



ASSEMBLY OF SEVEN
GENERATIONS

LA Labour of Love

**The Unpaid and Exploited Labour
of Grassroots and Community-Based
Indigenous Youth Groups**

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and Josh Lewis

A Labour of Love

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We honour the Survivors of Indian Residential Schools, Day Schools, Industrial Schools, convents, sanatoriums, and child welfare by responding to and advocating for the full implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 66.

We want to acknowledge all the community-based groups and collectives who continue to be a beacon of hope for the Indigenous youth they serve.

These are the stories of only a few of the many young people seeking change and justice. We know many more deserve to be acknowledged, and we hope this report aids to amplify their work as well.

This report was funded by Justice Canada – UN Declaration Act Implementation Secretariat to amplify the voices of Indigenous youth in the implementation of the *UN Declaration Act*, including the development of an Action Plan. We believe that TRC 66, if implemented in a good way, responds to Articles 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 39 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We would also like to thank Save the Children and their colleagues for believing in the vision that grassroots Indigenous youth have for TRC 66 and supporting their work and efforts.

Intentions

We ask readers of this report to be mindful of your intentions. This report came with hesitations from many of the grassroots youth groups we spoke with. Many have been used and exploited, their work stolen without compensation or acknowledgment. We ask that readers read this in full as a tool to advocate alongside the Indigenous youth groups mentioned in this report. This report is by and for Indigenous youth groups and only to be used by Indigenous youth groups unless permission is otherwise given.

Letter from Gabrielle Fayant

I've been working on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 66 since 2017, but I've been working in community, specifically with Indigenous youth, since 2010.

TRC Call to Action 66: We call upon the federal government to establish multi-year funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation and establish a national network to share information and best practices.

TRC 66 was created by Survivors in response to them witnessing Indigenous youth in their communities crave cultural and social supports as they break the cycles of intergenerational traumas caused by The Indian Residential and Day School Systems. Showcasing that Survivors see the value of youth taking up space on their lands to create a community for themselves, while navigating the trials that come with being an Indigenous person. The implementation of Call to Action 66 is a way to honour the Survivors missed youth and their efforts today, as well as ensuring that future generations will have a chance to live out their childhood rather than just surviving colonial violence, because every child matters.

The importance of the work done by these community-based Indigenous youth groups are not only dire, but critical to the survival of the youth they serve. Most often times these youth groups are the lifelines for Indigenous youth under-served and targeted by various forms of systemic racism and institutionalization via child welfare and incarceration. Indigenous youth face extreme realities, and many in these communities rely on their peers to overcome the many challenges which if continued to be ignore the more lives will be taken far too soon

The youth of today are the descendants of Survivors. They live with the highest rates of institutionalization, including child welfare, which has surpassed the peak rate of youth in residential schools, and mass incarcerations, which we've seen increase and where we've seen the rates of non-Indigenous incarceration fall. Today's youth live in a constant state of

grief, from the high rates of death by suicide to the endemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. The hardest part to face is that many of these deaths are preventable, and the solutions have been written in hundreds of reports throughout generations.¹

I want to be clear: TRC 66 cannot address all the injustices faced by Indigenous youth. However, if implemented in good faith with the community-based youth groups already doing the work of TRC 66, many Indigenous youth will have access to community, culture, and land. Without access to community, culture, and land, we will continue to live in a deficit. Placing the burden of recovering from the legacy of Residential Schools onto the descendants of the survivors is not only callous but inhumane.

The definition of History is that of a continuous, systematic narrative of past events as relating to a particular person, country, period, peoples, etc. Meaning that history is an ongoing action in which we have the power to use our positions to create an equal and accurate adaptation to what we bare witness to as a society. There are amazing Indigenous youth doing critical work for their peers and their communities because they believe that Indigenous youth deserve love and safety. We can implement TRC 66 together. From my point of view, seeing so many youth groups already doing the work on the ground, implementing TRC 66 is straightforward. The questions remain: How will you showcase your character in our history today and do you believe that Indigenous youth deserve love and safety the same way we do?

¹ See for example, the Caring Society's History of Inequity timeline: <https://fncaringsociety.com/reconciling-history/history-inequity>.

Key Terms

Youth Groups – For the purpose of this report, youth groups will include the ten Indigenous youth collectives, organizations, councils, and groups consulted in this process. They are **Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G), Western Arctic Youth Collective (WAYC), Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia (YIWU), Chokeycherry Studios, Stoney Nakoda Youth Council, Fishing Lake Métis Settlement Youth, The Indigenous Support Project (TISP), Revitalizing Our Sustenance, Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick (WNNB) Youth Committee, and Reclaiming Our Roots.**

Youth Organizer – For the purpose of this report, a youth organizer is a younger Indigenous person who organizes programs, activities, services, special events, etc., with one of the ten mentioned youth groups. Being an organizer is holistic in nature, and often includes doing administrative work, filing bookkeeping, finances, event coordination, mental health support, crisis intervention, workshops from language to sewing to beadwork, sports coaching, mentoring, etc.

Grassroots – Grassroots initiatives are community-based approaches created to address localized problems. Projects backed by local organizations can quickly gain momentum in the community because they are usually enacted by local actors who are known and trusted by the community. Moreover, larger organizations could benefit from local grassroots initiatives and groups connected directly to the issues and the people living in need. These groups are often the first responders in a crisis and critical witnesses to which solutions are better suited for a context. Partnerships can be fruitful when people (grassroots organizations) and resources come together to address a need and context. Grassroots initiatives and groups understand the multifaceted contexts and issues that could deter progress or stall innovative solutions while also creating a sense of trust in a community by authenticating the potential benefits of an innovative solution, as well as identifying flaws and required improvement.²

2 UNHCR’s Innovation Service. “Grassroots organizations are just as important as seed money for innovation.” Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/grassroots-organizations-are-just-as-important-as-seed-money-for-innovation/>.

Systems Navigator – For the purpose of this report, a system navigator is an older youth who provides help and support to other Indigenous youth to navigate complex systems that have been imposed on communities, such as child welfare, education (elementary, high school and post-secondary), housing, social assistance, health care, mental health care, employment, criminal justice system, etc. These systems are often complicated and difficult to understand or navigate without lived experience or knowledge of how each system operates. For example, Systems Navigators often support youth who are having anxiety making phone calls or attending meetings alone and often act as a spokesperson or advocate for youth.

Community-Based – Describes an activity locally organized and takes place locally. For the context of this report, community-based describes a youth group with events and programming within their community. Community can refer to a First Nation reserve, a Metis Settlement, or an urban community, but the emphasis is on gathering and organizing locally.

Land-Based – For the context of this report, land-based often refers to Indigenous youth reclaiming and relearning cultural teachings connected to the land and their homelands. Some examples are plant identification and harvesting, berry picking, hunting, hide tanning, moccasin making, attending ceremonies, survival skills, etc.

Culture – For this report, culture is a shared set of beliefs and values distinct to a territory and land base. It may be defined as traditional skills, a way of life and kinship to the land. There are visible and invisible ways of expressing culture. It is important that Youth Groups have the capacity to create spaces that allow Indigenous youth to practice their distinct ways of life. There is not one “Indigenous culture”; each Youth Group and youth within each Youth Group have their own kinship and values from their distinct cultures. Culture can even be distinct within Nations and tribes, from community to community and this deserves to be honoured.

Introduction

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 66 (TRC 66) is a call to action that Residential School survivors wanted for the current and future generations of young people. If meaningfully, fully, and honestly implemented, TRC 66 would advance true reconciliation by positively impacting survivors and multigenerational survivors, leading the way to address the harmful legacy of the residential school system. The intentions of survivors are clear and precise, with TRC 66 reading:

We call upon the federal government to establish multi-year funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation and establish a national network to share information and best practices.³

The TRC's 94 Calls to Action was released in 2015, and seven years later, most of the Calls to Action have not been fully implemented or are only in progress.⁴ Seven years is a significant amount of time in a young person's life, and it is too long to wait to address the urgent needs of Indigenous youth. Seven years is also a significant portion of a young person's childhood and growth. Growing up without proper support and having basic needs met can set up a young person for years of failure and struggle as they transition into adulthood. The most painful reality is that many youth are no longer with us due to preventable deaths such as suicides, overdoses and the endemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit peoples.

