous attitude continues to expect Indigenous people to be silenced, to pass, and to give up in frustration. Playing with sticks left everyone with new insights for living out Truth and Reconciliation.



A Medicine Walk in the drizzle led by Elder Marie Eastman.



A bundle of medicines collected at the retreat.

Medicine Walk: Listening to the Earth: After the intensity of the stick circle, people were invited to enjoy free time to rest, play, or, as the rain had become a drizzle, go on a guided Medicine Walk with Elder Marie Eastman, exploring how the earth speaks with us when we take note of the plants and landscape.

Sharing Circle #1 (Friday evening): Our evening circle allowed participants to share suggestions they had gleaned over the past day from the activities, but also from their various personal and professional experiences regarding (a) moving restorative justice forward in NL and (b) sharing a message officially with government leaders and the public. Once again applying circle and 2-eared listening protocols, each person was first invited to write down their key ideas on a slip of paper, and then, when it was their turn to speak, to share these aloud. To sit and listen to each other's thoughts was informative, practical, but especially encouraging as each, in speaking from their heart, made significant contributions. Through these cumulative thoughts, three key ideas emerged:



A teacher sits with two of her students in Circle.

1. People felt strongly that clear messages should be shared widely to help everyone reflect on what justice really means. Two powerful statements were suggested to spread this message:

Justice is when all people feel worthy and interconnected (dorothy vaandering, 2011).

True justice is achieved when collective healing happens and balance is achieved (Colleen Paul, 2025).

By inviting both leaders and community members to look beyond an adversarial idea of justice and to see its deeper, relational meaning, we open the door for people to advocate more confidently for themselves, their families, their communities, and for systems rooted in care rather than individualism.

2. All involved in the various social systems (education, community, health, criminal-legal), must commit to understanding and applying restorative justice principles and practices in difficult situations. This approach can be likened to medical first response or triage: approach with no judgement; inquire regarding what happened; attend to the immediate needs identified by the individual (for example, "When did you last eat?" "Are you in pain?"); ask about family or relational context; and offer connection ("Is there anyone you would like us to call?").
3. NL needs restorative justice approaches in all sectors and areas of the province. There are solutions. We invite leaders to listen and engage with those who understand restorative justice. We are stronger together.

The discussion concluded for the day when the question was posed, "Who is driving the restorative justice bus in NL in the government context?" This was in reference to the anecdote shared in 2021 regarding insights learned during the planning process. At that time, Chief Joe's insight was that the current provincial "restorative justice bus" is driven by settler-Canadians who tokenize Indigenous perspectives of justice by asking them to join them on the bus but to sit at the back. His dream was

for a time when Indigenous people would drive the bus. When asked during this retreat about who is driving the restorative justice bus at the government level today, Chief Joe responded, “We (the people together at the retreat) are driving the bus for now because government and institutions don’t want to. The bus won’t drive itself. Someone has to take the lead. We want to see government take control of loving people, not just politics... We are trying to change a 500-year-old mindset. We each have to tell others. Be loud. **We’re all driving the bus.**”

The circle concluded with an invitation to walk out into the dark alone or with a partner and to explore how, even in the dark, with practice, it is possible to move with confidence when the way is not clear. Time for an evening snack and informal conversation was available before heading to bed.



Gifts ready for the ceremony.

Closing Give Away: Midiwigwaas Gathering (Saturday morning):

In preparation for the final gathering, Chief Joe spread a large blanket in the middle of the circle with a smudge bowl and medicines in the centre. Before attending, participants were invited to bring an object that had meaning for them related to two-eared listening that they would give away. As people approached the circle, Chief Joe invited them to lay their gift on the blanket. The centre display was a deep expression of our collective identity that had grown over the two days.

Opening the ceremony: After Chief Joe welcomed everyone to our final morning together, Elder Marie Eastman and Knowledge Holder Sheila O’Neill offered to begin the day with drumming and singing the Mi’kmaq Giveaway song, expressing the significance of gift giving. In the spirit of giving, as participants, we then bore witness as the Indigenous leaders shared the drums with each other and invited the two youth from Miawpukek, Liam and DJ, to lead the group in the Mi’kmaq Honour song. We were deeply moved as we listened with two ears to the words and voices of Mi’kmaq leaders and youth expressing deep respect and love for each other.

