

An Update on Reconciliation Initiatives within the YMCA Associations of Canada



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A Message from Peter Dinsdale

For our country to become the **Canada We Want**, the YMCA recognizes that we must place a special and intentional focus on Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. YMCA Canada and Member Associations engaged in this work under the vision of our 2017-2020 strategic plan, Plan Y: Expedition.

The YMCA Federation in Canada's Statement of Reconciliation was unanimously approved by all YMCAs in Canada in 2017, and in December 2019, the National Board approved a Diversity and Inclusion Statement, with commitments on both a strategic and an operational basis. As part of the Roadmap to Reconciliation, YMCA Canada has offered staff trainings in cultural competency, as well as related learning opportunities.

In light of the expiration of Plan Y: Expedition and the need to meet the unprecedented historical challenges of the pandemic, over June and July 2020, the Post-COVID Working Group of the National Board of Directors held a virtual listening tour with CEOs and Board volunteers from 42 Associations across Canada.

In addition to the effects the pandemic has had on the YMCA, COVID-19 has amplified the effects of pre-existing inequities in Canada, increasing the need for the YMCA to have meaningful impact at the community level. Several YMCA Member Association leaders reported that conversations are taking place at the board level and at the staff level to look at areas such as the need for anti-racism, to address systemic discrimination, to increase board diversity, and to continue the work on Indigenous Reconciliation. There is a feeling that this work is important and that it must be done right.

The values and the vision for the **Canada We Want** have not changed, however our strategy has evolved to meet the needs of changing times. In the new YMCA Canada Post-COVID Bridging Strategy, which charts a course for the next 18-24 months as we get through the pandemic and evolve our model, Community Impact is a main pillar of YMCA Canada's pandemic response. As part of this Community Impact focus, anti-racism, including addressing anti-Black racism, and continuing our work on Indigenous Reconciliation, is a key part of the work to come.

As we move to the next stage of our Community Impact journey, it is important to reflect on and acknowledge the progress we have made so far.

Between December 2019 and February 2020, YMCA Member Associations from across Canada were invited to complete a survey. This survey was based on *The Indigenous Circle Approach to Cultural Confidence™*, (CIRCLE Approach) a framework for reconciliation developed by Sakatay Global. From this survey the report, **RECONCILIATION UPDATE REPORT for YMCA CANADA: An Update on Reconciliation Initiatives within the YMCA Associations of Canada** was created by Shannon Monk of Sakatay Global.

I am pleased to share the results of this report. While there remains work to be done, there is momentum within the Federation. Sharing the stories of what has taken place at the Association level gives us the opportunity to learn from each other as we consider the work to come.

Peter Dinsdale
President & CEO, YMCA Canada
November 2020



Preamble

The YMCA Federation in Canada's Statement of Reconciliation was unanimously approved by all YMCAs in Canada in 2017 to strengthen their dedication to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and communities in Canada.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update of reconciliation initiatives happening across Canada within YMCA Member Associations in response to this commitment. These initiatives are reflective of the YMCA Federation's commitment to fostering a sense of belonging for all and its values of inclusiveness, accountability, and collaboration.

YMCAs in Canada Statement of Reconciliation

The YMCAs in Canada have a commitment to building healthy communities through the power of belonging. Communities that are safe and vibrant, with a strong economy and a sustainable environment. Communities within a Canada that demonstrates:

- leadership in improving the health of all people;
- respect for diversity and pluralism;
- combatting inequality;
- protecting its most vulnerable; and
- nurturing the potential of young people.

For our country to become the *Canada We Want*, the YMCA recognizes that we must place a special and intentional focus on Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples.

Introduction

Between December 2019 and February 2020, YMCA Associations from across Canada were invited to complete a survey. This survey utilized *The Indigenous Circle Approach to Cultural Confidence™*, (CIRCLE Approach) as a framework for reconciliation. Developed by Sakatay Global, the CIRCLE Approach is based on six key themes:

Creating Space

Indigenous History and Context

Relationship Building and Protocol

Culture, Community, and Ceremony

Land, Language, and Lifelong Learning

Education Leads to Reconciliation

The purpose of the survey was to get a sense of where Associations were on their reconciliation journey. Some organizations are feeling fairly culturally confident, while others are just beginning to explore reconciliation. Through this survey process, Associations were invited to be candid. The goal was to demonstrate that there are best practices and emerging practices throughout the entire Federation, that everyone is at a different stage of development, that we can all benefit from learning from one another, and that no one is on this journey alone. We want to thank all of the participants who were honest and open and willing to share. We especially salute and thank those organizations who were vulnerable and hesitant because they felt they didn't have as much to share as others. It matters! In reconciliation, every step forward, every initiative undertaken matters! It is this wide array of practices that creates a spectacular opportunity for growth for the entire YMCA family as a whole.