3 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. nctr.ca/records/reports

4 Indigenous Watchdog. (n.d.). indigenouwatchdog.org; Jewell, E. & Mosby, I. (Eds.). (2022). *Calls to Action Accountability: 2022 Status Update on Reconciliation*. Yellowhead Institute. yellowheadinstitute.org/trc

“When people have healthy coping mechanisms and strong support systems, they are better equipped to heal from trauma. Not only did acts of colonialism cause trauma in Indigenous people, but it also affected their means of coping with and healing from trauma. This is how intergenerational trauma continues to negatively affect generation after generation of Indigenous people today.”⁵

Indigenous youth are at the heart of TRC 66. It is meant to support the holistic needs of Indigenous youth to remedy the legacy and ongoing effects of colonization and ensure they have access to programs and services rooted in community, culture, land, language, and ceremony.

Fully implementing TRC 66 means honouring Canada’s promises to Indigenous youth and honouring the commitments that Canada agreed to at the international level. Canada has agreed to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, Canada continues to fail Indigenous children and youth by violating their rights in multiple ways.

Convention on the Rights of the Child in Child-Friendly language is available for download from [this link](#).⁶

5 Centre for Suicide Prevention. “Indigenous people, trauma, and suicide prevention.” June 20, 2021. https://www.suicideinfo.ca/local_resource/trauma-and-suicide-in-indigenous-people/.

6 <https://www.unicef.org/media/56661/file>

A few examples:

- According to UNICEF Canada, Canada ranked 28 out of 38 of the world's wealthiest countries on the environmental well-being of children and youth in May 2022. This report measured children's experiences of their environment today and the world they will have in the future (Figure 1). While this report card addresses many of the concerns for Canadian children and youth, there is no specific research or consultation with Indigenous children and youth, which would most likely show much more extremes.⁷
- There is a "high level of consensus" that the situation of Indigenous children in Canada must improve. The Auditor General of Canada, the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates, the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, UNICEF Canada, and Aboriginal organizations have provided a breadth of analysis pointing to that consensus. In addition, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has twice asked Canada to take action to address the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in basic areas for child development, such as health, education, child protection, and poverty.⁸
- In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that Canada is racially discriminating against First Nations children by providing flawed and inequitable child welfare funding and failing to properly implement Jordan's Principle to ensure First Nations children can access the services they need. The Tribunal has issued over 25 non-compliance and procedural orders since trying to get Canada to end its discrimination.⁹
- In September 2017, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) stated that it was "alarmed" that despite its previous recommendation and multiple decisions by the Canadian

7 UNICEF Canada. "The future is now: The environment and children's well-being in Canada." May 2022. <https://www.unicef.ca/en/unicef-report-card-17>.

8 Canadian Coalition on the Rights of Children. "Paying attention to vulnerable children: Fulfilling the rights of Aboriginal children." Accessed November 14, 2022. <https://rightsofchildren.ca/childrens-rights-in-canada-report-in-sections/attachment/paying-attention-to-vulnerable-children/>.

9 The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society. (n.d.). "I am a Witness." Accessed December 29, 2022. www.fnwitness.ca.

Human Rights Tribunal, “less money is reportedly provided for child and family services for indigenous children than for children in other communities, and that this gap continues to grow.” The UNCERD also expressed concern that “the federal Government has adopted an overly narrow definition of the Jordan’s Principle, as stated in the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision . . . in 2016 and has failed to address the root causes of displacement, while tens of thousands of children are needlessly removed from their families, communities and culture and placed in State care.”¹⁰

- Youth suicide rates in Canada are very high. Indigenous youth in Canada experience disproportionately high suicide and suicidal ideation rates compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. A 1995 special report published by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples estimated that the rate of suicide among Indigenous youth was five to six times higher than among non-Indigenous youth in Canada. Unfortunately, since this 1995 report, these figures have remained largely unchanged, with Indigenous youth continuing to be at high risk of suicide. In addition, the most high-risk group for suicide are Inuit males aged 15–29, with rates almost forty times the national rate.¹¹

Why “In Progress?”

The Government announced on September 3, 2019, an Indigenous Youth pilot project delivered by the Canadian Roots Exchange that incorporates some of the recommendations from the final report submitted to the government by the Indigenous Youth Council (three youth advisors representing the voices of Inuit, Métis, and First Nations youth with

10 First Nations Child & Family Caring Society. “Canada’s Ongoing Racial Discrimination Against 165,000 First Nations Children and Their Families: Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child – Fifth and Sixth Periodic Report of Canada.” March 2, 2020. https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/report_to_the_committee_on_the_rights_of_the_child_caring_society_march_2_2020.pdf.

11 Canadian Human Rights Commission. Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in advance of the Committee’s development of the list of issues prior to reporting for Canada’s 5th and 6th periodic review. March 2020. http://rightsofchildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CHRC-Submission-to-the-Committee-on-the-Rights-of-the-Child-March-2020_.pdf.

recommendations on how Indigenous youth want Call to Action # 66 implemented). The government did not, however, establish one of the key recommendations: establishing “Indigenous Youth Voices” as a permanent, arms-length, non-profit, national agency with a mandate to inform, implement, and build on the TRC C2A #66.

- Significant deletions from official federal government response
- Deleted all reference to the Indigenous Youth Council and their mandate.¹²

—*Indigenous Watchdog*

There are far too many reports shelved and ignored, representing generations of Indigenous children and youth. We are reaching a critical time where the remedies, actions and recommendations from these reports dating back decades are needed more than ever.¹³ A big step forward is taking action and acknowledging the work of Indigenous youth groups who have carried the call of reconciliation by themselves for far too long. Throughout this report, you will learn about the experiences that Indigenous youth are currently facing on the ground and how, despite all odds, they are pushing forward to create community for each other. These youth groups are:

- Aunties, uncles, unties, thuncle/thauntie¹⁴ and more who form community and family in response to fractured family and kinship structures or separation of families due to colonization.
- They form safety nets and are often the crisis interveners in response to the systemic underfunding of health care and mental health services.
- They are the cultural and language revitalizers in response to the legacy of residential schools’ intentional removal of Indigenous children.

12 Indigenous Watchdog. “Call to Action # 66.” Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.indigenouswatchdog.org/cta/call-to-action-66/>.

13 See for example: First Nations Child & Family Caring Society. “History of Inequity.” Accessed November 12, 2022. <http://fncaringsociety.com/what-you-can-do/ways-make-difference/reconciling-history/history-inequity>.

14 Nonbinary and gender inclusive terms

- They are the job and opportunity creators in response to unethical and racist workplaces.
- They are the peer-to-peer and community supports in response to the lack of social resources to care for the well-being of Indigenous communities.
- They are the lifelines and system navigators in response to the ever-growing institutionalization rate of Indigenous youth,
- They diverting youth from entering child welfare due to the underfunding of family programs and services
- They are protecting Indigenous youth and families from being stolen by offering community safety and, at times, street patrols due to the everyday threat of violence toward Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit peoples
- They are caring, protecting and advocating for the land meaning the emergency of the climate crisis is also added onto their shoulders
- They working with youth to maintain and reclaim their rightful roles through kinship, relationship and reciprocity due to the multiple policies that have severed relationships to the land
- They are encouraging youth to take up space that is inherently their own due to the lack of care for the well-being of children and youth
- They are food providers and food educators due to the ongoing concerns of food insecurity and food desert

Indigenous Youth Continue to be Overrepresented in the Correctional System

- In 2018, Indigenous youth represented 8.8% of the youth population in Canada. Meanwhile, Indigenous youth represented 43% of youth admissions to correctional services in 2018/2019 (Table 9).
- The YCJA states that measures taken against young persons who

commit offenses should respond to the particular vulnerabilities of Indigenous youth. This provision for youth emphasizes meaningful consequences by way of rehabilitation and reintegration to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in custody.

- Indigenous youth are overrepresented in both custody and community supervision, representing 47% of custody admissions and 40% of community admissions in 2018/2019 in the reporting jurisdictions (Table 9).¹⁵

The youth organizers of these youth groups take on tremendous and complex work, often with little to no support. Many youth organizers are investing their own money and putting their lives on hold to be there for young people in their communities. The people that come together to make these youth groups happen are either not on salary, severely underpaid or leveraging multiple funding streams to make their salary. Many are not mandated to support their peers and communities, but they do this work because they care and carry the burden of knowing that if they do not, lives can and will be lost.

Among the youth groups we spoke to, much of the work is led specifically by young Indigenous women. All the youth organizers take on multiple roles in support of the holistic needs of people, and many are all on call for the youth they work with.