Midiwigwaas-Giveaway: Chief Joe then explained briefly the process of the Giveaway ceremony. One by one, going around the circle in the direction of the sun, we each got up, picked a gift, and then proceeded to go to each person in the circle to thank them for the gift with a simple word, a handshake, or a hug. This collective expression of gratitude was meant to show that after a time together, our individual gifts actually became a gift from the group. When all the gifts had been selected from the centre, we then shared in circle our reason for picking the gift. The person who gave the gift then shared the story behind their choice of gift. In listening to the exchange between the receiver and the giver, everyone witnessed how the gifts took on new meaning and seemed to be perfectly matched.

As this circle concluded, our hearts were full to overflowing. Chief Joe invited us to join hands and collectively pick up and hold on to the blanket as he offered a prayer of gratitude to the Creator. Sheila and Marie closed our time together with the Travelling Song.

KEY LEARNINGS

Participants experienced restorative justice in action; they experienced restorative justice as a way of being and living in right relation for 2 days as we met together. This solidified our understanding that restorative justice is not a tool to be used as is often communicated in the dominant non-Indigenous context.

In the details gleaned from conversations, documented details from Sharing Circle #2, and unsolicited feedback after the retreat, the following key learnings are important to note:

- Justice happens when all people feel worthy. Restoration begins by recognizing one's own worth and extending this sense of worth to others.
- Two-eared listening is the beginning of justice and restoration. "Through listening, we restore. Through indifference we destroy."
- True accountability is to people, not policies; this will diminish the tendency to blame.
- Healthy relationships are core for establishing just societies.
- Genuine decolonization centres relationship, reciprocity, and humanity. Without this, Indigenization of the mainstream cannot occur.
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous presence, participation, and leadership deepens authentic collaboration and transformative learning.
- Youth presence and participation are essential and inspiring. A strong leader invites the participation of youth and the community.
- Stories humanize; "You can't hate someone whose story you know."
- True justice is achieved when collective healing happens and balance is achieved.

WAYS FORWARD

- Deepen public understanding of restorative justice through public campaigns, videos, stickers, and storytelling;
- Advocate for systemic change by inviting government and institutional leadership to listen to and invest in community-driven restorative justice.
- Centre Indigenous and relational worldviews by engaging Indigenous leadership in shifting from adversarial to relational approaches to justice.
- Move away from Indigenization to decolonization grounded in relationship.
- Include and support youth engagement at all levels of understanding and practicing of holistic restorative justice.
- Model relational collaborative leadership—we are all driving the bus.
- Keep listening and connecting through retreat experiences like this, remembering that restorative justice begins before harm occurs—when people feel honoured, heard and connected to others and their environments.



Two student participants exploring the grounds.

CLOSING REFLECTION

The Two-Eared Listening Retreat was an experience that allowed participants to experience restorative justice as a way of being rather than a means for addressing harm. Through each of the events, participants grew in their understanding of what it means to live “in good relation” with self and with one another. Of particular note was the feeling of honouring relations between youth and adults and “glimpsing reconciliation” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous nationalities. We hope that the teachings and connections from this gathering will ripple outward, guiding the work of RFNL and its partners in nurturing relational systems of justice, education, and community life.



Coming together in our commitment to good relations, Two-Eared Listening, restorative justice, and reconciliation.

”

“This was one of the most powerful and meaningful gatherings I have ever attended. This retreat allowed for restorative justice to happen in real time. I saw it happening, and we needed this.” – Sheila

“[This] truly was a rare and powerful experience to witness and participate in living into ‘good relations.’ We caught a glimpse of what reconciliation can look like in practice.” – Colleen

“Our time in circle, in story, in laughter, while walking and playing, was such a gift. The gifting ceremony especially stays with me as a moment of Creator moving among us. I carry deep gratitude for the experience and for each of you.” – Tom



Front-back, L-R: Brianna Tremblay, Derek J Hollett, Liam Jeddore, Chief Mi’sel Joe, Leah Grace Hunt, Kelsey Pritchett Shawntelle Parsons, Dianne Hickey, Sheila O’Neill, Kristy St. Croix, Sherra Robinson, Roxanne Skanes, Tom Mugford, Shelley Coleman, Joanne Broders, Colleen Paul Sarah McDonald Moores, Marie Eastman, Jessica Webb, Beth Tuinstra, Alyssa Brennan, Shelby Arnold, Rod Jeddore, Lisa Charloug Norris, dorothy vaandering

APPENDICES

1. INVITATION

2. INFORMATION PACKAGE

3. PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK & REFLECTIONS

INVITATION



TWO-EARED LISTENING FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING: A TWO-DAY RETREAT

at Lion Max Simms Memorial Camp
Route 360, Bishop's Falls, NL

**4:00 PM, Thursday, September 11, 2025 to
11:00 AM, Saturday, September 13, 2025**

CHIEF MI'SEL JOE

in collaboration with Relationships First NL

invites you to

Two days of learning, practicing, and deepening your experience of two-eared listening and restorative justice in your role as a leader/practitioner in Education, Community, Criminal-Legal, Healthcare, & Government contexts.