Forty-nine YMCA Associations responded to the survey and shared many exciting initiatives. Here are some key themes that emerged:

- **Intentional Guidance:** YMCA Associations have intentionally sought out guidance from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals, organizations, and communities to create spaces that are welcoming and inviting to Indigenous people.
- **Relationships:** Both YMCA Associations as a whole and individual staff members have taken time to build trust and cultivate vibrant and meaningful relationships with Indigenous clients, partners, and communities. Most successes have occurred through ongoing co-collaboration and partnership founded on respect and inclusion.
- **Professional Development:** Many organizations have provided multiple learning opportunities for staff and participants that range from historical knowledge to cultural teachings and on-the-land experiences.
- **Holistic Approach:** Programming that is intergenerational and grounded in Indigenous language, culture, and on-the-land experiences have provided great value to staff and clients alike.
- **Policy Shifts:** Although not widely prevalent throughout the country, changes are happening. Associations that have made changes at the policy level have increased cultural confidence both internally and externally.
- **More to Do:** Most Associations acknowledge there is more work to do, yet there is a sense of excitement and optimism that there are resources to support this.

Cultural Confidence by the Numbers

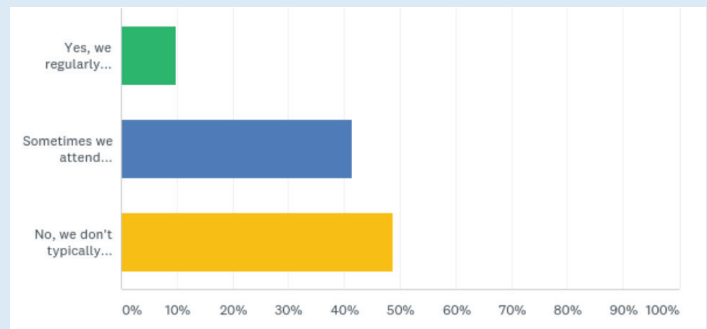
Of the 49 respondents within the survey, 41 responded to the following questions:

Do we regularly attend Indigenous cultural events?

10% - yes, we regularly attend events

41% - sometimes we attend events

49% - no, we don't typically attend events

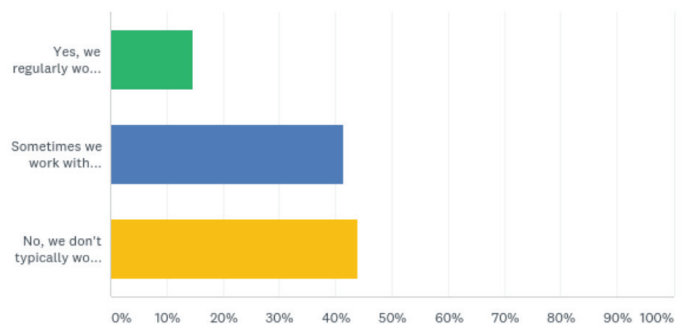


Do we regularly work with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers?

15% - yes, we regularly work with them

41% - sometimes we work with them

44% - no, we don't typically work with them

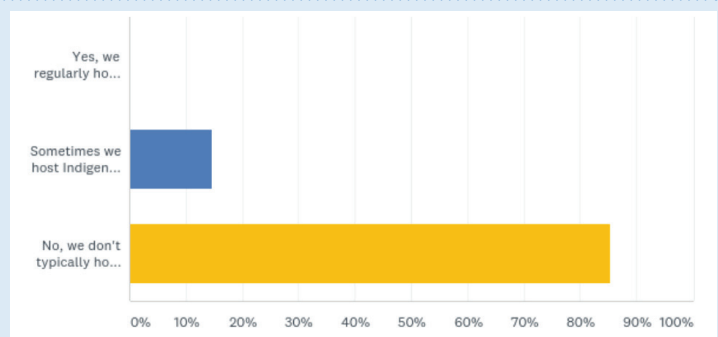


Do we regularly host Indigenous cultural events?

0% - yes, we regularly host events

15% - sometimes we host events

85% - no, we don't typically host events



YMCA Reconciliation Stories and Association Profiles

Of the 49 respondents within the entire survey, 26 YMCA Associations identified at least one or more initiatives focused on reconciliation. This section follows a storytelling format and profiles the best and emerging practices of various Associations. They are all included within the profiles provided below, using *The Indigenous Circle Approach to Cultural Confidence™* as a framework. For more detailed profiles on each individual Association, please see the Appendices.

Creating Space

Creating space is about being mindful of the environment we create and the impacts that environment has on others. It urges us to be aware of how others perceive and respond within their surroundings. It encourages us to be open, welcome, and inviting. We know that when we feel safe, valued, appreciated, and seen, our minds and hearts open up to the world around us. Creating space is about inspiring a sense of belonging and inclusion. Using the four realms of the Medicine Wheel Teachings (physical, spiritual, social/emotional, and mental/learning) is a nice way to assess the different ways you can Create Space within your organizations.

How have we created safe and welcoming PHYSICAL space for Indigenous people at the YMCA?

- Within the walls of the new Chilliwack YMCA, part of the **YMCA of Greater Vancouver**, sits a new, traditional **Stó:lō house post**. This beautifully carved house post, created by Chief Terry Horne of the Yakweakwioose First Nation, symbolizes that the centre of the community lies on traditional and ancestral territory.
- The **YMCA of Oakville** worked closely with Knowledge Keepers and the Chief of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation to create a **land acknowledgement plaque**. Following protocol, this was installed through a special ceremony.
- The **YMCA of Southwest Nova Scotia** has worked with local Mi'kmaq people to ensure their child care spaces have culturally appropriate items including **dolls, drums, and books**.
- Other ways YMCA Associations have created physical space:
 - Indigenous languages are included on welcome signage;
 - Welcome signs acknowledge traditional territory;
 - Artwork painted by local Indigenous artists is featured;
 - Building names were changed and oppressive displays were removed;
 - YMCA programming is offered within an Indigenous community;
 - Images of local Indigenous people are respectfully displayed;
 - Free programming is offered two nights per week for Indigenous participants;
 - An outdoor day camp site includes tipis set up and blessed by Elders; and
 - Posters feature the traditional names and territories of Indigenous people.

