

Elders and Youth Gathering 2017

World Café Reflections Summary: Ideas & Opportunities

Hosted by the Assembly of Seven Generation (A7G) &
Summer Solstice Festival Committee

Report compiled by Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange

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Introduction

From Thursday, June 22, 2017, to Friday, June 23, 2017, Aboriginal Experiences and Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G) presented a special two-day Elders and Youth gathering as part of the Summer Solstice Indigenous Festival.

The event was held in Ottawa, ON on traditional Algonquin territory in Vincent Massey Park. Participants were able to learn from different speakers on diverse topics such as language revitalization, Metis governance, sweat lodge teachings, the importance of traditional openings and more. In addition to being a learning space, the two days also gave youth, Elders and all attendees the opportunity to connect deeply and hear each other's perspectives.

The event ended with a World Café session inviting participants to brainstorm and reflect on five themes, keeping in mind all they had learned and experienced at the gathering.

World Café Session Themes:

1. Safer Spaces & Inclusion
2. Well-being
3. Identity and Culture
4. Ceremony
5. Professional Development

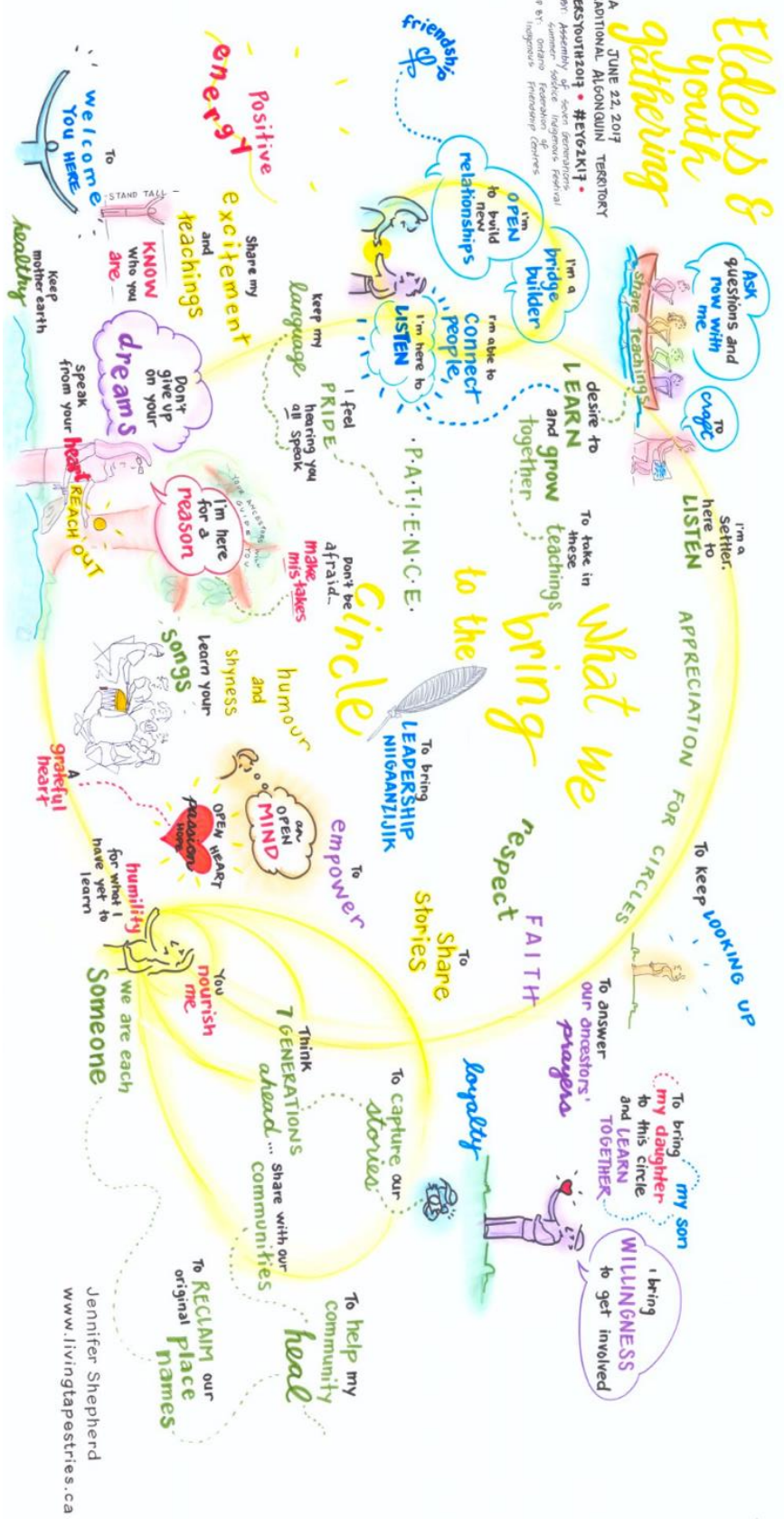
This document outlines some of the key themes and ideas that came out of this fruitful discussions, offering ideas for next steps and opportunities to better support Indigenous youth and communities.