Registration is FREE and includes meals, snacks, and lodging.

**You provide your own bedding, towels, and travel to and from the camp.
*Travel subsidies may be available upon request.***

**COME WITH AN OPEN SPIRIT FOR SHARING
IN A UNIQUE RETREAT EXPERIENCE!**

Tentative Itinerary

Thursday, Sept. 11

4:00 - 6:00 PM
Meet and greet,
and explore

6:00 PM
Supper

7:30 PM
Opening Circle



Friday, Sept. 12

8:00 - 9:00 AM
Breakfast

9:30 AM
Learning Circle #1

11:00 AM
Nutrition Break

11:15 AM
Learning Circle #2

12:30 PM
Lunch

1:30 PM
Medicine Walk

3:15 PM
Nutrition Break

3:30 PM
Sharing Circle #1

4:30 PM
Free Time

6:00 PM
Supper

7:30 PM
Sharing Circle #2

9:00
Listening Activity

Saturday, Sept. 13

8:00 - 9:00 AM
Breakfast

9:30 AM
A Circle of
Gifts

11:00 AM
Farewell

"Every time
I meet in circle,
I leave different
than I arrived.
It takes me
from my head
to my heart,
and I want
to do that
in everything
that we do."

*Peace of the Circle
Participant
peaceofthecircle.com*



INFORMATION PACKAGE



TWO-EARED LISTENING FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING: A TWO-DAY RETREAT

Lion Max Simms Memorial Camp
September 13-15, 2025



*To listen with two ears,
take your two ears and join
them together to find your
hEARt.*

*Two-eared listening
requires your ears, your
mind, and your heart so
that we are open-minded
and always working
towards equality and
reconciliation.*

*The hands around the
hEARt symbolize the
sharing of what we
understand and learn.*

(modified from Rachel & Anne Cortez, 2021)



Sponsored and supported by RFNL & the Department of Justice and Public Safety

Welcome to a very special time of sharing, resting, learning, and hoping.
We're glad you're here!

Our Intention for Gathering

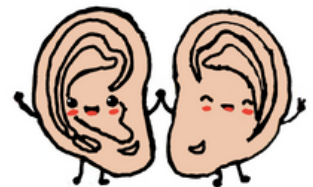
- Learning two-eared listening.
- Practicing two-eared listening.
- Deepening our individual and collective experience of two-eared listening.
- Strengthening our knowledge & practice of relational, restorative justice.
- Recognizing the connection that is possible across cultures in NL through two-eared listening and restorative justice for all social contexts.
- Deciding on individual and collective action for moving rj forward in NL.
- Infusing Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations into our personal and professional lives.

Our Gathering Protocol

Mind and Heart

At this Two-Eared Listening Gathering, we invite participants to listen deeply with the intention of learning and understanding. Two-eared listening is an act of conciliation that promotes respectful relationships through building trust and nurturing understanding. As you participate in this Gathering,

- Listen with intention
- Be open to receiving new learning
- Suspend judgement
- Purposefully engage in (re)conciliation



*Elders tell us that we have two ears and one mouth
so that we can listen more than we talk.*

*In Indigenous governance,
the strength of the leader is rooted in relationship.
A true leader walks with their people,
leading from within the community,
and never above it.*



NOTE: The retreat space and time will be a technology-free experience. If you need to connect with those outside the retreat, please do so at break times away from other participants.

Thank you.

Agenda

"Every time I meet in circle, I leave different than I arrived. It takes me from my head to my heart, and I want to do that in everything that we do."