How have we created safe and welcoming SPIRITUAL space for Indigenous people at the YMCA?

- The **YMCA of Northern BC** engaged Indigenous youth, adults, and Elders in the design of a major renovation. Key feedback indicated the need for a cultural and spiritual space. As a result, a *room with special venting* was built to allow for burning medicines and ceremonial smudging.
- Within the **YMCA of Northern Alberta** Housing First services, Elders are engaged to *bless new homes* of Indigenous individuals and families. Smudging is permitted in program spaces and apartment units.
- At the **YMCA of Niagara**, within Employment and Immigrant Services, *smudging* is permitted and encouraged for Indigenous programming. All workshop spaces accommodate prayer circles and other ceremony.
- Other ways YMCA Associations have created spiritual space:
 - Local programs are conducted in the Cree language;
 - Workshops integrate cultural teachings and ceremony;
 - Sacred medicines and private spaces to perform ceremony are provided;
 - Families are supported to engage in traditional practices; and
 - Connections and referrals are made to local Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

How have we created safe and welcoming SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL spaces for Indigenous people at the YMCA?

- As part of 2020 SMART Goals on their *annual performance reviews*, **YMCA of Okanagan** Employment Services Facilitators have been tasked with fostering connections with local Indigenous service providers to ensure Indigenous youth in their programs receive the appropriate social/emotional supports they need for success in their programs.
- At the Shelter for the **Kamloops Community YMCA-YWCA**, they work to leave room for open conversation, knowing that culture, traditions, and experiences of being marginalized are sometimes difficult topics to discuss and share. They recognize that *communal caring models* are part of many Indigenous family care approaches and support families to choose how they want to make sleeping arrangements and care plans.
- Other ways YMCA Associations have created social/emotional space:
 - Indigenous team members are hired in key roles, from front line to leadership;
 - Efforts are made to include more diverse (Indigenous) images in promotional materials;
 - Programs are developed from an Indigenous worldview, including perspectives on community building, child and youth development, and personal wellness; and
 - Expressions of interest about Indigenous culture are followed up.

How have we created safe and welcoming MENTAL/LEARNING spaces for Indigenous people at the YMCA?

- The *Skills for Steel* program, offered through the **YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford** is a program specifically designed for Indigenous people by Six Nations Polytechnic. It builds on the region's long and proud history of Mohawk Steelworkers. Program space is provided at the LBY Centre (Laurier Brantford YMCA).
- The **YMCA of Oakville** is a member of the community-based *Truth and Reconciliation Committee* which is comprised of school boards, municipality leads, and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. Together they plan and facilitate community gatherings that educate, raise awareness, and honour Indigenous history and culture.
- Other ways YMCA Associations have created learning space:
 - o *Beyond the Bell* programs provide academic and social supports to Indigenous children from families with low incomes;
 - o Events and activities honouring Indigenous cultures, celebrations, rituals, and ways of knowing are presented;
 - o Tipis and other Indigenous structures are erected as places of learning; and
 - o Program curricula are created by and for Indigenous people.



Indigenous History and Context

Until 2015, with the introduction of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, most Canadians were unaware of the one-sided history presented within Canada's education system. By having a firmer grasp of Canada's history from an Indigenous perspective, we are better able to understand our unique roles within the change happening across the country. Indigenous awareness training, in a variety of styles and formats, can provide opportunities to learn the truth about Indigenous people in Canada and assist us on our learning journey. Topics can include pre-contact history, contact and impacts of colonization, residential schools, 60's Scoop, murdered and missing Indigenous women, intergenerational trauma, and truth and reconciliation, amongst others.

How have we created opportunities to learn about Indigenous histories and context?

- In 2019, the **YMCA of Okanagan** hosted *multiple Indigenous Training workshops* to build competencies with Child Care and Early Years Services staff. This 2-part series was called "Pathway to Truth and Reconciliation" and included Syilxcen (Okanagan) language, cultural knowledge, Indigenous education, and Indigenous early child development and care.
- At the **YMCA of Greater Moncton**, past *Peace Week activities* have provided opportunities to learn about Indigenous history and context. This has included participation in Reconciliation Jeopardy, smudging ceremonies, and partnering in PEI with the Abegweit First Nation community.
- **YMCA Northumberland** has welcomed the *Drumming Circle* from Alderville First Nation to many YMCA events and has had both an Elder and a community member speak at the Peace Breakfast. Camp program participants have visited Alderville First Nation for day trips.
- At the **YMCA of Greater Toronto**, Indigenous Cultural Competency Training is delivered regularly by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC); Senior Staff and the Board of Directors have participated in a *KAIROS Blanket Exercise*; and the YMCA Cedar Glen Outdoor Centre facilitates the *Wiigiwaam Reconciliation Program*, a collaborative, community-based program developed in partnership with local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
- Other ways YMCA Associations learn about Indigenous histories and context:
 - Participating in conferences, workshops, and online training;
 - Collaborating with local nations and Indigenous organizations to offer training and awareness opportunities on local history, context, culture, learning styles, and parenting philosophies;
 - Listening to Indigenous stories to hear, first hand, the impacts of colonization;
 - Collaborating on curriculum adaptations of YMCA programming;
 - Focusing on educating Indigenous children and youth about historical context and current events within the broader Indigenous community;
 - Participating in and sharing information through Indigenous People's Day, Orange Shirt Day, Indigenous Awareness Month, local Treaty Day celebrations, etc.;
 - Sharing best practices and resources and exchanging information with Indigenous practitioners and partner organizations;
 - Attending cultural exhibits and showcases;
 - Visiting a residential school;
 - Integrating/embedding Indigenous perspectives into YMCA curricula; and
 - Incorporating teachable moments wherever possible: For example - when land acknowledgement is offered, provide a different fact or teaching for each occasion, such as the context for celebrating National Indigenous Day or Treaty Day, etc.

