



# Circles of Connection

Oceanside Building Learning Together Society

2017-18 Annual Report

Reflecting back over the past year, I've seen and felt many shifts in our realm both at work and in life. We seem to be experiencing increasingly uncertain times in our world. I find it helps to focus on things that we *can* be certain about.

Luckily, circles can be looked at as one of the constants of certainty. Anyone, anywhere can look up to see the moon on a clear night or sense the warm round light of the sun during the day. When you think about it, we pay homage to the circle in many, many ways through-out our world of deep history, in ancient and modern cultures and in many diverse communities. As I explored the many facets of circles in our existence, I took stock of who is in our OBLT circle. This gave me something to ponder: **Maybe, we are the circle.**



It seems fitting to start this exploration with the child. It is almost as if a child instinctually knows the importance of a circle. The circle emerges in drawings, in movement, in family.

“At the pre-schematic stage of art development, children are beginning to see the connections between the shapes that they draw and the physical world around them. Circles and lines may be described as people or objects that are physically present in the child’s life.” (Matt Fussell – The Stages of Art Development)

In the early childhood care and education world, the circle is woven throughout the day. It shows up in many songs, poems, stories and art. It is how they gather in ‘circle’ time and story time. On our WOW bus, our little sit down circle times can be a magical experience.

**Our circle, thankfully, has children within it. Their important work of play and learning is foundational to a large part of our mission and our passions.**



In Sanskrit, the literal translation of the word “mandala” is the word *circle*. The use of the mandala is diverse and reaches far back in history. It is commonly used for focusing attention and an aid for mindfulness. Buddhist monks are known for creating huge intricate and colourful sand mandalas. After, sometimes weeks of efforts to create the stunning circular beauty, the mandala is dismantled and returned back to nature to represent the impermanence of life.

We can always count on change at OBLT. We are steered a lot by research. When we find out that we have many children vulnerable in social-emotional wellness, we pay attention to how we present our environment, the materials, and the resources for parents. We listen and we adjust depending on the information we receive.

**Our circle is not permanent. People, circumstances, funding and information can change from one year to the next, sometimes shifting our direction.**



The labyrinth is another circular pattern with history, dating back to as early as 430 BC in Ancient Greece. Usually, there is one way to the centre, and then reversed, one way back to the outside where you started. The paths are meandering yet always moving as the circle, within the circle.

OBLT’s energy moves with intentional pathways. Our relationship circles are diverse and there is a sense of simultaneous motion within. While we are sharing our journey in a presentation with a funder, we could be cuddling an infant, helping a senior learn the in’s and out’s of their iPad, playing musical instruments with a crowd of littles and bigs or collaborating on a community issue with a group of organizations.

**Our circle has concentric paths: children, families, seniors; play, literacy, education; research, time, place; community, government, politics.....**



The growth rings of a tree round are a wonderful representation of how our circles can grow. The rings can be tightly close, or farther apart depending on external impacts like rain, sun and nutrients. The circles within may be small, and in our case, just a few caring individuals. Then, as passion, conversations and reaching out happens, our circle expands while retaining the small circle within.

Dialogue occurs on a daily basis. Sometimes just 2 individuals can create a positive and external impact to a challenge. We see a struggling pregnant mom with a toddler and infant – she is soon to have 3 children under the age of 2. Who is in our circle that can support and help? We start with us, the centre of the OBLT circle, and then we look to the next circle. Maybe it's Island Health or Parent Support Circles. We can look within and outside us with confidence.

**Our circle has grown, with nurturing, sometimes quite fast and other times, the growth is slower, more mindful and carefully intentional.**

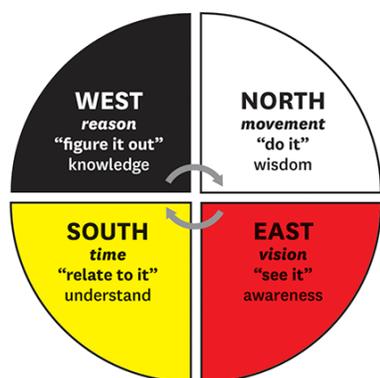


Figure 1: Gifts of the Four Directions

The medicine wheel comes from many indigenous traditions. The four directions that we all know well: north, south, east, west, all start from a centre point and we must turn in a circle to sequentially face all of them.

