



The Students
Commission
Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement



TRUTH & RECONCILIATION

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Some may consider Canada's 150 years as something worthy of celebration, but to many, this represents 150 years of oppression and violence. Trauma caused by residential schools and oppression inflicted on Indigenous peoples of this land still impacts all aspects of Indigenous young peoples' lives. There are many areas which require improvement before reconciliation can truly be achieved. The first steps towards reconciliation are education, awareness, and empathy building. Although funding is a necessary aspect of improving current living conditions of Indigenous people, community capacity building needs to become a focus in order for all communities to prosper and be self-sustaining. In this report, we share our recommendations developed at the #CanadaWeWant youth conference to guide us along the path of truth and reconciliation.



The Truth and Reconciliation Theme Team's Dream Tree.

SUMMARY

The path to truth and reconciliation is multi-layered and will require Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to unite and walk the path together. There are four main areas the federal government needs to address to progress along the path to truth and reconciliation.

These four areas are **Awareness, Access to Resources and Opportunity, Capacity Building and Building Sustainable Communities, and Celebrating and Practicing Indigenous Culture.**

Awareness: Our recommendations include restructuring of school curriculum across Canada to help educate, inform, build empathy and break stereotypes of Indigenous history and culture.

Access to Resources and Opportunity: Our recommendations include increased access to medical care and mental health support, especially in small rural communities.

Capacity Building and Sustainable Communities: Our recommendations include more in-school support, trades training, and job opportunities for Indigenous youth.

Celebrating and Practicing Indigenous Culture: Our recommendations include supporting Indigenous ceremonies and celebrations in public spaces.



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The Path to Truth and Reconciliation Theme Team



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Acknowledgments

Thank you first to the courageous young people who traveled from coast to coast to coast to build the #CanadaWeWant so we can have the #CanadaWeNeed.

With representatives from First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities from across the country, we humbly gathered on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, the Ojibway/Chippewas, the Anishinabek, and currently the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. We were also surrounded by Indigenous communities: to the North were the Chippewas of Georgina Island; to the East are the Mississaugas of Scugog Island; and to the West are the Chippewas of Kettle and Stoney Point. Through Indigenous-led ceremony, acknowledgement and respect, we recognized the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples on this land, and were very grateful to have the opportunity to use it as a meeting place, and a space for knowledge sharing.

Thank you to Heritage Canada for supporting youth participants from across the country and for asking us to provide our voice on this topic. Thank you to YMCA Cedar Glen, The Students Commission of Canada, Sharing the Stories Research and Evaluation Platform, Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, RBC Foundation, UNICEF Canada, the Government of Canada and the many other funders of the #CanadaWeWant Conference 2018, and all of the organizers, elders, adult allies, facilitators, and most of all the wonderful youth participants. Thank you to The Students Commission Conference Planning Committee for their hard work. Thank you to the federal government representatives and policymakers that attended the Conference and will continue to support the development of A Youth Policy for Canada.



Executive Summary

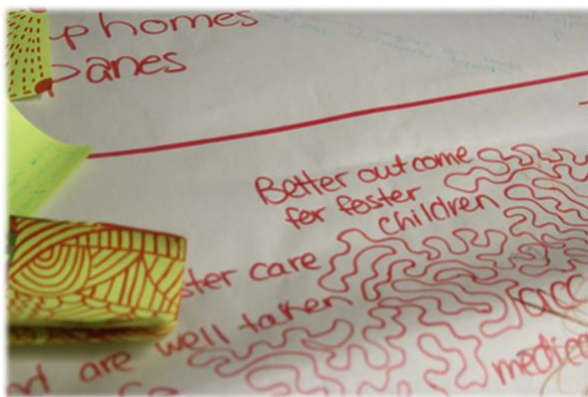
Our key findings are categorized into four areas: Awareness, Access to Resources and Opportunity, Capacity Building, and Celebrating Culture.

Truth must precede reconciliation. The Canada We Want is honest. For this reason, awareness of Canada's history of colonial violence and the present challenges that stem from this is imperative to achieving reconciliation. All members of society must be aware of and understand that they have an individual responsibility to work towards reconciliation.