How have we changed/adapted/addressed systems, structures, or policies that can assist us to better serve Indigenous clients and work more effectively with Indigenous partners, communities, and staff?

- The **YMCA of Fredericton** has partnered with St. Mary's First Nation recreation program to introduce youth to YMCA programming. To **address barriers to access**, they have hosted sessions at different facilities and have provided transportation options to assist the participation of interested youth.
- With the development of their **new facilities**, the **YMCA of Southwestern Ontario** has implemented a new approach to determining what future programming will look like. They have begun hosting community feedback sessions with architects and Walpole Island First Nation Elders and community members to learn what the community wants and needs, guided and supported by the *Journey Together Indigenous Planning Committee*.
- The **YMCA of Three Rivers** has begun thinking about **data collection** from an Indigenous perspective. In conversation with community partners, specifically with their Indigenous EarlyON team, they noted that surveys they put out to parents/families/public accessing the programs could be problematic. The community partners shared that, historically, there was a concern with self-identifying as Indigenous – it hasn't always led to positive outcomes. A rich discussion about data collection ensued, regarding what data is collected and why. Large sweeping changes have not yet been made, but it has raised the Y's level of understanding about data collection sensitivities.
- Other ways YMCA Associations have addressed systems, structures, or policies:
 - Implementation of a memorandum of understanding, partnership agreement, or operating principles with local First Nations to subsidize the cost of health and fitness facility memberships in order to recognize historical barriers to participation and to help make access more equitable;
 - Development and implementation of policies to: pay Elder and Knowledge Keeper honoraria; permit the purchase of tobacco for ceremonial purposes; allow smudging whenever possible; and provide Employee Assistance Program (EAP) support for Indigenous employees who may prefer to opt for counseling support from a Traditional Elder rather than a Western counselor;
 - Immediate, positive response to feedback from youth by removing oppressive language within workshops;
 - Formation of an Indigenous Advisory Circle to help guide the organization;
 - Attendance at an Indigenous Employment and Retention session to learn about barriers to Indigenous employment, recruiting Indigenous applicants, how to approach community outreach, and how to increase retention of Indigenous employees;
 - Active integration of knowledge shared by Indigenous partners into ways to work and interact together more effectively and make programs and job opportunities more accessible; and
 - Amendment of security fire protocols to be able to offer a space for smudging.

Relationship Building and Protocol

Our societies are founded on relationships. We thrive in environments where we are understood, valued, and appreciated. For a wide variety of historical reasons, the relationship between Indigenous people and Canadians is fragile. Rebuilding trust takes time and commitment and patience. Building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people provides opportunities for all citizens within Canada to connect and build community and celebrate both differences and similarities. It allows everyone to flourish and prosper. Knowing who your neighbours are, the many different organizations that represent First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, and the protocols of different nations, assists with the relationship building process.

How have we connected and partnered with local, regional, or national Indigenous clients, partners, communities, or organizations?