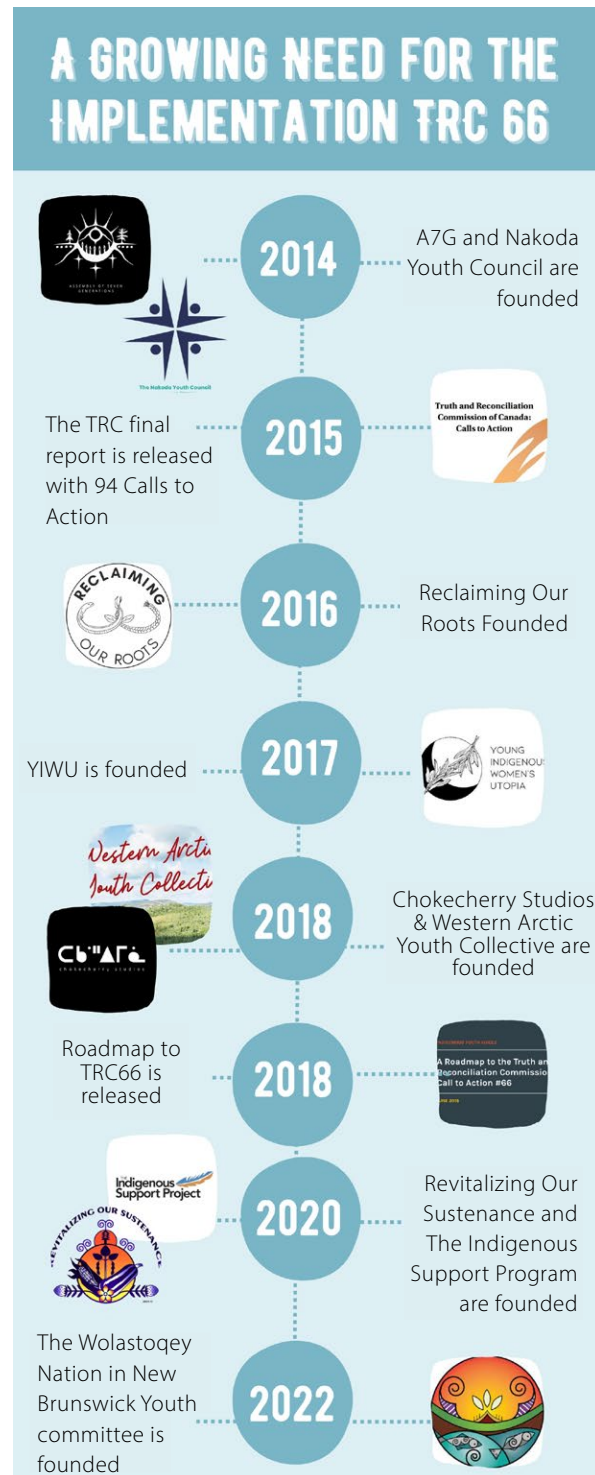
Due to the lack of services in funding in their communities, these organizations comprised of one to three youth organizers are often taking on many or all the following roles:

- Counsellor
- Event Coordinator
- Moderator/Facilitator
- Program Coordinator
- Diversion Coordinator/Prevention Workers
- Family Support
- First Aid Response

¹⁵ **Source:** <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00016-eng.htm>; **Source for Table 9:** <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00016/tbl/tbl09-eng.htm>

- Mental Health Crisis Response
- Systems Navigator
- Proposal Writer
- Language and Culture Support
- Administrator/Finance Management
- Mediator
- Food Educator/Processor
- Equipment Operator
- Communications
- Outreach
- Chef
- Human Resources

These grassroots youth groups are carrying the weight of navigating their own experiences as Indigenous peoples while trying to support and uplift other Indigenous youth. They do this life-saving work with small grants, short-term project-based funding, and makeshift budgets. Large organizations and institutions with stable, multi-year funding dole out these small grants and short-term project-based funding without fully grasping the reality of the work the youth groups are doing. Compounding this is the sense that large organizations and institutions hone and sharpen their policies and other work, like funding submissions, based on the data, reports and research conducted by these youth groups, often through project-based funding.



“Despite the ever-growing claim that non-profit programming is data-driven and evidence-based, the majority of organizations only engage with a small fraction of the ‘evidence’ that has been generated. More specifically, most non-profit organizations tend to rely on quantitative research and evaluative data to measure and justify their programs and services within a neoliberal context that demands ‘accountability.’ The privileging of this type of data – deemed objective and thereby indisputable – is rooted in the history of the post-secondary institution, which has positioned the randomized control trial as the ‘gold standard’ in scientific research (another myth that is beyond the scope of this document). In doing so, it has marginalized the work of critical, feminist, Indigenous, racialized, and other anti-oppressive scholars. Reflecting this pattern, the forms of research and evaluation that are considered valuable in the non-profit sector have tended to focus primarily on individuals (for whom programming is intended) or on the programs themselves (and the extent to which they are worthy of funding). As such, systemic injustices and how these are reproduced in everyday practices and policies generally remain unexamined. Furthermore, this has led to an abundance of data to justify the development, implementation, and maintenance of individualized programming, data that often perpetuates the stigmatization and marginalization of certain individuals and communities.”¹⁶

—Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

Young Indigenous people are doing all of this labour for their communities in the hopes that the collective futures and the present realities of Indigenous children and youth will honour the sacredness of their lives. Young Indigenous people provide this labour so that future Indigenous children and

16 Tink, L. N. & Kingsley, B. C. (2021). “Transforming the non-profit community in Edmonton: Phase 1 – identifying myths, trends, and areas for change.” Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. <https://ecvo.ca/blog/transforming-the-nonprofit-community/>

youth will practice their cultures, speak their languages, and be connected to their lands. The amazing Indigenous young people doing this work deserve the bare minimum of a living wage that acknowledges their contributions.

Youth Perceptions Haven't Changed in 30 Years

“Sadly, as we head towards the 1990s, we, the people of the First Nations, have to admit that our relations with the Canadian government have never been worse. Our rising expectations of recent decades, our hopes for a better future, have unfortunately turned out to be illusory, shattered by the grim reality that governments...are still not ready to work honestly with us to resolve issues that have been outstanding for centuries.”¹⁷

—George Erasmus

“Indigenous youth have been voicing similar concerns for their safety and well-being for generations. Their voices were part of the seminal report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), released in 1996. Indigenous youth were clearly heard and acknowledged within this federal report; at that time, they shared concerns around their loss of culture, lack of opportunities, and suicide, to name a few. If not exactly the same, these concerns are very similar to those that Indigenous youth have today. Decades later, the lives of Indigenous youth have not changed for the better – and, in many contexts, their outcomes have gotten worse.”¹⁸

—Indigenous Youth Voices

17 Erasmus, G. (1989). “Twenty Years of Disappointed Hopes” in B. Richardson (Ed.), *Drumbeat: Anger and Renewal in Indian Country* (p. 8). Summerhill Press.

18 Indigenous Youth Voices. (2018). “A Roadmap to the A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #66.”

Context: Why Are We Costing Out TRC 66?

Programming for Indigenous youth is underfunded, understaffed, and underpaid, which directly impacts young Indigenous people trying to access culturally grounded supports, resources, and services. Funding opportunities for Indigenous peoples, especially grassroots groups and collectives, continue to be predominantly project-based.

Project-based funding places Indigenous grassroots organizations in the untenable position of having to align their priorities, goals, and program objectives with that of the federal government or other large organizations to access funding. The alternative is to be left with little to no funding. The implication of this is stark, with grassroots organizations unable to access funding that aligns with the need for holistic cultural and language-based initiatives; something that does little to redress the legacy of the residential school system intended to assimilate Indigenous children into the broader Canadian society.

Microgrants and a lack of funding for infrastructure also result in inconsistent and unsustainable youth initiatives. Many youth leader positions are severely underpaid, leaving youth organizers unable to accumulate intergenerational wealth or stability within their lives. Those that take up these positions are navigating deep rooted systemic issues such as poverty, homelessness, intergenerational and compounded trauma, and overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in child welfare and incarceration, to name a few.

