



**Changing Ways.  
Changing Lives.**

## Eyaa-Keen Centre, Inc.

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Mel and Shirley Chartrand, Founders, Co-Directors, and  
Co-Lead Behavioural Health Specialists

### Background

The Eyaa-Keen Centre in Winnipeg, MB, serves First Nations people who are recovering from trauma. Eyaa-Keen focuses on providing a unique form of aboriginal traditional-based therapeutic trauma treatment and psychological rehabilitation. The organization has been accredited since 2004, and has achieved consecutive three-year CARF accreditations in Intensive Outpatient Treatment and Governance Standards.

The name, Eyaa-Keen, means “being self or being natural” in Ojibway, an Aboriginal language in the Manitoba region. The term refers to a person being authentic, natural, and being connected as one with the earth. Mel and Shirley Chartrand are the Founders, Co-Directors, and Co-Lead Behavioural Health Specialists at Eyaa-Keen. Mel describes their mission as being, “to help people become balanced again by restoring their natural abilities and connectedness to the earth and fulfilling their purpose and ways.”

Eyaa-Keen’s programs and services deliver integrated physical, emotional, mental and spiritual treatment, healing and development through a series of aboriginal traditional ceremonial sessions. Treatment is based on traditional ways, disciplines, and laws. The Chartrands have been trained extensively by their ceremonial elders in healing using traditional methods. Mel observes, “We were trained in Western treatment methods and recognized its limitations. These methods did not go to the core of our people and our traditional ways of seeing and understanding to accomplish healing this level of trauma. The major difference between Western and traditional trauma treatment is that we focus on the most inner parts of people. We try to get each person to identify and connect with their inner strengths and abilities. We aid him or her to recognize and use these abilities in a manner to overcome, heal, and change.”

Many times the people who seek out Eyaa-Keen’s services are not ready to fully embrace traditional ways. To ease the transition, the Chartrands created a way of teaching and discipline that is traditional-based, but not recognizable as such. Eyaa-Keen offers one-on-one sessions, group sessions, day programming for two or three days, and five- and ten-day residential programs.

Shirley describes the healing, “For those we serve, making decisions from a spiritual place for themselves or their family unit is more important than other things. When a person can make a good decision for that moment, that’s a big step and we measure that as a success. We make sure that the service is geared toward what each person needs, not what we need to do to them. Our clients are trained to look after themselves. They learn discipline and how to recognize triggers. They learn what to do with themselves in certain situations. By the end of a five- or ten-day program, they have a complete maintenance system for themselves. After that, they continue one-on-ones for support, or they continue for groups or ceremonies. The end result is that each time a person improves themselves, they improve the community. We’ve helped so many. It’s unbelievable how many we’ve helped.”

## The Challenge

Mel describes the main challenge faced by Eyaa-Keen: “Our traditional ways and systems are very powerful and very clear and they’ve been working for thousands of years. Mainstream modern and Western ways don’t understand it. It was hard for us to try and demonstrate to funders that we do have a system, that we know what we’re doing, and that the system works well.”

## Eyaa-Keen’s Journey

Eyaa-Keen chose CARF accreditation for several reasons, the first of which is the outcomes-based measurement system. Mel reports, “The CARF accreditation process helped us validate what we have, and that we have a way. That is how it helped us by validating our traditional ways and systems of governance, healing, measures, management, and so on.”

The second reason lies in the consultative survey process. Mel explains, “One of the reasons why we chose CARF accreditation is because it is the only accreditor where the accreditation process belongs to us. Other accreditors have their own system and providers are supposed to fit into it. With CARF’s consultative accreditation process, it is based on the outcomes; our systems and our ways are not being evaluated. The process belongs to us. What is important are the treatment outcomes.”

The third reason is the relationship forged between the people involved in the process on both sides. Mel affirms, “What’s really important is a balanced give and take. With CARF that’s what we felt that we got. We had to demonstrate a lot of things, so we felt that we were doing a lot of giving. The CARF people gave back by helping us. We felt it was a good relationship with a balanced give and take. It was one-sided at the other accreditation organizations we were considering.”

## Implementing the Quality Standards

Implementing the quality standards was challenging for Eyaa-Keen because the company has an oral tradition. Mel recounts, “We wanted to make sure that everything was going really well and that accreditation was going to prove it. We called and called in the beginning. We wondered how we were supposed to be able to do all the policies and procedures in the standards manual. We phoned Dan Stavert, the chief advisor-accreditation standards, at CARF Canada. He said, ‘Just write down what you do.’ We have an oral tradition, so we had to write down exactly what we did in each situation. When we did that, we found out that we met the standards naturally because we followed our traditional ways.”

Mel continues, “That was the toughest challenge. To write down our traditional ways, and the ways of what we do to achieve something without revealing the inner part of it. There are things you are not supposed to write down. We still can’t. The Elders taught us how to write it in a way that meant something and was real and true. It took us 2½ years to do this work. We’re very streamlined paper-wise.”

After completing the Intent to Survey, the survey dates were set, and experienced CARF surveyors visited Eyaa-Keen to review their materials, speak with staff, and interview the people receiving services. With the history and cultural differences between Western and traditional aboriginal ways, the personnel at Eyaa-Keen were fearful that there would be punitive actions taken if the surveyors found anything amiss.

As it turns out, Eyaa-Keen’s employees had nothing to worry about. “We got the staff together to encourage them to participate and tell the surveyors everything they learned,” Mel says. “They were able to answer all the questions and enjoyed talking to the CARF representatives. It was a good process

because they got to see how much they know about how everything works.” He continues, “The surveyors came in and said, ‘Well, we see you doing this, and recommend that you write it down this way.’ Our natural way when someone does something incorrect is to talk to them in a consultative and understanding way. The on-site survey fit our traditional way of doing things. There was nothing punitive about it.”

Shirley summarizes, “Our staff was really happy and fulfilled while they did all the work to put the pieces together by having long discussions to figure out all the quality standards. They were happy with how they felt after completing the entire survey process. It helped our staff feel confident in everything we’re learning and doing.”

## **Accreditation Promotes Quality**

Accreditation has helped Eyaa-Keen run more smoothly, and allows the company to demonstrate the quality of its services to both funders and its community. As Mel puts it, “Basically, we got streamlined. People can’t see the system because it is so subtle. It provides a sense of security to the community that there’s an organization that is dedicated and committed to ensuring quality. They can rest assured that if they or a family member need service, there will be a place to go.”

Shirley adds, “The other piece of accreditation is that it will pull together all the staff, the management, the directors, and give them strength. Once the process is complete, it does wonders for everybody. Having the accreditation means that we’re here and people everywhere can see that we are consistently doing something and doing it well.”

Mel’s advice to other organizations considering CARF accreditation is that the effort must be sincere: “Getting accreditation will really simplify and streamline things. Providers need to see how accreditation can support them, and how it can validate that they are doing good things already. It needs to come from an internal place where your people feel that accreditation is what to do. They want to make sure their services maintain high quality and that the persons served know that they will be safe and will receive quality services at all times.”