- The **YMCA of Sault Ste. Marie** has partnered with Garden River First Nation on **infrastructure applications** and they are also exploring other partnerships including **housing projects** with Ontario Aboriginal Housing.
- The **YMCA of Northeastern Ontario** has supported the **recruitment and retention of Indigenous students** from Laurentian University by promoting the YMCA and its associated programs and services and employment opportunities at the Indigenous Student Orientation Events. They have Indigenous **representation** at the **Board** level and they continue to strengthen their relationship with Serpent River First Nation with the goal of providing **Indigenous content** at camps and in their outdoor activities.
- The **YMCA of Owen Sound Grey Bruce** participates in the *Giiwe Sharing Circle*, a regular gathering of agencies to promote **intersectoral collaboration** for responding to Indigenous homelessness. They have one staff member who identifies as Métis.
- The **YMCA-YWCA of Vancouver Island** is connected to a number of **local First Nations**, including T'Sou-ke, Beecher Bay, Ditidaht, Pacheedaht, Songhees, Esquimalt, and Wsanec First Nations. They also partner with a number of **regional and national organizations** such as Right to Play, Victoria's Native friendship Centre, Hulitan Family and Community Services, Island Métis Family & Community Services, the Ministry of Children and Family Development Aboriginal Services, and the local Health Authorities and School Boards.
- The **YMCA of Greater Vancouver** has an extensive list of **First Nations partners**, including Stó:lō, Musqueam Adams Lake, Tahltan, Yale, Namgis, Okanagan, Osoyoos, and Seabird Island. **Indigenous community partner organizations** include First Nations Health Authority, Kahui Tautoko Consulting, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, Métis Nation BC, Ts'ewulhtn Health Centre, Kwun'atsustul Counselling, WheLaLaU Area Council Society, North Winds Wellness Centre, Nak'azdli Whut'en Health Center, Nawican Friendship Centre, Prince George Friendship Centre, North Okanagan Friendship Centre, Quesnel Tillicum Friendship Centre, Urban Native Youth Association, T'kemlups te Secwepemc Community Services Department, Xetolacw Community School, Carrier Sekani Family Services, Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society, Hailika'as Heiltsuk Health Centre Society, etc.
- The **YMCA of Southwestern Ontario** has various partnerships in place at various locations. The **Beyond the Bell** program partnered with Bkejwanong Kinomaagewgamig to provide after school programming to students living on Walpole Island First Nation. **Newcomer services** provides programming that connect Indigenous and newcomer youth. The Right to Play partnership at Aamjiwnaang First Nation brought together youth to share their unique cultures, histories, experiences, and perspectives. The relationships with First Nations communities is something the Y has worked hard at strengthening over the years and **Indigenous participation has increased** significantly in various Y programming and leadership initiatives. Through a partnership with

the Thames Valley School Board, the **First Nations, Métis, Inuit Program** offered cultural teachings and recreational programming. Partnerships also have been developed with the N'Amerind Friendship Centre, the Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre, and the Sarnia Lambton Native Friendship Centre.

- Other ways YMCA Associations have connected with Indigenous partners:
 - Regular outreach to local Friendship Societies, Indigenous Support Workers, and other advocates to help educate staff and participants and to ensure their programs are sensitive to the unique needs of Indigenous participants;
 - Increased numbers of Indigenous staff in a variety of board, front line, administrative, leadership, and advisory roles;
 - Shared resource and in-kind costs with employment programs;
 - Travel and outreach to remote communities to provide information and services;
 - Partnering directly with First Nations communities, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers on a variety of programming including early years, afterschool, camps, fitness, recreation, youth, cultural activities, employment, building and construction, trades training, etc.; and
 - Developing regional and national Indigenous connections and partnerships in addition to local focus.

How have we built trust and cultivated relationships with Indigenous people?

- The **YMCAs of Quebec** has partnered with the Cree First Nations communities of Mistissini, Waskaganish, and Chisasibi in northern Quebec. These nations have adopted the YQC's *Alternative Suspension program* (AS) and offer it within their own communities to create a safe space for youth who are suspended from school. Program employees are from the community and uniquely positioned to **support** the challenges

and realities that the youth face. This relationship has developed over time, beginning with an **openness to learning** and **understanding of other realities**. **Honesty** is a critical aspect of relationship building, as well as having the **humility** to admit that they may not be familiar with a different culture, and asking **respectful questions** to better understand. Finally, they acknowledge that it's an **ongoing process**, one that cannot be forced and will take **as much time as is needed**.

- The **YMCA of Niagara** Board of Directors has always been a diverse group possessing a wide range of competencies and connections to the community. In addition to members of the previous board with **Indigenous background**, a current **board member** is the Executive Director of the local Indigenous Friendship Centre. As a result, this Association has been guided for many years on best approaches for building trust with the Indigenous community and has laid a strong foundation for their many partnerships. **Intentional relationship building** takes place through **effort** and **commitment**. These **positive working relationships** are nurtured through regular and ongoing **meetings, discussion, and consultation** to discuss **shared interests**, community issues, and potential opportunities to partner.
- The **YMCA of Greater Toronto** has established many **connections** with Indigenous individuals and organizations through various programs across the GTA. This became more formally developed in 2016 with the introduction of the YMCA Cedar Glen's *Wiigiwaam Reconciliation Program* and the creation of the *Cedar Glen Indigenous Advisory Circle*. The YMCA of Greater Toronto is learning that relationships with Indigenous people **take time** and **energy** to build and they are learning to **pause, reflect, and adjust** their mindset to **allow ways of relating** to others that they have not experienced before. Through their *Indigenous Reconciliation Working Group* and the relationships they are **nurturing** so far, this has been an important learning. An example of this **willingness** to learn and **adapt** is demonstrated in the relationship they have with the Indigenous Advisory Circle to Cedar Glen Outdoor Centre and the time they take to really

listen and follow the Circle's advice, which may mean **changes** in policies and practices within the Association. **Humility** is a key tenet for relationship building. With this comes the **responsibility** to be prepared to **listen** and then to **act**. In December 2019, the Association implemented a survey to gather the information of existing Indigenous relationships, partnerships, trainings, services, and/or programs to determine next steps.