Elders & youth gathering

OTTAWA, JUNE 22, 2017
ON TRADITIONAL ALGONQUIN TERRITORY

#ELDERSTOYUR2017 • #EY2017
History: 811 Assembly, 1000+ Indigenous Federal
Sponsors: 811, Ontario Federation of Indigenous
Languages, First Nations Centre



Jennifer Shepherd
www.livingtapestries.ca

Theme 1 // Safer Spaces & Inclusion

Prompt Questions: How can we create safer and inclusive opportunities? For 2-Spirits? For LGBTQ youth? For youth with impairments and accessibility concerns? For non-Indigenous youth?

The Discussion

This group focused on discussing what inclusivity and safer spaces look and feel like. One of the main themes that came out of the discussion was the idea that spaces really can never be guaranteed to be fully safe, no matter how aware or committed we are as organizers to making spaces inclusive and safe. Instead, what we need to constantly remind ourselves is to operate through humility and be actively assessing where people are at and how things can be adapted. Creating safer spaces is a continuous process and journey that needs to be approached with intentionality, flexibility, and openness.

Host Reflection: “One thing that came up that was interesting to me was the realization that our conversations around safer & inclusive spaces often are inaccessible, involving academic language; we identified that and then tried to do our best to make sure that for the rest of the conversation that we used language that was easier to understand or we took the time to explain terms and concepts that came up.”



What does inclusivity look & feel like?

Inclusivity feels like community.

Participants shared the importance of coming together and intentionally welcoming different perspectives. Everyone should feel supported to share their voice in an inclusive space, and people should be supported to learn through constructive feedback rather than being made to feel bad for making mistakes. The atmosphere should strike a balance of fun and positivity while remaining intentional about fighting for inclusivity.

Inclusivity looks like:

- Using accessible language that everyone understands
- Ensuring a diversity in role models and knowledge centres
- Offering food, drinks and childcare

- Providing visual indicators of participation level & feelings: allow people to identify their own needs and meet them
- Asking if people are willing to be photographed
- Asking for consent and permission and respecting the answers
- Not tokenizing identities: don't do it for a checkmark

When it comes to gender...:

- Approaches to ceremony that aren't gender restrictive
- Gender neutral & physically accessible washrooms
- Normalizing pronouns
- Not using gendered terms or phrases

What do safer spaces look like and feel like?

Safer spaces feel like respect. This means respecting where people are at when it comes to their emotions, knowledge, experiences; respecting physical boundaries and asking for consent. They also feel like humility: being open to learning from mistakes. In safer spaces it feels okay to 'pass' and to choose how and when to participate.

Safer spaces look like:

- Being intentional in how spaces are planned and structured
- Using trauma-informed approaches
- Having access to reliable spaces (consistent funding for good/safer spaces)
- Recognizing the burden of emotional labour
- Not expecting individuals from marginalized communities to teach
- Being mindful of language (and different perspectives on it)
- Having open communication
- Recognizing that learning, unlearning and understanding is an ongoing process
- Recognizing that spaces can never be 100% safe

Tips on How to be a Good Ally

Being an ally is a constant journey and a commitment. Here are four tips that can help guide this journey:

1. **Practice Self-Awareness:** How much space are you taking up? What energy are you bringing to the space? What are your privileges and how do you use/carry them? What are your intentions you're bringing into this space? Something to keep in mind is the phrase 'step up, step back'. This will help you to be aware of space you're taking up. Make sure you speak only for yourself and your own experiences, and not for others, and focus on learning versus recognition for your actions.
2. **Keep an Open Mind (and be humble):** Be open to learning and unlearning. With this comes humility: have the humility to make mistakes and learn from them. Be open to constructive criticism in this process and don't be afraid to ask questions! You might feel uncomfortable but this is all part of growing and learning.