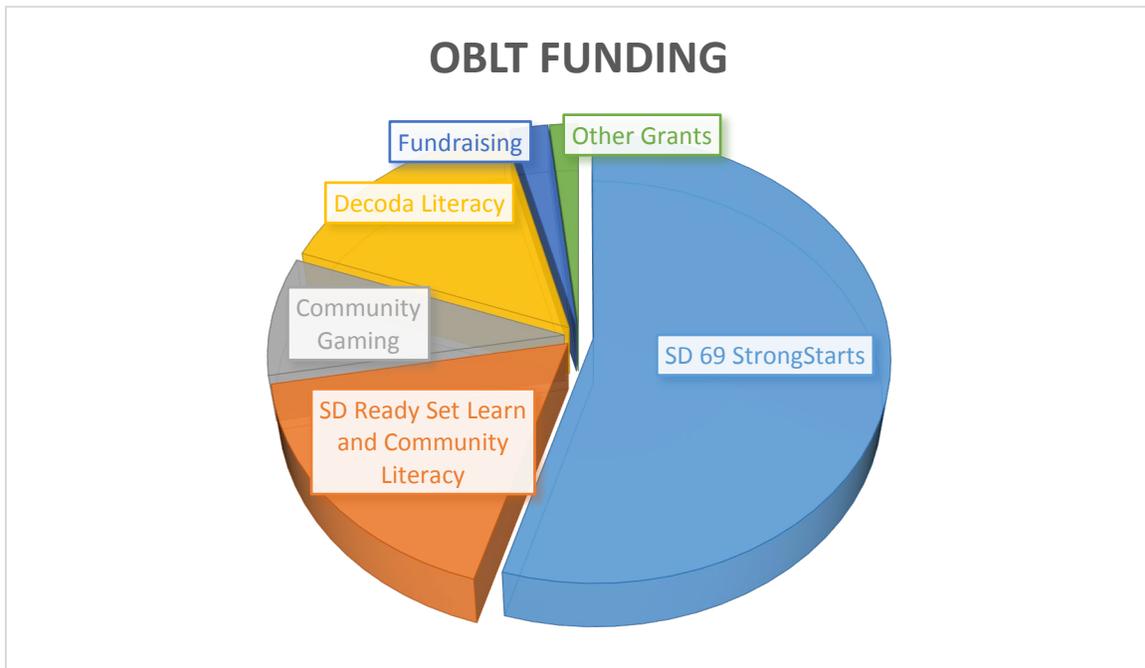
“...the underlying web of meaning to Medicine Wheels remains the same: the importance of appreciating and respecting the ongoing interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all things.” – Nicole Bell, PhD, Anishinaabe and Assistant Professor, Trent University

As we move through our 4 directions, similar to seasons, we connect to our closest partners. I can think of the School District as our medicine wheel, offering support, a framework and passion with each direction we face. Similarly, the OBLT Board offers stability, structure and like-minded paths – they too are a part of our medicine wheel. All of us keep close our beginnings and our mission.

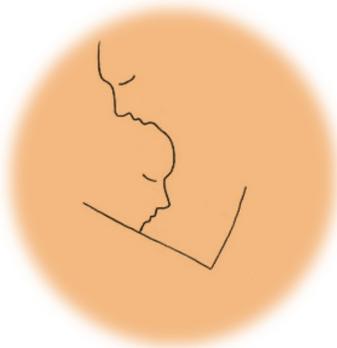
**Our circles are interconnected, and yet we are part of a whole. We have movement and, just like the 4 directions. We travel from one place to the next, until we end up back where we began.**

And why not look at the pie (both as food and as a means of illustrating portions of statistics)? The first pastry that encircled food goes back to the mid 1500's as a means of protecting the food within. The earliest pie charts were developed in 1801 and are widely used in the business world to depict the collected records of any plethora of numbers.

We at OBLT feed people, and we also collect numbers. How many people needed help with their technological devices? How many children attended our big pre-kindergarten event? What does our funding look like? What we do know, is that we are not underutilized.



**Our circle can be looked at and portioned by program, by users and by funding, but what matters most can't always be measured. What matters most is how impact is felt, how caring is absorbed and how our mission and purpose makes a day to day difference.**



One last circle: the embrace – an enfolding of care, love and security. Each person (child, parent, caregiver, staff person, grandparent, senior, community member) in our circle deserves this embrace. Either literally or figuratively, we all need to be held. We all need to be heard, and we all need to be a part of something – like a circle.

OBLT can be that circle for someone, and OBLT might also need to be a part of another circle or two so that we can be better at what we do.



So, are we the circle? Yes and no. Years ago this Oceanside Building Learning Together circle was created. By connections, conversations and sheer will, a community of caring people was formed for the sake of literacy and learning for both young and old and every age in between. As time has gone on, parts of our circle have expanded or disappeared, yet the outer ring of intention has remained intact. The power of the circle continues to be binding. My vision has been and always will be about community, united round table caring groups and individuals collaborating for the well-being of everyone we encounter – including ourselves.

This uncertainty we are feeling is only an opportunity to strengthen our circles, link them together and cradle change, growth and sustainability with resiliency. Resiliency that comes from being in a circle.

*Respectfully Submitted:*

*Judi Malcolm, Manager*