-Peace of the Circle Participant peaceofthecircle.com

Thursday, September 11, 2025	
4:00-6:00 PM	Meet, Greet, and Explore
6:00 PM	Supper
7:30 PM	Opening Circle
9:30 PM	Closing Activity
Friday, September 12, 2025	
8:00 AM	Breakfast
9:00 AM	Opening & Learning Circle #1
10:30 AM	Nutrition Break
11:00 AM	Learning Circle #2
12:30 PM	Lunch
1:30 PM	Medicine Walk: Listening to the earth
3:15 PM	Nutrition Break
3:30 PM	Sharing Circle #1
4:30 PM	Free Time
6:00 PM	Supper
7:30 PM	Sharing Circle #2
9:00 PM	Listening Activity
Saturday, September 13, 2025	
8:00 AM	Breakfast
9:00 AM	A Circle of Gifts
11:00 AM	Farewell

The RFNL Team



Traditional Chief Mi'sel Joe **Cultural Advisor**

Chief Mi'sel Joe of Miawpukek Mi'kamawey Mawi'omi First Nation, NL, has devoted his life to Mi'kmaq leadership and cultural preservation. A former Administrative Chief of over 30 years and now Traditional Saqamaw, he has guided Conne River's growth and advanced understanding of Indigenous leadership in NL. Since 2018, he has mentored RFNL, helping shape the first Two-Eared Listening Gathering and reminding us that restorative justice begins with hearing stories of injustice and honouring all people and creation through decolonizing practice.



dr. dorothy vaandering **Director**

dorothy vaandering is a professor in Memorial University's Faculty of Education and Director of Relationships First NL. A former primary-elementary teacher, she has spent 15 years researching Restorative Justice in Education and creating professional learning that nurtures relational communities where all are honoured as worthy and interconnected. Living relationally in all aspects of life is core to who she is. As a settler-Canadian, engaging in reconciliation is central to her work. She is the author of numerous publications, including *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education*.



Sarah McDonald Moores **Restorative Justice Education Coordinator**

Sarah McDonald Moores is a music educator and graduate of Memorial University's Music and Educational Leadership programs. Since 2006 she has worked with NLSchools in a variety of roles and now serves as Restorative Justice Education Coordinator with Relationships First NL, where she supports educators in embracing restorative justice as a way of being. She also teaches the graduate course Rethinking Educational Engagement at Memorial University. A founding member of Lady Cove Women's Choir and Projëkt Chamber Voices, Sarah has performed and toured internationally as chorister, conductor, and soloist.



Lisa Charlong Norris **Grants and Project Manager**

Lisa brings over 15 years of experience in research administration, including grants facilitation, proposal writing, and managing Canada Research Chair projects. With degrees in Arts and Education and a Master of Education, she also has expertise in data management, scholarly communications, and project leadership. Outside of MUN, Lisa is passionate about supporting young people on restorative paths toward healthy relationships with self, family, community, and Creator. Her favourite place is in the cold salt water, even in winter.



Jessica Webb

Jessica Webb has just retired from a career in K-12 Education system, working as a Junior High French Immersion Science teacher, a Program Itinerant for Safe and Inclusive Schools and a Program Development Specialist for Safe and Inclusive Schools with the Department of Education. Jessica has also been a sessional instructor at Memorial University for undergraduate and graduate courses in Restorative Justice in Education. Jessica is keenly interested in growing restorative and relational opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador in education, community and justice.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

FEEDBACK

The following is a summary of participant feedback received after the conclusion of the event. In keeping with the relational format of the event, an email of thanks from the organizers was sent out several days after the event. This prompted significant unsolicited response from approximately half of the participants. When the draft of the report was completed six weeks later, participants were invited to review it and were also invited to respond to one or more of the following prompts resulting in more feedback:

- The Two-Eared Listening Retreat impacted how I...
- The most challenging aspect(s) of the Two-Eared Listening Retreat for me was...
- The best part(s) of the Two-Eared Listening Retreat were...
- I would encourage others to participate in a similar retreat because...
- ... any thoughts that you would like to share.

A formal survey was not distributed. The following summary is a compilation of the feedback received. A document with full responses is available by sending rfrjnl@mun.ca a request.

The Two-Eared Listening Retreat at Max Simms Camp was a profoundly meaningful and transformative experience. Many highlighted that restorative justice “happened in real time,” and noted how connection, trust, and relational safety were established through circle processes, shared meals, time outside, drumming, and collaborative activities. Consistent themes were identified across all reflections from youth and adults alike:

Deep Connection, Trust, and Relational Safety

Participants identified the immediate sense of comfort and belonging that emerged, with several comparing the gathering to a family reunion. The circle practices invited openness, laughter, tears, and vulnerability. Youth noted how emotionally powerful the experience was, describing it as unlike anything they had ever attended, finding new ways for “how to go about my life.”