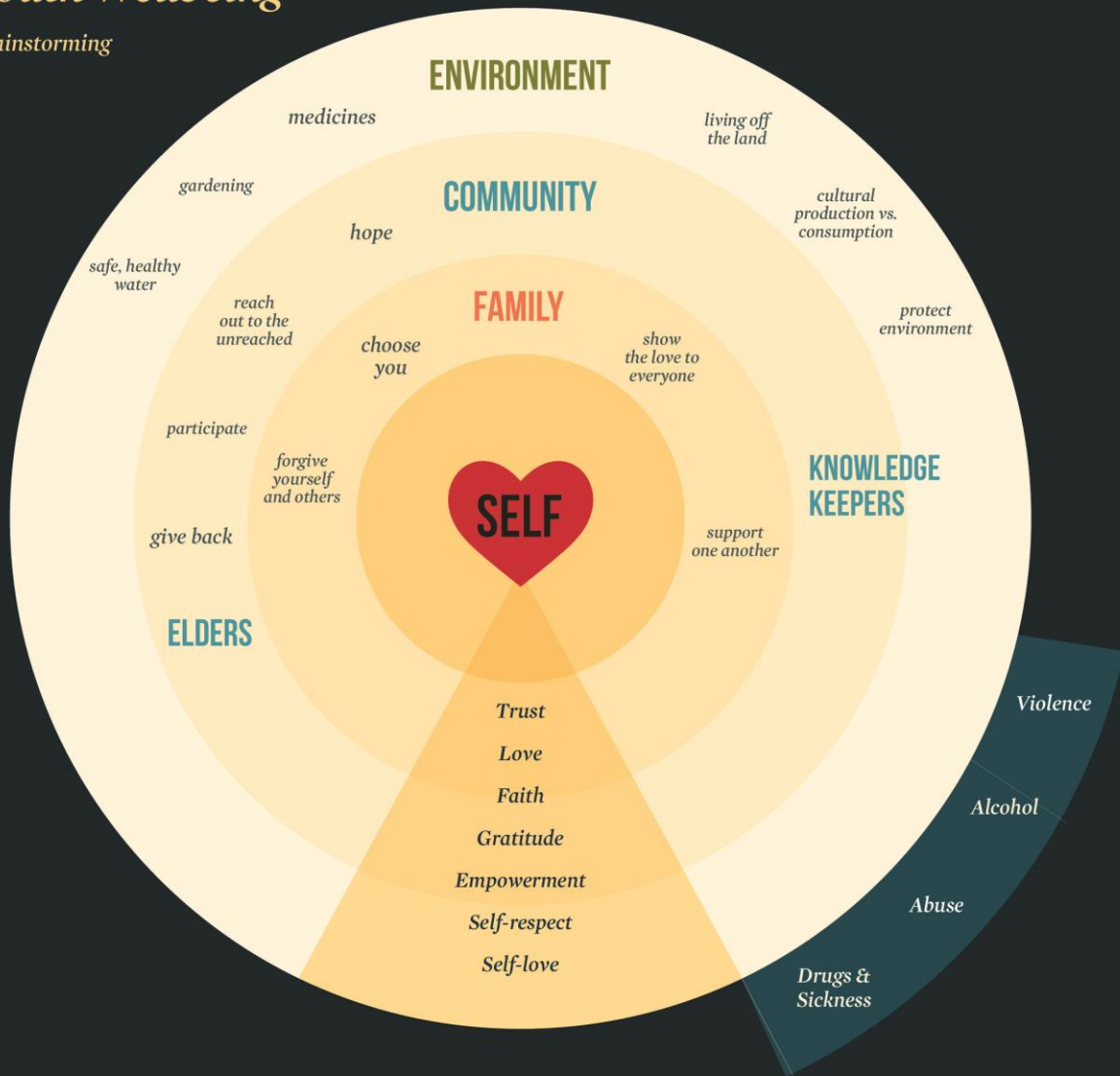
3. **Respect & Gratitude Come First:** Treat people equally and show gratitude for people's emotional labor.
4. **Show Up:** Don't just do the easy, comfortable work – get your hands dirty! Offer your support to help when its needed

Question to consider: How do we address intersectionality while valuing and respecting intergenerational exchange in Indigenous spaces?