There are currently four types of funding that exist:

- 1. Multi-year funding** – This is ongoing funding which shows a strong commitment by funders to address a need that has been outlined by Indigenous youth groups. Some program-style funders have begun to offer multi-year funding, but they are few and far between, and most

- are also foundations and private sector funders. Without multi-year funding, Indigenous youth groups cannot plan long-term and are always in a state of anxiety trying to figure out where next year's or next month's resources will come from. Indigenous youth face challenges that are next to impossible to overcome without multi-year funding.
2. **Core funding** – This funding is rare for many non-profits today but is especially non-existent for Indigenous youth groups. None of the youth groups we heard from have core funding meaning that Indigenous youth groups often go without funding for basic things like office space. This type of funding is also needed to handle administration work that comes with program and project funding. Without core funding, youth groups are forced to take on multiple roles to deliver one program or must take funds away from program funding to cover the cost of not having core funding. Youth groups offer and deliver all programs in dire need to the youth they serve.
 3. **Program funding** – This funding focuses on a particular program (i.e., after-school programming, early childhood programming, a youth drop-in, etc.). This type of funding can range from \$50k to \$500k, depending on the funder and type of programming. It usually includes funding to support a full-time salary and supplies to operate the programming. This type of programming is harder to attain than micro-grants and often requires reporting details like the number of youth who participate in the program and the expenses. This means there is a large administrative burden on a youth group, but with limited administrative funds to meet the reporting requirements (typically between 5% and 15%).
 4. **Project funding and micro-grants** – This funding is typically small grants awarded to individuals, groups, or organizations to do small events or projects. These are the most accessible grants; however, they cannot sustain the work needed for Indigenous youth. This type of funding supports one-off events, workshops, etc., which are needed, but Indigenous youth cannot plan long-term initiatives with these types of grants.

Despite this, Indigenous grassroots groups and collectives organize in the absence of funding and shortfalls in policy areas because they know their work is essential and is a lifeline for so many Indigenous youth. It is because of their tireless work, sacrifice, and compassion that we are costing out TRC 66. They deserve living wages. The work of youth groups warrant sustainable, long-term funding that is grounded in their values and ethics and driven by their community priorities, not government objectives.

Almost every youth group we spoke to has a shared sense of fear not knowing how they will be able to meet the basic needs of the youth in their community month-to-month. This fear and the ongoing struggles of operating a community-based youth group create severe anxiety for youth organizers and youth seeking basic needs. Applying for grants and funding is highly emotional because Indigenous youth are placing applications for needs that directly impact their communities. In turn, this adds to the stress and pressure. Not receiving approval for the funding can be a massive disappointment for a community, sometimes leaving youth at higher risk of experiencing poverty, loss of housing or increased rates of suicide or overdose. In addition, many youth groups described applying for funding as dehumanizing due to the way funding applications make Indigenous youth have to prove they are deserving to have their basic needs met.

Almost all youth groups told us about the lateral violence they've experienced. We want to acknowledge that lateral violence is due to systemic racism and the government's failure to meet the basic needs of Indigenous youth. The unmet needs of Indigenous youth continue to grow, and youth groups do not have the resources to fill all of the gaps. This often leads to Indigenous youth taking out their anger and grievances on the youth groups and, in extreme cases, can lead to violence toward youth organizers.

Due to the high volume of requests and the many roles youth organizers have to take on, many simply do not have the capacity or skills they need to resolve conflicts that Indigenous youth might have. The majority of organizers we heard from did not have access to benefits or paid time off however the amount of labour that organizers have to take on has a big

toll on their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Some having to pay for physiotherapy or counselling from their own pocket. The demand on youth groups and organizers is extremely high. Not only is there very little compensation for youth organizers, but there are also no resources or space for care. Many youth organizers spoke about feeling depressed, overwhelmed, burned out and constantly triggered but having no way to slow down. Youth groups simply do not have the privilege to slow down or say no.

“Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. Be willing to feel your anger, even though it may seem endless. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal.”

–Grief Quote by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler

Most, if not all, youth groups we heard from must rely on large organizations or institutions to administer their funding. This automatically reduces their budgets by 10% to 15%, while youth organizers are expected to also do the administrative work for their grants. While these relationships can be very beneficial, it implies that youth cannot administer or manage their own funds and can hold back the work that needs to be done.

There is an overwhelming need from all youth groups for infrastructure. Youth are doing much of their work from home without any consistent place to gather. Even access to land is inaccessible or challenging to coordinate, even though it is both a right of Indigenous peoples and an urgent need. During the course of this work, it was made clear to us by those we spoke to that being on the land is powerful and healing. Investments must be made to ensure land-based learning and programming can continue long-term. Unfortunately, there continues to be a misconception held by funders and

the public that land-based programming is easy and inexpensive. The reality is that Indigenous-led revitalization programs that are land-based require a significant amount of time and labour to organize and facilitate.

Many youth groups we spoke with talked about the tokenization they've experienced. They are often asked to do performances, presentations, and art installations without any real investments in their community work. While fun events and sharing arts and culture is necessary, the needs of Indigenous youth cannot be addressed by only focusing on soft rights or easy fixes. Addressing systemic issues such as poverty, inaccessibility to housing and employment, climate change, and inaccessibility to water, food, and social services must be the top priority.

Lastly, it is important to remember that while many Indigenous youth groups have shared experiences with underfunding and being overworked, they all require unique and different solutions to meet the needs of their communities. For example, youth groups in the north will need budgets that reflect the high cost of living there, and they should not be required to fit into budgets that can only work in the south. Another example is meeting youth where they are at; not all youth will want to do land-based programming, nor will they all have the capacity to reclaim their languages. They may, however, need support to find housing or mental health professionals. Implementing TRC 66 cannot be a one-size fits all approach that we often see rolled out at a national level.

Methodology

One of the biggest concerns we witnessed while researching to develop the Roadmap for the Implementation of TRC 66 was the lack of data and reports ethically conducted by Indigenous youth. One of the ways forward that we identified in the Roadmap was to create an Indigenous youth-led Research Team.

Research and Knowledge Translation

The Indigenous Youth Voices Research Team will focus on collecting, organizing, and disseminating existing research and new research being done related to Indigenous youth needs and priorities. Far too often, Indigenous communities are being researched with little to no control over how that research is being done and what it is being used for, and so we see this as being a positive step in having more control and understanding of research processes. This work could include developing a database of reports and literature in these areas to be shared with individuals, community-based organizations, funders, governments, and academia. It will also involve developing and facilitating knowledge translation strategies that can help to ensure that knowledge is making its way to the community level and not being trapped on shelves or only within academic spaces.

Similar to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the Research Team could also advise on the non-profit Capacity Building work (outlined next), offering insights to community groups on program evaluation techniques that are often a significant barrier to groups accessing sustainable funding.

—*Indigenous Youth Voices. (2018). A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #66. Ottawa, Canada*

Despite the federal government's lack of commitment to the Roadmap, we still upheld our responsibility to the Indigenous youth that advised on the



Roadmap. One of our main priorities after the Roadmap was to create *A Way Forward in Conducting Research With and by Indigenous Youth*. Indigenous youth told us what ethical research and engagement looks like and we continue to honour their way forward by following these seven requirements in all research we do.

In addition to the seven requirements for ethical research and engagement with Indigenous youth, the research methodology in this report includes an Indigenous approach that respects grassroots, framed and led by our values. We visited Youth Groups

The Indigenous youth that shared their truths and concerns with us were very clear that the information they shared with us were not recommendations or advice to take lightly. These are requirements and standards for ethical and meaningful engagement with Indigenous youth.

*—A Way Forward in
Conducting Research With
and by Indigenous Youth*

in their communities, and spent time together on the land and with their communities. Some organically created values that formulated during our time with each of the groups were:

- Consent
- Non-judgemental
- Allowing Youth Groups to guide the conversations
- Respecting and honouring diverse Indigenous customs and traditions

As one Youth Group pointed out: “Indigenizing research means not only doing the bare minimum (meeting ethical requirements) but elevating the standards even more. In our teachings, we talk about respect and honesty. When we practice that, we hold ourselves to an even higher standard than the basic requirements of western research.”

Between June 2022 and October 2022, a team of eight facilitators and writers heard from 10 diverse youth groups and collectives. The following questions were developed by Indigenous youth and asked to each group:

- What does youth programming look like to you?
- What does it mean to you to be a youth?
- Budget meeting your needs?
- What would be an ethical budget for you to do all the things you are doing and have full support to do it?
- What would it look like to have an ethical budget?

This research was made accessible by placing the burden of research on the research facilitators and not the youth groups by visiting each community and understanding each group on their own terms. A financial contribution was made to each group along with gifts for each contributor and gifts to share with youth that were not in attendance.