- Other ways YMCA Associations have created trust and built relationships:
 - Understanding that work with children, youth, parents, and family members must be from a relational-based perspective;
 - Connecting those from Indigenous backgrounds with community cultural resources and supports such as mentors, Elders, Wisdom Keepers, and peer support networks;
 - Supporting relationship-building by offering dedicated leads within the Association;
 - Having the humility to recognize the difficult history of colonization in Canada and how the YMCA, intentionally or not, has contributed to this history;
 - Following proper protocols with different nations;
 - Working together on curriculum to ensure it is culturally safe and inclusive;
 - Recognizing it is a process that requires longer term, ongoing commitment to grow and deepen relationships;
 - Having patience and recognizing that the current negative social, spiritual, and health outcomes that Indigenous people experience have been generations in the making and will take generations to turn around;
 - Recognizing the need to take immediate action, while also understanding the long-term process;
 - Having honest and regular dialogues with Indigenous leaders to assess community needs and to hone competencies and capacities;
 - Incorporating the knowledge gained into local programs;
 - Acknowledging that more training is needed for management, front line staff, and participants;

- Having conversations with Elders, Indigenous service providers, and local planning groups;
- Recently joining the local community Indigenous Reconciliation Committee;
- Learning more about what is required and balancing that with what they know and working for an improved and culturally informed tomorrow;
- Following up on feedback provided on their physical environment, resources, and play materials to ensure they are culturally respectful; and
- Incorporating feedback from Indigenous partners on organizational procedures and future builds.



Culture, Community, and Ceremony

Canada is celebrated as a country with a rich, multicultural diversity of citizens. This diversity is also exemplified within the Indigenous population. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people have their own unique and distinct culture, traditions, languages, ways of life, histories, ceremonies, sacred places, spirituality, Indigenous knowledge, collective consciousness, and nationhood. First Nations territories are comprised of over 634 nations and territories throughout Canada, with over 50 Indigenous languages. The Inuit are the original peoples of the Arctic, whose traditional homelands make up the four regions collectively known as Inuit Nunangat. Distinct Métis communities developed along the routes of the fur trade and across the Northwest within the Métis Nation Homeland.

How are we involved with the protocols, teachings, and ceremony of Indigenous people within our traditional territories?

- The **YMCA of Northern Alberta** *incorporates Indigenous teachings*, ceremony, and history into staff development and team meeting experiences. They contract Indigenous organizations to support improving competency and corporate cultural capacity to have Indigenous experience *be seen, known, and valued* throughout their Association. They have practiced or experienced a variety of cultural teachings including *smudging, medicine wheel, four directions, blanket ceremony, sweat lodge ceremony, drumming, dancing, and preparing and sharing cultural foods in their community kitchens*.
- The **YMCA of Pictou County** provides opportunities for clients, volunteers, staff, community partners, etc. to learn and participate in cultural teachings every day through a *comprehensive art display* located throughout their facility, consisting of 50 pieces produced by regional Indigenous artists. They also have a very strong relationship with *Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre* and regularly learn from *Mi'kmaq Elders* and Knowledge Keepers.
- **YMCA Calgary** staff within the Indigenous Department lead the Association in *local protocols* and teachings. The manager is a Knowledge Keeper who has transferred *ceremonial rights* from the Blackfoot Culture and is a traditional tipi owner. The Indigenous department fully participates in cultural events. These include smudging, *pipe ceremonies, tea dances*, pow wows, *tipi blessings*, and sweat lodges to name a few. These are attended by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and participants. Opportunities for *urban Indigenous youth* remain a priority to ensure they can develop a *proud Indigenous identity* for themselves that includes *connections to traditional culture*.
- The **YMCA of Regina** has participated in *smudge walks*, sweat lodge ceremonies, *feasts*, and other cultural events.
- Other ways YMCA Associations are involved with Indigenous cultural teachings and ways of knowing:
 - Celebrating major milestones like retirement, birth, death, potlatch, etc.;
 - Inviting Indigenous companies and individuals to offer cultural teachings to different groups;
 - Partnering with local organizations to help with learning the protocols, teachings, and ceremony of Indigenous people within the local traditional territories;
 - Ensuring that those who help them with learning have their time and knowledge valued through remuneration, honoraria, and/or gifts;

- o Reaching out to ask local Nations about local protocols including land acknowledgements, building relationships in person, gifting, and land permissions;
- o Consulting on protocol, including land acknowledgement, traditional practice to present the wampum belt, language, and greetings;
- o Working actively to engage in partnership with Indigenous communities and to be guided in meaningful ways to determine how they want to proceed;
- o Attend and/or host events for Indigenous Peoples Day and Orange Shirt Day including community education workshops, pow wows, and cultural activities;
- o Making tobacco offerings to an Elder to conduct smudging ceremonies;
- o Participating in Soup and Bannock lunches at the local First People's House;
- o Attending vigils for Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls;
- o Hosting ceremonies - such as a youth suicide healing circle - to acknowledge significant deaths;
- o Providing space for restorative justice sessions;
- o Inviting new clients, staff, and volunteers of Immigrant Services to participate in Indigenous-focused events and activities (e.g. pow wows, ceremonies, etc.) to raise awareness of culture and reconciliation;
- o Providing teachings about Indigenous culture including the meaning of the circle, the smudge, the turtle, the feather, the pipe, the clans, various medicines, and symbols;
- o Learning about and understanding issues of food security and sustainable diets derived from place-based knowledge and livelihoods spanning thousands of years;
- o Catering meals from local Indigenous caterers;
- o Offering teachings related to food including harvesting and hunting protocols, the Three Sisters (corn, beans, squash), Sweet Water Ceremony (maple syrup, maple butter), Cedar Tea, wild rice, berries, bannock, and frybread; and
- o Offering teachings related to the Medicine Wheel, including the four directions, four races, four seasons, four medicines, four learning modalities, four elements of nature etc.