Indigenous Youth Wellbeing

Brainstorming



Theme 2 // Well-Being

Questions Prompts: What are solutions for better supporting Indigenous youth wellbeing? What new ideas for supporting Indigenous youth wellbeing do you have after this event?

The Discussion

For participants discussing this topic, wellbeing started at the self: loving oneself, forgiveness and knowing oneself. Key to this is having a strong grounding foundation of Indigenous history and culture, and being connected to the land and nature. Participants noted that not having a strong sense of identity leads to depression and negative coping mechanisms. From individual wellbeing comes connection to community, having a supportive network, and being able to advocate for Indigenous rights and justice. Balance, Understanding, Decolonization, and Education were four tenets expressed as being key to wellbeing.

At the Individual Level:

- Don't allow others words upset you
- Don't give up/give in
- Be positive
- Have a voice – speak your mind
- Don't bottle your emotions
- Speak truth
- Listening: communication
- Honour our journey and others' journeys
- Humility, trust
- Know who you are/where you came from
- Have a voice/speak your truth
- Self love, self respect
- Relationship with creator/creation
- Forgiveness
- Inner child journey = heal

Self-Care Ideas:

Participants identified a number of self-care ideas and tips to support individual wellbeing, stressing the importance of getting grounded and having positive coping mechanisms to support wellbeing.

1. Go to bush, get connected with nature, land and water
2. Practice gratitude
3. Practice sobriety
4. Gardening: foods and medicine
5. Listen to music
6. Break dependency on technology, electronics, cell phones, and social media

The Importance of History & Culture in Grounding the Self: “How could our creation stories help us achieve wellbeing?”

Participants stressed the importance of educating one’s self in Indigenous history and culture, asking “How could our creation stories help us achieve wellbeing?” They highlighted going to ceremony, praying and the significance of language. Further, learning the history of Indigenous peoples and culture, such as sports. Lacrosse, Canada’s national sport that was invented by Indigenous peoples was given as an example. Participants expressed that this education is important to both personal wellbeing and community wellbeing and advocacy.

Moving from the Self to Community

Four key issues were noted as ways individuals could get involved in the community engage with elders and knowledge keeper and contribute to the wellbeing of Indigenous communities:

1. Combat stereotypes
2. Combat white privilege
3. Stop bullying/discrimination
4. Suicide prevention awareness

At the System Level: Education

Participants stressed that an integral aspect of Indigenous wellbeing is the education system. There needs to be more Indigenous representation in schools/community and Indigenous peoples need to be able to speak for themselves. Education needs to be decolonized – this includes increasing the number of Indigenous teachers, addressing racism and educating non-Indigenous people about Indigenous history, culture and peoples.



Theme 3 // Identity & Culture

Prompt Questions: What are solutions for supporting Indigenous youth to strengthen their identity and culture? What new ideas for supporting Indigenous youth identity and culture do you have after this event?

The Discussion

Participants in this discussion were mostly young professionals who are already sharing culture in their communities through their work. Most of the youth were connected to or staff of Indigenous organizations that work directly with other youth. The discussion focused primarily on best practices of how to support and share culture within education or community settings. The dialogue really became a place of sharing about how to continue to do this work in a good way.



Host Reflection:

“One of the biggest themes was "role modelling" or "empowering young people". This opened up dialogue about how the youth were already role modeling their way of life to others. For example, many of the youth who visited us were chaperoned by youth leaders from their communities. So this role modelling was happening before they arrived. Other examples included inviting hesitant youth to ceremonies, gatherings, celebrations and making them feel part of their culture.”