Since the release of the Roadmap on the Implementation of TRC 66 in 2018, research coming from that roadmap has continued. Research was a

recommendation from the Roadmap. The following is a list of research and reports conducted since that reference and support the implementation of TRC Call to Action 66:

- 2018** A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action 66 (Indigenous Youth Voices) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/final__2_-_indigenous_youth_voices_-_roadmap_to_trc_66_-_compressed.pdf
- 2019** A Way Forward in Conducting Research With and By Indigenous Youth (Indigenous Youth Voices) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/indigenous_youth_voices_a_way_forward_in_conducting_research_with_and_by_indigenous_youth.pdf
- 2019** Justice, Equity and Culture: The First Ever YICC Gathering of First Nations Youth Advisors (Assembly of Seven Generations and Youth in Care Canada) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/38228_chrt_compensation_report_v5_final.pdf
- 2020** Building the Field on Indigenous Youth Healthy Relationships (Canadian Women’s Foundation and Assembly of Seven Generations) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/btf_fnmi_hub_first_meeting_report.pdf
- 2020** Mapping Indigenous Youth Services – Ottawa (Assembly of Seven Generations) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/mapping_indigenous_youth_services_a7g_-_final_.pdf
- 2020** Land Back: Indigenous Youth Leading the Way in Indigenous Sovereignty (UNICEF, Caring Society and Assembly of Seven Generations) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/reimagine_playbook_0.pdf
- 2021** Accountability in Our Lifetime: A Call to Honour the Rights of Indigenous Youth and Children (Assembly of Seven Generations and Caring Society) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/accountability_in_our_lifetime.pdf

- 2021** Children Back, Land Back: A Follow-Up Report of First Nation Youth in Care Advisors (Assembly of Seven Generations) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/79004_land_back_report_v5f.pdf
- 2022** Braiding Grassroots Wisdom: A Toolkit to Start and Share Wise Practises Among Indigenous Youth Groups and Collectives (Assembly of Seven Generations) http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/79005_braiding_grassroots_wisdom_v3f.pdf

Common Themes

While the Indigenous youth groups we spoke with have differing and unique needs, it is also clear that the youth groups have shared experiences in supporting the youth in their communities.

- Youth Groups are doing A LOT, with very little
 - > Youth groups and youth organizers are seriously underfunded and underpaid, or not funded at all
 - > Micro-grants are not meeting the needs of Indigenous youth
 - > There is a dire need for funding for capital and other administrative support like audits, though youth groups may not have identified this in their budget.
 - > Youth organizers are severely overworked
 - > Youth leading this work do not have the same outcomes as someone doing similar work in a non-profit due to unreliable and inadequate grants that mean inconsistent and underpaid employment. This has a compounding effect, often preventing the person from thriving (i.e., low credit and not being able to get a mortgage)
- Youth groups do not have access to infrastructure (spaces, buildings, equipment, supplies, etc) consistently or at all
- Youth organizers are carrying the weight of caring for their communities
 - > Young people want to support young people and youth organizers know there is an urgent need for this work
 - > Some youth groups are also carrying for Elders, adults and families
 - > Some youth groups are providing food security to communities due to lack of food security and displacement of traditional food systems (i.e., traditional harvesting and hunting lands)
 - > Bridging “safe” and reciprocal connections with elders and youth, “community appointed elders

- > Supporting the reclamation and revitalization for entire communities and Nations
- > The safety, dignity and wellbeing of young people is not guaranteed
- > The need is growing, but there is little to no resources
- > The burden to “reconcile” is often placed on Indigenous youth who continue to go without consistent or any access to their communities, cultures, and languages.
- > Picking up people that falling through the cracks due to policy failure
- > Providing social services where social welfare is failing
- The work of grassroots and community-based Indigenous youth groups are being exploited
 - > Large organizations are taking the work of grassroots youth groups and taking credit for their labour without any recognition or compensation
 - > Youth organizers are asked to participate in research and consultations without the means to sit at these decision-making tables
 - > Youth groups are seeing practices they’ve created in outside spaces without consent
 - > Practices are being mimicked without full intentions or understanding proper protocols
 - > Duplicating services
 - > Having to compete with Western ideas of who is and not a youth
- Youth groups need to be autonomous
 - > Youth groups are often independent of their community political structure and other organizations, which means they are not able to access funding and supports that may have otherwise been available.

- > Youth groups are intentionally choosing to remain independent because community political structures and other organizations may not align with their values and ethics that directly impact young people.
- > In some cases, youth groups intentionally choose to remain independent because it allows for distinct needs and supports to be met outside of the governing infrastructure.
- > Youth groups need to be able to define their own work and create new approaches to youth work
- > One example we heard was how some First Nations bands are redirecting youth funding without discussing with youth
- > Youth groups needing to apply for independent funding as well as being able to administrate and
- > being able to own equipment and supplies
- Young people are defining youth initiatives and programming
 - > Colonization disrupted the important and valued role of youth in communities
 - > Programming and initiatives include activities connected to culture, building self-esteem and pride, like land-based activities, hunting, farming, harvesting, food sustainability, sports, music, visual arts, documentaries, storytelling, language immersion and working with Elders.
 - > programs created to decolonize, indigenize, restoration, cultural exchanges that include LGBTQ2S+, TRC 66, UNDRIP, MMIWG2S+
 - > The Roadmap on the Implementation of TRC 66 outlined in-depth what youth programming was and these types of programming are exactly what the youth groups we spoke with are actively doing to this day.
 - > Youth programming for most youth groups are not restrictive of who they serve, not defined due to funding (i.e., 18–24)

- Funding that is designated for Indigenous youth is not getting to the youth
 - > Non-Indigenous organizations are getting funds they do not have the qualifications for
 - > Prescribing events and programming for youth not with youth
 - > Not able to pay youth for the community work
- Space
 - > Designated youth spaces turn into all-purpose without youth being able to advise or control the space
 - > Many youth group are unsure of how long they will be in spaces

Program Areas of Focus for Multi-Year Funding at the Community Level

Identity, Language, and Culture

Land-based learning (for language, tradition, cultures): Youth need access to different forms of land- and culture-based learning/experiences (i.e., sweats, longhouse, on-the-land programming/training/camps).

Identity: Indigenous identity (Nation-specific) needs to be prioritized so that youth can learn about their history, traditional forms of governance, creation stories, etc., and feel safe to do so.

Language: Long-term language revitalization training, workshops, and learning opportunities are needed.

Cross-cultural programming: Programs should include opportunities for Indigenous youth to hear from each other and teach each other about their own cultures and traditions.

Arts-based: The power of the arts was highlighted as an important way to connect with youth and support their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, especially in relation to identity/language/culture-based learning.

Networking

Participants identified the need for connections between organizations, opportunities for youth networking, and to travel and learn outside of school, and broad-based advocacy efforts by Indigenous youth across Nations. Distinctions-based exchanges were also identified as needed to strengthen connections within Nations.

Life Promotion/Suicide Prevention/ Mental Health Support

Cultural and land-based healing for mental health issues were emphasized, as well as a reconceptualization of suicide prevention as life promotion.

Two-Spirit/LGBTQ2SIA-Focused

Two-Spirit-specific education and programs are needed, and programs must be inclusive for youth who are questioning or figuring out their gender identity.

Sports

Youth sports programs were identified as a way to engage youth and support their holistic development in an active, play-based way.

Health and Well-Being

Workshops (youth-led) and programming on topics like birth control, consent, healthy relationships, addictions, drug prevention, women empowerment/preventing violence against women were identified; participants also stressed that these programs can/should be in partnership/ collaboration with existing programs/ organizations.

- http://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/final__2_-_indigenous_youth_voices_-_roadmap_to_trc_66_-_compressed.pdf

A Closer Look at Youth Groups

Here is a map of all the collectives that we visited and their locations throughout the country.¹⁹



¹⁹ **Source:** <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1a5MVpUISngExbVO4sNEY1b3Fknc7U0&usp=sharing>



Western Arctic Youth Collective

WAYC is based out of the Yukon and Northwest Territories and was founded in 2017. They represent and/or work with various Indigenous communities in the north. WAYC hosts a lot of programming in communities all over Yukon and Northwest Territories to fill in the gaps that bigger organizations neglect.

Their programming is:

- inclusive to everyone: sexuality and gender – they strive to create a safe space for youth;
- accessible to everyone (i.e., drop-ins instead of committed times);
- helping with intergenerational healing;
- supportive, kind, gentle;
- ongoing, it offers consistency and stability.

Successful youth programming is done right when programming inspires others to continue more youth programming in other places.