How do we work with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers?

- The **Kamloops Community YMCA-YWCA** has Elders involved in *creating resources* for children (mostly early years – under age 6) for families and community programs, organizations, and child care providers to use. They have *a designated Elder position* at the Women's Shelter. This is a special position and requires someone who is the right fit for the services. They also engage Elders to provide a *welcome, blessing, song, or smudge*, depending upon the requirements and suitability, for events and meetings.
- The Vice Chair of the **YMCA of Cape Breton** regularly works with a local Knowledge Keeper. An *Elder-in-Residence* position is being considered in order for the Y to have someone they can regularly turn to for advice, insight, and mediation.

- Other ways YMCA Associations work with Elders:
 - o Indigenous programs are designed and developed in consultation with a core group of Elders;
 - o Programs host regular visits from Elders and Knowledge Keepers where they share knowledge and ceremonies with participants;
 - o Formal partnerships and connections to the Indigenous community are frequently guided by Elders;
 - o Elders engage in cultural exchange processes;
 - o Elders sit on advisory committees;
 - o Elders are involved in professional development and training activities such as the Blanket Exercise; and
 - o Elders are involved with youth programs.

Land, Language, and Lifelong Learning

Identity is a core attribute of Indigenous cultures and a key element of spiritual wellness. It is derived from connections to language, land, and cultural continuity through lifelong learning. Ways of being, reflected through Indigenous languages, describe all aspects of creation as living beings. The earth, stars, water, fire, animals, etc. are animate beings in every Indigenous language. Since time immemorial, Indigenous people have had an intricate, respectful, spiritually and physically dependent, grateful, and protective tie to the land. The nature of this tie is not so much one of ownership but one of stewardship. This sense of responsibility is greater than an emotional tie – it is intrinsically tied to the spirits of all aspects of the earth. Each Nation has its own unique relationship with the land and if you are working with a community, that connection and relationship is important to know.

How have we participated in on-the-land activities?

- The **YMCA of Pictou County** has participated in on-the-land activities, such as walking the Mi'kmawey Debert *Interpretive Trail* and learning about *traditional plants* and *medicines* and *stories of the land*.
- The **YMCA of Greater Toronto** has developed a partnership with the Cree Cultural *Interpretive Centre*. Together, they run a program at Camp Pine Crest that involves traveling down the Missinaibi River. Participants spend two days at the Centre and help prepare a *traditional meal* in a *smoke house* and learn about Cree culture. At Camp Pine Crest they try their best to *follow protocol* by contacting all Indigenous communities whose land and waterways they will be travelling through. They send *tobacco offerings* out on their canoe trips so staff and participants can make an offering to a community member or to the river.
- At the **YMCA-YWCA of Vancouver Island**, in the past some *cedar harvesting* was facilitated at camp in partnership with the local First Nation. At camp and through their Outdoor Programs in particular, they often *talk about the land* they travel on and its connection and importance to Indigenous culture. They also try to include *Indigenous content* as part of their trips to different locations. They have solicited *Indigenous created resources* and connected with Indigenous groups to increase knowledge and content.

- Other ways YMCA Associations participate in on-the-land learning:
 - o During the summer an Indigenous Day Camp is held. The program is free for families to attend and they have approximately 25 children for each two-week camp. At the site they have tipis set up and they participate in all the activities (archery, challenge courses, wide games) that the broader camp does but they also have culturally specific activities, including smudging and time with Knowledge Keepers;
 - o Newcomer youth were taken to a First Nation community as part of a cultural exchange. The youth engaged in a variety of activities such as making medicine pouches. They hosted a collaborative cultural event where members of the community were invited to view artwork created by the youth and see performances of First Nations dancing and drumming;
 - o Traditional on-the-land activities such as plant picking and sweat lodge ceremonies are coordinated in Indigenous communities; and
 - o Acknowledging and understanding that Indigenous peoples are the custodians of a large part of the world's biodiversity and natural resources and using this knowledge to coordinate and inform programming.

How have we participated in Indigenous language-based activities?

- The **YMCA of Pictou County** hosted a youth exchange in 2019. Youth were given a short *language lesson* at Pictou Landing First Nation. The Nation also shared *language apps* to continue learning the Mi'kmaq language. These apps are *Lnu'suti* and *Tal-Tluen*.
- The **YMCA of Southwestern Ontario** provides *bundles* for families which include cards with a couple of familiar English *rhymes translated* into the local Indigenous languages. Beyond the Bell staff and *students have taught* program staff some traditional language which staff attempt to use in the program. Students are encouraged to *read* in their traditional languages when *books* are available.
- Other ways YMCA Associations participate in language-based learning:
 - o To celebrate 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, an event was organized to learn about the diversity of Indigenous cultures through art, stories, song, film, and food;
 - o A local Elder is occasionally enlisted to provide language workshops for interested children and youth to learn some key words;
 - o One centre tries to incorporate fun ways for children and youth to learn some words in Blackfoot and Cree within their programs; and
 - o Some language-based activities are offered depending on the availability of staff who speak Indigenous languages.

How do we promote inter-generational connections?