“Youth will Bring You Back to Culture”: Take Time to Create Learning Moments

Youth can feel disconnected from their culture. They need encouragement, space to share and vent with friends and to feel included. Further, there is so much to learn that it can feel like “the more you learn, the less you know.” That being said, it is important and empowering for youth to learn/relearn the Indigenous Way of Life that they are born with. These are some ideas of how Indigenous youth can be supported to learn more deeply and meaningfully about their culture:

- 1. Role Modelling:** Youth need to see and learn from Indigenous role models they can look up to.
- 2. Safe Space to Learn/Reconnect:** Gathering is healing and can be empowering. Youth are knowledge keepers and need to have conversations with diverse community members about their histories and backgrounds.
- 3. Connection to Elders & Knowledge keepers:** It is important youth know how they can connect with elders and knowledge keepers so that they are able to engage with and learn about the Indigenous way of life in their lives and with their families.
- 4. Language:** Opportunities for youth to learn their traditional language can connect them better to the land.
- 5. Family:** Bringing family members/parents to powwows and other Indigenous events

6. **Encouragement:** Youth need more opportunities and encouragement to engage with Indigenous culture
7. **Cultural Supports:** Learning more about nutrition, medicine packs/holistic medicine, classroom support, afterschool programs and curriculum development that supports Indigenous cultural learning
8. **Art:** Engage youth to connect with their identity and culture through artistic expression.
Example: [Neechee Studios](#)



Theme 04 // Ceremonies

Prompt Questions: What are solutions for engaging Indigenous youth in ceremonies? What new ideas for engaging Indigenous youth in ceremonies do you have after this event?

The Discussion

In this session, participants brainstormed existing barriers to performing ceremonies and engaging Indigenous youth in ceremonies, and listed out questions that need to be considered when planning to engage in ceremonies. Participants also asked questions that are works in progress, where there is no clear cut answer and the solution may change depending on context.

Examples of Ceremonies include:

- Walking out ceremony
- Berry Fast ceremony
- First Kill ceremony
- Sunrise ceremony
- Fasting ceremony
- Shaking Tent ceremony
- Naming ceremony
- Funeral ceremony
- Wedding ceremony
- Harvesting Ceremonies: Qaggig

Examples of Traditions include:

- Hunting
- Giving thanks
- Traditional dinners
- Feasts
- Sweats in home & smudging/prayers



Barriers to Ceremony include:

- Transportation
- Addiction
- Dispelling myths and misconceptions about ceremony
- Knowing the right elders and trusting their knowledge
- Discrimination
- Public disinterest
- Peer pressure
- Finding medicines in the city
- Cultural appropriation – sale of four medicines, dream catchers etc.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can ceremonies that are done in the bush, come to the city?
2. How can technology be used in ceremony? Can it?
3. How can you use social media to coordinate ceremony? How do you create good space through the use of social media?
4. How do we protect consent to be filmed during ceremony?
5. What traditional foods are needed and are there specific permission policies for these foods?
6. What are the protocols for asking for ceremony?



Theme 05 // Professional Development

Prompt Questions: What are solutions for creating more professional development opportunities for Indigenous youth? What new ideas for creating professional development opportunities do you have after this event?

The Discussion

“Knowing your identity is a key part of professional development for Indigenous peoples”

One of the main issues that was discussed, was that Indigenous youth have to navigate and negotiate walking in two worlds when it comes to most professional development opportunities. Having a strong understanding of culture and identity was identified as key to this process, otherwise youth may feel disconnected. Further participants expressed that Indigenous people need to be in leadership positions, especially in Indigenous organisations and in situations working with Indigenous peoples. Participants focused their discussion on how Indigenous youth can approach their own professional development, and identified the qualities employers are looking for as well as existing initiatives that support the professional development of Indigenous youth.

Host Reflection: “An important take-away for me was the need for more mentorship opportunities for Indigenous youth. Youth who are involved in the child welfare system may lack the personal connections and life skills to advance professionally with the ease that others who have such connections are able to.”

How can Indigenous Youth Engage in Professional Development and ‘Walk in Two Worlds’: Four Tips for this Journey

“Small connections can lead to amazing opportunities.”

Professional development is about being more than you thought you could be. Part of this is dealing with what hurts you, letting go of what isn’t yours and finding someone to talk to. Going through this process can lead you to find out what you’re passionate about and help you to navigate talking and walking in two worlds.