Power of the Retreat Structure

The semi-structured, responsive agenda encouraged authentic conversation and allowed learning and relationships to unfold naturally. With technology and watches tucked away inside personalized paper bags provided by Chief Joe, youth and adults alike appreciated that circles ended not by the clock but when every person had been heard. This created a unique environment of full presence and attentiveness.

“When we participate in Two-Eared Listening and use the Talking Circle format, there is an immediate sense of trust and comfort among all involved.”

-Rod Jeddore

“With zero phones, watches or technology, everyone had only to focus on the circle, and we ended our circles not based on the time but by when everyone had their turn to speak.”

-Leah Hunt

Indigenous Leadership, Ceremony, and Cultural Grounding

Indigenous leadership, along with Indigenous-led ceremonies and drumming, were described as central to the retreat's impact. The deep knowledge, humility, humour, and humanity of Indigenous leaders, as well as the significance of the spiritual grounding and guidance they provided were significant for participant growth and understanding.

Shared Leadership in Action

The Two-Eared Listening Retreat was co-facilitated through a shared and relational approach to leadership. Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, coordinators, and non-Indigenous coordinators each brought distinct gifts, responsibilities, and teachings. Guidance emerged through ceremony, circle practice, story, silence, and instructive facilitation—woven together rather than separated into roles. This collaborative way of leading allowed participants to experience reconciliation not as a concept, but as a lived, relational practice.

Significance of Youth Involvement

Numerous participants highlighted how meaningful it was to have Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth actively involved. Their voice and presence added depth to the retreat, reminding adults of why this work matters and who will carry it forward. Participants recommended expanding youth representation in future retreats.

Activities that Deepened Learning

While all the formal and informal activities held meaning for the participants, two in particular stood out:

- **The Stick Activity:** The Stick Activity was a surprising experience for all participants. One youth in a detailed reflection shared that through silence and collaboration, they were able to observe personalities, patience, eagerness, and creativity in the group. They found joy in how the visual-art aspect of the activity provided a deeper understanding of themselves and others. Participants appreciated how the activity illuminated non-verbal communication, teamwork, and trust.
- **The Giveaway Blanket Activity:** The culmination of time together, expressed through the Giveaway Ceremony, touched participants deeply as a visual expression of relationship that provided each with an object carefully given and selected, that would remind us all of our responsibility towards one another as human beings.

"The Two-Eared Listening Retreat impacted how I think about collaboration and communication. It reminded me that working together effectively often requires patience, observation, and understanding beyond words."

-Colleen Paul

"The presence of youth, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, accompanied and supported by their schools, was a gift to us all. It reminds us of why we do what we do and helps develop the next generation of leaders and change makers."

-Sheila O'Neill

"Chief Joe, I learned during this circle, is a very competitive person... This circle taught me patience, creativity and that Chief Mi'sel Joe is one of the purest humans I've ever met."

-Leah Hunt

Setting and Environment

The outdoor retreat setting was considered essential—a space to “get away from everything,” with all of the components of the environment supporting reflection, connection, and collective presence.

Personal and Professional Impact

Participants left committed to taking Two-Eared Listening practices into their personal lives, communities, workplaces, and schools. Several planned to organize staff or student circles. Youth participants also expressed meaningful personal growth and relational skills they intend to carry forward.

Expressions of Gratitude

Reflections were filled with gratitude—for the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, drummers, organizers, and for the collective experience of living into “good relations.” Many felt they had experienced a glimpse of reconciliation in action, across generations, backgrounds, and nations.

Feedback reflects a deeply meaningful inaugural retreat that fostered intergenerational connection, cultural grounding, emotional growth, and relational learning. Youth and adults alike left inspired, transformed, and eager to continue the practice of Two-Eared Listening in their own communities. RFNL is inspired to create opportunities like this one in a wide variety of places and contexts as a way to share the transformative potential of holistic restorative justice in Newfoundland and Labrador.



“The gifting ceremony especially touched me, a living expression of reciprocity and community, gently reminding us that Creator works through each of us, if we are willing to listen with both ears and open hearts.”

-Brianna Tremblay

“Future retreats must be located in a similar outdoor setting. “Getting away from everything” was a cornerstone to the success of this retreat.”

-Sheila O’Neill

“My principal is on board and we will be starting this in the near future with interested staff and also starting with a group of students.”

-Shelley Coleman

“I look forward to seeing how the spirit of Two-Eared Listening continues to ripple out in our lives With a hEART filled with gratitude, Tom.”

-Tom Mugford

“The retreat reinforced the value of deep listening and reminded me how essential it is to create spaces where people feel safe & truly heard.”

-Sherra Robinson