- The **YMCA of Northern BC** recently acquired *funding* for an *inter-generational program* focused on senior volunteers, including Elders. This project allows for *seniors and Elders* to access supplies, training, and support *to share knowledge and culture*.
- **YMCA Calgary** programs are structured to match *Blackfoot Lodges* which children *move through* as they grow and learn in life. As they move to subsequent lodges, they become *mentors* for children in the previous lodge.
- Other ways YMCA Associations participate in inter-generational connections:
 - Hosting family gatherings that are inter-generational.

Education Leads to Reconciliation

Reconciliation can be a confusing and intimidating concept for people. There are many different interpretations of what it means and how to approach it. Reconciliation is a journey, not a destination, and each individual on this journey has an opportunity to learn and contribute in some way. People and organizations are at different stages of awareness and confidence. The principles of the TRC Calls to Action reflect action, legislation, and funding required to redress the historic injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. Cultural confidence for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people accelerates when we actively look for models of success that dispel myths and stereotypes. There are many, many culturally appropriate models of success within every sector – health, education, justice, economic development, language and culture, child welfare, publishing, music, entertainment, travel, and tourism, etc.! Looking at the world from an asset-based lens (rather than a deficit-based lens) encourages us to see what's right there in front of us.

How are we actively advancing our Reconciliation Action Plan?

- The **YMCA of Three Rivers** has included Reconciliation throughout their current *Strategic Plan*. They have created a *charter* which has been endorsed by the Board of Directors and Leadership staff and has been shared with staff and interest groups.
- The **YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford** has actively included Reconciliation within their *Strategic Plan*.
- The **YMCA of Cape Breton** has included Reconciliation within their current *Strategic Planning Exercise* (December 2019 - March 2020).
- Other ways YMCA Associations are actively advancing their Reconciliation Action Plan:
 - Convened a staff working group to begin exploring reconciliation;
 - Formed an internal Indigenous Reconciliation Working Group (IRWG) in 2018 comprised of 12 staff from across programs and regions;
 - Coordinated with regional partners to hire an Indigenous Cultural Training Coordinator to support Early Childhood learning for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures;
 - Participated in intersectoral committees and working groups to advance reconciliation; and
 - Actively working with staff teams to create more awareness of the *Statement of Reconciliation* by YMCA Canada.

How have we connected with and actively promoted Indigenous stories and successes within our Association?

- The **YMCA of Northern BC** has featured Indigenous success stories in their *Annual Report* and as *Y stories*, using a variety of media including *videos, photos*, stories of positive change, etc.
- **YMCA Calgary** has a specially designated department to support Indigenous issues. They are proud of the work of the *Indigenous Department* and actively highlight many of their success stories on a regular basis. These have been featured in print through *blogs* and *social media*, through their *Annual Reports*, and at their *AGMs*. Indigenous Culture has also been featured and promoted at the *openings* of some of their new facilities.
- The **YMCA of Medicine Hat** 2018-2019 *Annual Report* features an *impact story* from an individual who identifies as Indigenous who accessed their employment services and as a result, obtained full time employment at the Medicine Hat College as an Indigenous Student Specialist.

How have we provided supports to build a sense of cultural confidence and commitment to reconciliation?

- The **YMCAs of Quebec**'s approach to developing programs with the Cree Nation has been one that favours *empowerment* over control. They provide *guidance* and *assistance*, but ultimately it is their Cree partners who choose the path forward and manage the program. This approach to *collaboration* is based on *respect, transparency, openness* to learning and building a *relationship of trust*.
- The **YMCA of Greater Toronto** has started the process of forming an *Indigenous Advisory Circle* to their Association. They continue *nurturing* the relationship and creating the *space to listen* to the voices of Indigenous peoples that are part of the Indigenous Advisory Circle of Cedar Glen.
- The **YMCA of Greater Saint John** currently offers Cultural Intelligence training, *Ally and Safe Space Program* at the University of New Brunswick Saint John (UNBSJ) for staff and immigrants; reconciliation is talked about when they cover systemic discrimination. How they can build a sense of commitment to reconciliation *will be explored in 2020* with an Elder.
- Other ways YMCA Associations have built cultural confidence and a commitment to reconciliation:
 - o Providing adequate resources for staff professional development opportunities;
 - o Providing culturally appropriate learning and resources for clients;
 - o Forming a working group made up of a youth representative, YMCA staff, volunteers and members, and Indigenous representatives to work on reconciliation efforts; and
 - o Strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities.

Conclusion

We will conclude with some words of wisdom inspired from comments throughout the survey:

The YMCAs across Canada can play a significant role in advancing reconciliation and helping the nation heal, but only if we approach it with humility and with an understanding that our ignorance of Indigenous traditions and history is a barrier in itself. We must recognize that to know a tiny bit about Indigenous people in our own territory does not inform us about anyone else. We must acknowledge that the challenges faced by Indigenous people go far, far beyond residential schools, and we must understand that the federal law that allowed the creation of those schools and policies still exists.

Furthermore, it is important to learn from the past, but also to see what is in front of us. Build relationships, recognize the strength of community, celebrate successes, identify role models, and be vigilant to look at situations from an asset-based lens.

Finally, let's imagine a future premised on YMCA Canada's Statement of Reconciliation...and let's make it happen!