Some of their current programming includes: beading workshops, youth gatherings, land-based workshops, cultural workshops, language revitalization workshops, community visits, youth mentorship, advocating, capacity building for youth, aiding self-governing nations, program delivery, conflict resolution, various training opportunities, youth engagement, networking, etc.

WAYC has a core team of 11 members, but there is no secure funding for proper employment roles. They work on month-to-month contracts. When funding is short, there are five core members who have employment, 1 permanent staff member and the other one's sign contracts. Their core team is located through communities in the north: two in Inuvik, two in Whitehorse and one in Yellowknife. They currently have three youth in

Whitehorse also being mentored. WAYC currently has one shared office space in Whitehorse and one staff house in Inuvik to store supplies and host programs.

An ethical budget for WAYC would include the costs of:

- 6 full-time staff salaries (living wages, benefits) including full-time salary for project director/executive director;
- 6 youth-helpers – part-time salaries;
 - minimum 3 core events with supply budget (needs to consider the cost of travel in the north);
- activities: four months of drop-in activities (includes a budget for supplies, food, venue)
 - > Cost will change based on activity (e.g., beading vs. regalia workshops)
 - > Cost will change if offered in most northern communities;
- space: shared space isn't working for them because they are outgrowing it. They would ideally want an office, community space, storage, board room, and kitchen, all together. Prices for rent would vary based on community.



Fishing Lake Metis Settlement Youth

Fishing Lake Metis Settlement is a small, independent, and self-governing Metis community, one of eight land-based Metis Settlements in Northern Alberta. In Fishing Lake, there is a small gas station with limited groceries and items, the Joe F Dion School, which goes to grade 8, the administration office, services for housing and families, limited emergency services and potable water service.

Currently, Fishing Lake has one Full-Time Youth Worker, small grants that make up a supply budget and a shared building to host youth programming and for office space. There are special events and activities planned three days a week. Some activities and special events include Sports, Land Based, Fishing and Hunting, Meat Harvesting, Cultural Revitalization, Building Self-Esteem, Music, Ribbon Skirts, Working with Elders and Storytelling, to name a few. The caseload for the youth worker is often at capacity but saying no to youth is often a matter of life and death. While the Youth Worker is on a full-time salary for 40 hours/week, being the only Youth Worker on the settlement often means working many hours overtime due to crises that happen at all hours of the day and night.

While there is limited infrastructure for youth programming, often the best place for youth is on the land. Fishing Lake is abundant in lakes and land for youth to gather on however, just like most Indigenous youth impacted by colonization, youth in Fishing Lake are also relearning survival skills and land-based skills.

Despite the limited resources available for youth programming, the need continues to grow. An ethical budget for them to include the needs of the youth would include:

- programming and support for youth seven days a week,
- trauma-informed, Metis-specific Counsellors;
- additional youth workers;
- budget for food;
- ongoing programming listed above as well as programming to teach cooking, cleaning, laundry, and life skills.



Nakoda Youth Council

The Nakoda Youth Council was established in 2014 on the Stoney Nakoda First Nation. It is located West of Calgary, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. Their work strives to support the reawakening of spirit within the youth in their community through programs that promote experiential learning and incorporate land and cultured-based activities.

These activities include hunting, archery, canoeing, medicine harvesting, hiking, beading circles, cultural camps, and mountain sports like biking and snowboarding. Their cultural programming is holistic and interconnected. For example, during their medicine harvesting, they are also learning their language and hide tanning leads to art and regalia making. Their hunting camps and culture camps are a huge part of their work and are community and family oriented. Their community is known for having strong language speakers and knowledge keepers.

Currently, their work is done within local schools with elementary grades where high school students are able to shadow council members and learn about becoming facilitators and are provided with space to lead opportunities such as sharing circles. The council is also given opportunities to engage in international experiences and attend events such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

In addition to delivering programming, they also play an educational role within non-Indigenous spaces in Canmore and Banff on projects related to Indigenous youth's realities when they leave the reserve for education. Since the language is strong in their community, it creates unique challenges for youth. Youth have a hard time existing in urban spaces because they didn't grow up there and there is culture shock.

Past programming included weekly youth nights at a community center that had access to a kitchen and a gym. Over a hundred youth would be part of these youth nights and it was made possible by the consistent funding they had at the time.

Currently, their youth council is seven members of volunteers with one part-time staff. The caseload for the part-time position averages 25–30 hours a week, and with funding being limited and project-based, when funding ends, it leads to youth not being as engaged, as there is no program stability. To meaningfully meet the needs of youth within the community, the Council needs ethical funding that includes:

- 2 full-time positions and one part-time position;
- sustainable funding to host meetings and deliver weekly programming;
- cost of meals, supplies, PPE, and honorariums;
- program funding for activities such as youth culture camps.

Their youth culture camps offer opportunities for neighbouring nations to connect, share and build stronger alliances. Each nation would host a day and share cultural teachings and skills. These culture camps are quite costly but support travel, food, shelter, honorariums, and supplies for several communities in the area.



Chokecherry Studios

Chokecherry Studios is based out of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and was founded in 2018. Chokecherry started off as a photography project and has since grown into a services and programs provider. Chokecherry Studios had no start-up funds. It was a personal investment where a majority of the budget went to rent.

Their current programs are youth-led and focused on art and anti-racism. Youth are encouraged to come as they are and that includes:

- giving people who don't get many chances space to make changes in their community;
- Youth finding and wanting to amplify their voices;
- non-exclusive, lots of parameters – not membership-based;
- open door to inviting new members such as family or friends;
- youth-defined safe spaces – creating a family dynamic rather than institutional programming;
- having opportunities for all genders.

Support services include in-house counselling, device donations, access to food and medicines, safe rides home, and harm reductions (naloxone training, safe drug intake). These supports are needed because of the lived experience of many youth who attend. Many of the topics of their programming can be triggering, so counselling is offered.

Currently, Chokecherry is open to youth 6 days a week. They offer evening programming to not be redundant with other organizations offering programming, this way, they are leveraging support from other organizations instead. Chokecherry works closely with youth from Young Indigenous Women's Utopia. Programming each evening has different themes, including art drop-ins, hip-hop, creative writing, talking circles, suicide prevention, and a boy's group. From these programs, youth will identify topics that hit home, and this leads to community mobilization, campaigns, policy reform and

art installations. The outcomes are not based on the organization but based on the youth and what they feel is most important. They are in the works of developing a cultural pillar in their organization that will provide more access to Elders and ceremonies.

Currently, in their fourth year, they are operating on a budget which includes four full-time staff and 1 part-time staff member. A majority of their funds go to the rental of their current space. With their current budget, they are not secure and not thriving. They have little budget for administration work. They are also in need of funding to pay for supplies for their weekly programming. They have applied for several grants, but they are often not accepted. Some barriers are currently facing are:

- most funders are asking for a high baseline to accept grants;
- they don't have charitable status;
- since they are newly established, funders are less trusting.

Chokecherry Studios requires multi-year funding to be sustainable. Having three years or four years of funding would be foundational for them. This funding will also need to consider yearly increases based on growth. Project/program funding is necessary because there is no way to expand facilities or purchase a building. Grassroots shouldn't be without ethical needs and supports (offering benefits, insurance etc.). An ethical budget would include:

- rent: for current space – “a consistent home” ;
- staffing: 2 administrators, 1 manager, 5 full-time staff, 4 part-time positions, 1 Elder on staff, 1 bookkeeper, 1 community mobilizer staff, 1 communications staff. This also includes benefits for staff;
- food: costs for meals for the full year;
- supplies: costs for supplies for various programs throughout the year;
- project and program funding.



Young Indigenous Women's Utopia

Young Indigenous Women's Utopia is based out of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and was founded in 2017. It offers smaller group opportunities for Indigenous girls and incorporates generational mentoring from older girls/women. Their programming and activities focus on

harm reduction and cultural reclamation through art, writing, ceremonies, technology, and public speaking on issues such as gender-based violence and colonial violence. They often take part in fun activities to balance out the harder resiliency work. These activities include pow-wows, youth exchanges, community barbecues, spa days, bowling, canoeing, karaoke, and escape rooms.

YIWU offers monthly meet-ups that happen on weekends and evenings. Their support is a combination of group activities and one on one support. These meet-ups are holistic, open, and organic. The girls are able to bring their families, which encourages healthy family relationships. They also offer 24/7 online support to those who need it. YIWU also works alongside Chokecherry Studios to bridge gaps in services and to work together in addressing community needs. Collaboration between these two youth groups is to ensure support isn't needlessly duplicated.