- 1. Connect with culture/teachings:** Find out who you are/learn about your teachings from elders. This could include learning from wampum belts or pictographs, as well as learning traditional languages and being part of the process of language revitalization.
- 2. Education is very important:** Consider engaging in some sort of post-secondary education
- 3. Create/Engage Your Network:** This could include your parents, who can be great advocates, mentors, perhaps an Elder, and community who can help you with different aspects of your journey. Barriers you may come up against include personal barriers such as low self-esteem, and systemic barriers such as racism and discrimination. Your network is key to supporting you through addressing these barriers. Further, networking is a big part of professional development – building your contacts, making community contacts, and attending conferences can help you grow and develop in your career. MPs can also be good resources.

4. **Experiential Learning:** It can be a very powerful learning experience to do hands on things like make documentaries/films, both in terms of learning about the self, and learning practical skills.

What Qualities Are Employers Looking for? Someone who is...

- adaptable/flexible
- a self-motivated/self-starter
- eager to take initiative
- is able to take constructive criticism with gratitude
- knows what to put on their resume: this includes highlighting transferrable skills and using key words that reflect what they are looking for

Existing Initiatives:

1. **Outward Bound**
www.outwardbound.ca
 - Lots of opportunities for Indigenous youth
2. **Canada Summer Jobs (15-30)**
<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/youth-summer-job.html>
 - Wage subsidy program; can lead to future development
3. **Working with Friendship Centres**
<http://nafc.ca/en/>
 - Partnerships are very important; Friendship Centres fund urban Indigenous peoples
4. **Canadian Roots Exchange**
<http://www.canadianroots.ca>
5. **OYAC Youth Councils**
 - Provides opportunities to travel, meet people & develop leadership experience
6. **Imagine a Canada Competition**
http://nctr.ca/education_imagine.php

In Summary

"I could tell the youth need spaces where they can open up and learn from their older generations. I feel many Indigenous youth are so disconnected from culture so having a space to soak it all up is so greatly needed. This way of gathering and sharing is part of our traditions and for those two days they were living out that tradition. One quote that was shared was that "Indigenous peoples don't have "culture" but rather a way of life." For many youth, this was their first connection to that way of life."

– Attendee and World Café host reflection

As evident in this overview, participants shared lots of positive energy, reflections and ideas during the world café sessions at this two-day gathering. One of the overarching messages spanning all five world café topics – 1. Safer Spaces & Inclusion; 2. Well-being; 3. Identity and Culture; 4. Ceremony; and 5. Professional Development – is that Indigenous youth need to feel grounded in and connected with their Indigenous identity. Having a strong sense of identity will allow youth to feel empowered to see themselves in ways and spaces they might not have otherwise, and can also lead to positive effects for their communities and beyond.



In order to support and foster this sense of Indigenous identity, youth need more opportunities to connect with land, to engage in ceremony and tradition, and to learn their traditional language(s). Throughout, they need to be able to access and develop relationships with mentors, Elders and knowledge keepers to help guide and support them through their journeys. Safe and inclusive spaces are also vital to this process so that everyone can feel supported to learn, make mistakes, practice humility and gratitude, and grow together, regardless of generation.

How do non-Indigenous people support these needs? Participants expressed that allies need to take the time to educate themselves about Indigenous history, culture and people, respectfully asking questions while not expected to be taught by Indigenous people all the time. Participants also emphasized the need for allies to practice 'stepping up and stepping back' – to be aware of their intentions, energy and how much space they are taking up. It is integral that Indigenous voices and people have the space to lead processes of learning, decolonization and truth and reconciliation.



This report was compiled by Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX). YouthREX is a province-wide initiative based at York University with five regional Hubs across Ontario that promote the integration of research evidence and evaluation in the development and delivery of Ontario's youth programs. YouthREX regional hubs engage local grassroots youth serving organizations, academic partners, youth and policy stakeholders in capacity building, knowledge exchange, research and evaluation opportunities. YouthREX is primarily funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services with extensive contributions from York University and the YouthREX partner universities.

For more information please visit: www.youthrex.com and exchange.youthrex.com