Reconciliation requires building a new and trusting relationship between the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples of this land. This new relationship necessitates that Indigenous people are treated equal to non-Indigenous people by the government. There is a systemic and significant divide between resources allocated to Indigenous people, especially those living on reserve, and non-Indigenous people. For example, many Indigenous communities still do not have access to clean drinking water. Reconciliation demands that Indigenous people have access to resources and opportunities that allow them to thrive, and that the Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that this happens, regardless of the cost.

Indigenous people living on reserve often have less opportunities than people living off-reserve. Sustainable and self-sufficient communities require capacity-building activities and trainings. Communities should identify to the government the supports they require, and the government should respond with action necessary to help communities become as self-sufficient as possible.

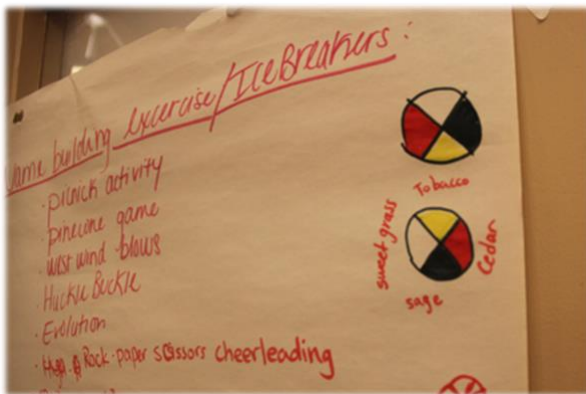
For most of Canada's past 150 years, Indigenous culture has not been celebrated. In the Canada We Want, this is not the case. Sustainable and thriving communities are those that also have a thriving connection to their heritage and culture.



"Today I learned that it's okay to ask questions about culture you know little about"



"I am humbled by the experiences that my group members have gone through or stories that have been passed down"



"Cultivating my minds awareness to listen and respect while others are speaking"

#CANADA WE WANT

The change we want to see:

The Canada We Want is one in which all Indigenous people are connected to their culture, and one in which all people in Canada understand they have a role to play in working towards Truth and Reconciliation. The Canada We Want has a new and trusting relationship between Indigenous people and the Government of Canada. The Canada We Want provides adequate resources, supports and opportunities in all Northern, remote, and reserve Indigenous communities.

Rehabilitation processes that incorporate traditional teachings.

The way we want to get there (Activities):

All people in Canada have the opportunity to engage in dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to build empathy and understanding of how we will walk the path of Reconciliation together.

The way we want to get there (Activities):

All publicly-funded school curricula teach young people Canada's true past and emphasize that we can and must do better in supporting Indigenous people.

The way we want to get there (Activities):

All Indigenous youth will have access to their culture, regardless of where they live. For example, non-Indigenous Foster Parents caring for Indigenous children must be obligated to connect the child to their culture in an authentic and meaningful way.

What we need to get there (Resources):

The Government of Canada must commit to implementing all TRC Calls to Action.

The way we want to get there (Resources):

All Governments in this country (Indigenous, Federal, Provincial, Territorial, Municipal) must work together to support Indigenous people.

What are the values and the principles to ground our recommendations?

Our Recommendations are grounded in the values of honesty, listening, compassion and commitment to working together towards a better future for Indigenous people in Canada.

What are the values and the principles to ground our recommendations?

Our Recommendations are grounded in an ultimate respect for the diverse Indigenous teachings and culture, especially the Medicine Wheel.

Our Recommendations

Awareness:

Steps towards Reconciliation must begin with awareness. Awareness of Indigenous culture, of Canada's history of colonial violence, and of the current challenges Indigenous people face as a consequence. Awareness must be supported through education systems to break existing stereotypes about Indigenous people and build empathy.

Recommendation 1: Increase educational opportunities about Residential Schools and Indigenous history, as well as current circumstances Indigenous people live in. All educational opportunities should be grounded in the firm understanding that Canada can and must do better with respect to its relationship with Indigenous people.