YIWU operates on less than the salary of one full-time staff member. Due to insufficient support and funding, YIWU is often doing more work than they have the capacity for. They have very limited capacity to properly compensate youth for their participation and contributions. Their main funding flows through a university as a research grant, with much of that funding going toward activities. They are able to support their youth organizers with bi-monthly contractual honorariums. They are also able to offer small honorariums/incentives for young girls. They have no funding to offer full-time salaries or contracts for cultural experts. Their most recent book project cost almost a third of the annual operating budget. YIWU is also funded through community fundraising and donations.

For YIWU to operate sustainably, they would need ethical funding to support:

- 2 full-time staff (1 project manager and 1 scholar/writer/artist in residence);
- administration space;
- weekend/special Events: to cover space, food, supplies, honorariums – example: poetry night;
- travel fund;
- honorariums for participants (monthly meet-ups);
- funds for activities like murals and cultural events such as sage picking, ribbon skirts, drumming, full moon ceremonies, etc.;

They also asked specifically for a budget line to support families who are experiencing incarceration. Funds are needed to feed families via prison canteens.



Revitalizing Our Sustenance

Revitalizing Our Sustenance Project (ROSP) is an Indigenous youth-led program to help provide Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth opportunities to learn about the importance of sustainable agriculture practices while feeding the community. They are based out of Six Nations of the Grand River and founded in 2020. The overall long-term goals are to provide programming for the community in which incorporates experiential learning through food, Haudenosaunee language immersion and language learning on farm, ceremonial, environmental, “pre-contact” education that centers the old ways that come with Haudenosaunee plant ecology education. Build curriculum and resources to promote Haudenosaunee food/land education to build a sense of identity, positive mental health, and stronger and safer communities. ROSP brings the community together by providing workshops on agriculture duties/responsibilities, prepping and closing the gardens, and cooking food together; they don’t have enough resources for farming or hosting larger groups of participants due to no facilities on the farm. Their goal is to set up infrastructures to get outdoor access and space for a learning atmosphere and Haudenosaunee food education centre. Without this they do not have access for Haudenosaunee food education or restoring Haudenosaunee food systems.

They work on the land in phases from April to November:

Phase 1: seedlings

Phase 2: transplanting

Phase 3: harvesting

Phase 4: food preparation- dehydrate, cook, can

Phase 5: preparing soil for winter and new season

An ethical budget for ROSP would allow for them to:

- acquire gathering space and infrastructure such as barn, storage sheds;

- hire 10–20 positions to help with farming (full-time/seasonal staff – gardeners, maintenance, managers, educators, sellers);
- hire 5–8 positions to support research, curriculum, and resource development;
- hire 3 tech positions to support current video project and online accessibility for further learning;
- purchase farming equipment, tools, and food marketing supplies for produce;
- pay for administration costs: computer software, app subscriptions, office supplies, website, and monthly bills;
- pay for honorariums and food costs;
- pay for supplies: storage, plants, seedlings, seeds, containers, soil, testing, compost, lumber costs, etc.



The Indigenous Support Project

The Indigenous Support Project (TISP) provides relief materials and cultural education to Indigenous communities within Canada and across the globe. It was founded in 2020. They help Indigenous peoples and youth in Toronto through food security, cultural education, peer-to-peer support, and community outreach and access to land.

Their programming provides cultural events, activities, and resources that would otherwise not be accessible to community members. TISP supports community members through traditional agriculture and food bank support using traditional cooking, farming programs, harm reduction, mental health first aid, First Story Toronto City Tours, fundraising, outreach, and networking with Indigenous peoples globally.

The budget for delivering TISP programs has grown in the last year due to growing demand of community needs. They are currently operating at full capacity but with half the required amount of funding to meet the needs of their community. The funding they have does not include the cost of renting or owning a space as they do not have one yet. A company vehicle to pick up and drop off for program and food/meal drop offs. The biggest expense for them is securing a physical space for TISP programming, having a safe and reliable company vehicle, events, health check-ins and storage as a big portion of their funding is spent on renting spaces. Their second largest expense for them is securing full-time positions for their staff, which they are currently not able to provide. Which harms the community and the staff members as no one has adequate time for themselves or their families.

With an ethical budget, TISP will be able to:

- pay their staff a fair and equitable wage that will allow for them to have proper mental health care and take breaks on a regular basis, which in turn will benefit the community they are supporting.
- acquire office and program space;
- sustain their current programming;

- implement new programs and events;
- create pathways to education opportunities for youth (on and off reserves):
- provide support and compensation for travel to external communities in need (outside Ontario);
- provide supports for youth attending post secondary schools;
- provide cultural education programs within schools (off reserve);
- provide opportunities and paid work to community members;
- provide “pen pal” and 65+ type activities and services for elders and survivors with limited mobility or access to cultural/family;
- provide early education programs and services for those under the age of 12.



Assembly of Seven Generations

Assembly of Seven Generations is based in Ottawa on unceded Algonquin Territory, and they have been organizing and supporting Indigenous youth since 2014. They work with a diverse urban population of First Nation, Metis, and Inuit youth. A7G is very open, and diverse, and connects a wide variety of age groups at their gatherings.

Currently, they host a weekly youth drop-in every Friday evening which provides peer-to-peer support, cultural support (sharing circle, drumming) and a hot meal. From these gatherings, ideas are shared, and new projects and initiatives are created, such as language drop-ins (they have hosted Ojibwe, Plains Cree y Dialect and Inuktitut), Annual Round Dance, Elders and Youth Gathering and Marketplace. A7G recently started a social enterprise/store in hopes of creating more funding options through a business model.

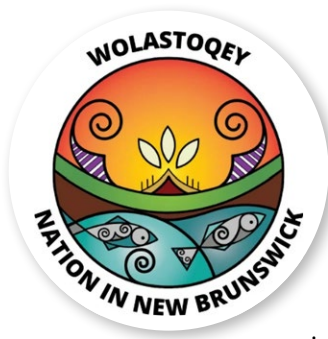
During the pandemic, A7G transitioned to more land-based learning and hosted a variety of workshops like moose hide tanning, maple syrup making, ice fishing, net fishing, medicine harvesting and food harvesting, gardening, etc. They were recently able to begin doing ceremonies again. These activities are a big part of A7G's current work.

Despite all the amazing work, A7G currently has zero core funding. They operate on donations and small grants which employ youth through short-term project contracts. Most of the work is done voluntarily by a team of youth helpers. A7G offers compensation when they can, but it's not near an equitable amount for the work that is done. A7G currently does not have a designated youth space. They have several locations all over the city that they use, but none of them are connected.

An ethical budget for A7G would include costs for:

- 7 full-time salaries – roles include systems navigator, language facilitator, land-based coordinator, community builder, administrator, marketplace coordinator, etc.;
- part-time salary for a mental health support/counsellor;

- Youth Space: rent for community space, storage, office administrator, kitchen, social enterprise;
- funding for annual events like round dance, elders and youth gathering, land camp, etc.;
- Friday night gatherings (food, space, supplies, funds for weekly programming);
- access and transportation costs to land for a garden, moose hide tanning, maple tree tapping, sweat lodges and ceremonies.



Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick Youth Committee

The Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick (WNNB) was formed in 2017 to help coordinate and provide technical support and advice to the six Wolastoqey Communities in New Brunswick: Matawaskiye, Neqotkuk, Bilijk, Sitansisk, Welamukotuk, and Wotstak. The Wolastoqey Tribal Council (WTCI)

is a not-for-profit organization whose role is to provide capacity-building opportunities for its member communities within the traditional Wolastoqey territory in New Brunswick. The Wolastoqey Tribal Council focuses on the growth and success of Wolastoqey communities by providing opportunities through employment and training, health, and education. The WNNB/WTCI Youth Committee was formed in early 2022 with two youth from each community, initially just with WNNB, to guide consultation engagement efforts with Wolastoqey Youth in the six New Brunswick communities.

There are currently youth groups in some, but not all of the Wolastoqey communities in New Brunswick. The youth in the committee have expressed that much of the time, when youth-oriented programming has been implemented, it is either a one-time event or there is a lack of consistency. Being a first-contact nation, the effects of colonialism have eliminated some aspects of a traditional way of Wolastoqey life and endangered the Wolastoqey language. They feel as though they have no voice in the community and want to work together with their communities and the Nation to gain confidence and feel as though their voices are valued and heard.