- Standardized mandatory Indigenous history and cultural teachings should be implemented into all school curricula across Canada.
- Indigenous cultural competency trainings should be delivered to all organizations and service providers.
- The Government of Canada should support and deliver dialogue-based workshops between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in schools and in community centres to begin **empathy building**.
- The Government of Canada should support “knowledge exchange” programs (including elders, non-Indigenous, and Indigenous peoples). E.g. A 2-week exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people.
- Municipalities should support community workshops in which Indigenous youth share their experiences with decision-makers and service providers (i.e. teachers, social workers, etc.)
- All public spaces (schools, parks, hospitals) should have a permanent land acknowledgement.

Access to Resources and Opportunities:

The Canada We Want is one in which Indigenous people have the same opportunities to thrive as non-Indigenous people. This requires working towards equal access to resources and opportunities for all people in Canada. Access to appropriate resources and opportunities will allow communities to realize their potential and thrive socially, culturally and economically.

Recommendation 2: All Indigenous people have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive and live a healthy life. This will require:

- Access to health care for all Indigenous people. Jordan's Principle¹ should be at the forefront of this.

¹ Jordan's Principle ensures indigenous children and youth receive the services they need in a timely manner. The principle is named in memory of Jordan River Anderson. The five-year-old from the Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba died in hospital in 2005 as the provincial and federal governments argued over who should pay for his at-home care. (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs)

- Access to EMS services- many Indigenous communities do not have emergency services.
- Increased and adequate access to mental-health resources and support in all rural, remote, and reserve Indigenous communities.
- All Indigenous communities should have access to clean drinking water.
- Food subsidies should be provided by the Government of Canada in Northern communities to make (healthy) food affordable.
- Rehabilitation Centres for Indigenous people should be established that provide culturally-relevant support.

Capacity Building and Sustainable Communities:

In the past, the Nishnawbe Aski² Education Council (NNEC) provided funding and support to Indigenous youth who chose to leave home to pursue a higher education. This helped support an environment of opportunity and capacity building among Indigenous people. This funding was cut, causing the majority of outside support services to come from the Windigo Council³ and Shiboogama⁴. This is problematic because many Indigenous communities are financially unstable. Northern Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable and are the least self-sufficient. To achieve sustainability, communities require investment in all of their infrastructure and services.

Recommendation 3: Build the capacities of Indigenous communities to become self-sustaining.

- Provide no-cost trainings to young people in Indigenous communities, specifically in the areas of trades.
- Ensure that Government of Canada decisions take into account and deeply consider the implications of their decisions on the ability of Indigenous communities to practice traditional ways. E.g. Pipelines should not interfere with Indigenous land and the health of this land.
- Funding structures should be reformed to allow Indigenous communities more autonomy and the ability to do financial planning.
- Governments provide additional supports and grants to Indigenous young people attending post-secondary education.

² Nishnawbe Aski Nation is a political organization that represents the legitimate, socioeconomic, and political aspirations of its 49 First Nation member communities in Northern Ontario to all levels of government in order to allow local self-determination while establishing spiritual, cultural, social, and economic independence.

³ The Windigo First Nations Council is a member of Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN). It serves a collective on-reserve population of 2,556 individuals (as of 2016)

⁴ Shiboogama is a regional tribal council located in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, Canada. It is a member of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN).

Celebrating and Practicing Indigenous Culture:

Canada's past 150 years have been characterized by a systematic attempt to eradicate all Indigenous culture and traditional ways of life. The Canada We Want is one in which all Indigenous people are connected to and proud of their culture.

Recommendation 4: All Canadians have the opportunity to celebrate Indigenous culture.

- Workplace policies respect and account for the practice of Indigenous ceremony.
- Publically-funded schools provide all students the opportunity to learn about Indigenous culture by attending Pow-Wows.

Conclusion

Truth and Reconciliation should be at the forefront of all decisions made by non-Indigenous governments in Canada. This will require a structural shift in both the way decisions are made and Government's priorities. The Canada We Want is one in which Indigenous youth have equal opportunity as those who are non-Indigenous. This will only be achieved if all people have the opportunity to learn and become aware of Canada's history of colonialism, and therefore understand their own responsibility to walk the path of reconciliation.