There is currently one Youth Coordinator that works for WNNB/WTCI, but her role is split between working as the youth coordinator and the language coordinator for WTCI due to a lack of funding to support one full-time committed Youth Coordinator. The Youth Coordinator only became a permanent contract position in June 2022 after working on a short contract between January 2022 – April 2022. During the brief break between

contracts, the youth committee meetings were still held to keep the committee running. The Youth Coordinator wrote a report to WNNB/WTCI to highlight key areas the youth are interested in focusing on, including:

- nation building: many of the youth feel isolated in their communities and don't know other Wolastoqey youth from the other communities;
- mental health/addictions support;
- land-based activities
- nation job creation;
- Elder and Youth activities;
- annual nation-wide youth gatherings;
- LGBTQ2S+ support;
- land, water, and traditional knowledge workshops.

Currently, WNNB/WTCI has been using funding from their nationhood budget for any youth-related activities, which is not a budget solely for youth activities. They are also applying for government and other organizational micro-grants to be able to implement the activities that the youth have expressed a desire for.



Reclaiming Our Roots

Reclaiming Our Roots is a grassroots youth group founded in 2015 and located in Mi'kma'ki that promotes land-based learning and community stewardship by (re)connecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth with meaningful land-based knowledge rooted in Mi'kmaw values.

Currently, Reclaiming Our Roots has a core team of two (one position is salaried) and 10 people on contract. Since they are addressing a gap for Indigenous youth, they have a good success rate for receiving grants. Though they apply for various types of grants, they do not often apply for Indigenous grants.

The main focus of their work is mentorship and workshops that give Indigenous youth cultural connections and teach them ways they can live a contemporary land-based life. They fill in gaps by mentoring and supporting Indigenous youth to gain skills and providing them with opportunities to go on eel excursions, hide camps, seal hunts, harvesting and march break camps. They are currently working with kindergarten-grade-age children to teach land-based knowledge as well. Their programming always strives to give back, so youth often give food back to Elders in the community after a harvest. They offer free programming and remove as many barriers as possible by providing rides, supplies and equipment for all their activities.

Lack of multi-year funding and temporary employment leads to staff making personal sacrifices to do this work, and because they do not have job security, they are unable to accumulate wealth or stability and cannot access opportunities such as buying a house or getting a credit card. To ensure they can meet the needs of the Indigenous youth they support and provide staff with job security, an ethical budget for them would include:

- sustainable funding for two full-time workers (paid as experts in their field);
- part-time workers and contracted staff;
- to be able to compensate experts and guests with dignified honorariums.

Ethical Requirements for Indigenous Youth Funding Programs

Each youth group is unique, which means their needs are also unique. However, there are requirements to guide policy and programs toward better approaches to implementing TRC 66. These requirements are standards that every funding program dedicated to implementing TRC 66 should have and funding programs dedicated to Indigenous youth in general. The ethical requirements for Indigenous youth funding programs are as follow:

1. Funding must be based on the best interests of indigenous young people

Far too often, funding decisions are based on cost-effectiveness or the priorities of the funding organization or institution. Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the best interests of Indigenous youth and children must be a primary consideration.

2. Funding must address substantive equality

Indigenous communities continue to face colonization and have never been adequately funded. Therefore, a funding approach that recognizes and addresses differences in context is imperative, in addition to taking proactive measures to address the needs of Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth have a right to equal opportunity to make for themselves a life that they wish to have in a manner that honours their languages and cultures.²⁰

3. Youth groups to define their own needs and budgets

Budgets for community-based youth groups cannot be designed or defined nationally, nor by large organizations or institutions. Parachuting one-size-fits-all micro-grants into communities is offensive

20 Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy at the University of Ottawa. (2022). "Data assessment and framing of an analysis of substantive equality through the application of Jordan's Principle."

and ultimately does not meet their needs. While a group of youth in an urban setting might be able to organize a small event for \$5000, a youth group in a remote community in the North simply cannot.

4. Reduced stipulations to access funding

Applying for funding is very paternalistic, especially for Indigenous youth. Funders often require Indigenous youth to “prove” their oppression and struggles. Youth groups have described how funders do not trust that they could serve their communities. Youth groups are often overlooked in favour of non-Indigenous organizations with little to no experience working with Indigenous youth. Access to funding must presume that youth-authorized and trusted youth groups in communities are a credible resource and need for Indigenous youth.

5. Living wages must be offered based on region

Funding for Indigenous youth must offer liveable wages at the bare minimum. These wages cannot be decided at a national level but must meet the needs of the youth organizers in the regions they are working in.

6. Must support youth groups where they are at

Some youth groups are just starting, some focus on specific projects, and others are established non-profits. Therefore, their needs and requests will be much different. Implementing TRC 66 must be flexible and able to meet youth groups where they are at, rather than pushing youth groups into a pre-decided program or project created without their involvement.

Similarly, there must have space for youth groups to make mistakes. Training and support must be provided where indicated by youth groups, but ultimately funding must include room for growth and transformation along with the accompanying growing pains.

7. Budgets must include care and support for youth organizers

Youth organizers' care and support is defined by their community. This can include benefits, vacation time and parental leave for youth organizers. Typical employee benefits can be considered a minimum guideline.

8. Reporting must be defined by youth groups

Funding reporting requirements must consider where youth groups are at and what their capacities are. Reporting requirements must move beyond written reports to include youth-accessible and culturally inclusive reporting, like storytelling and oral reporting.

Immediate Next Steps to Implementing TRC 66

Unfortunately, a lot of the requirements to implement TRC 66 were outlined in The Roadmap on the Implementation of TRC 66 in 2018 however there has been little to no movement on this roadmap by stakeholders that have the power to move the needle, such as the federal government.

The last federal Indigenous youth funding program, Cultural Connections of Aboriginal Youth (CCAY) sunsetted in 2015 and there is no federal funding program dedicated to Indigenous youth to date. Next steps would be as follows:

1. Fund Existing Community-Based Youth Groups as a Pilot
 - a. Funding must be multi-year
 - b. Funding must be defined by each youth group (i.e., administrative and program needs)
 - c. Review with Youth Groups collectively after one year
 - d. Adjust as needed, including for adaptability, context and increased need
 - e. Reporting designed by the youth group and it has a purpose/role for the group
2. Establish and fund a Panel of Experts to Advise on Creating a Permanent TRC 66 Fund
 - a. Youth Groups would co-create a vetting process and ethical screen for the Panel of Experts
 - b. Panel would advise on:
 - i. Defining values and ethics of mechanisms
 - ii. Defining operational approach to distributing and monitoring funds
 - iii. Defining selection criteria for fund

- iv. Support with outreach and engagement
- c. Panel of Experts should include Youth Groups in Pilot but should not only be limited to these youth groups
- d. Panel of Experts should include mainly Indigenous youth and allies determined by community with experience in youth movements, organizing and supports
- 3. Establish a Multi-Year and Core Support Funding Mechanism Supporting the TRC 66 Fund
 - a. Work with Youth Group Pilot to formalize the Mechanism
 - b. Consult with existing Indigenous youth funding mechanisms
 - c. Must be an Indigenous youth peer reviewed process
 - d. Must offer Ethical Budgets (See Ethical Budget Requirements)
 - e. Panel of Experts would offer strategic advice and guidance
- 4. Establish an independent Accountability Mechanism
 - a. An Accountability Mechanism would:
 - i. Oversee the implementation of TRC 66
 - ii. Review and report on Canada's obligations to Indigenous youth wellbeing
 - iii. Advice on removing barriers to meet Canada's obligations, duties and responsibilities to Indigenous youth
 - iv. Provide advice and guidance to funders on how to make their funding ethical

Conclusion

Indigenous youth groups are already doing the work of community building, cultural and language revitalization, systems navigation, and peer-to-peer support, it is time they are supported to do this work. Indigenous youth shouldn't have to keep proving why their lives matter and why they deserve to have ethical funding.

We call upon all stakeholders, particularly the federal government, to fully implement TRC Call to Action 66 with the guidance and leadership of grassroots Indigenous youth collectives and organizations who have been paving the way to see this justice in their lifetime.

Almost 30 years later, despite many apologies and acknowledgements, countless reports and recommendations, and an overwhelming use of the word “reconciliation” by the Canadian government today, many Indigenous people, especially Indigenous youth, still remain skeptical, if not completely disillusioned, by the notion of reconciliation.

—*Indigenous Youth Voices. A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action # 66. June 2018*