A FIRST PEOPLES' POSTSECONDARY STORYTELLING EXCHANGE

RESEARCH FINDINGS REPORT

2016-2021

FUNDED BY A PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GRANT THROUGH THE SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL (SSHRC)

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A FIRST PEOPLES' POSTSECONDARY STORYTELLING EXCHANGE:

Intersecting college and community circles

Prepared for

Our Research Partners, Community Advisory Boards, and Participants

Prepared by

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(Preface by Michelle Smith, Principal Investigator, Dawson College)

Funded by:

Social Sciences & Human Resources Council (SSHRC)

2016-2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Research Team would like to acknowledge Susan Briscoe. Due to a terminal illness, Susan stepped down as FPPSE project lead in March 2017. She passed away in July 2018.

> *"Every student has a different story, but each of them involves sacrifice and determination as well as success and pride. I have been deeply touched by each story, and I have such great admiration and respect for each student."*
>
> *Susan Briscoe*

Educator, advocate, poet. Susan Briscoe developed the FPPSE to break down institutional barriers and honour the courage and dynamism of Indigenous students she taught. Hers was a vision of inclusivity and fairness where all learners would have the opportunity to reach their educational and professional goals. Susan set this project on a clear path, privileging First Nations, Inuit and Métis voices and bringing together a team of scholars and advocates dedicated to justice in education.

Susan, we are so very grateful that you set this process in motion. This project, the relationships formed, community created, and stories exchanged, are part of your legacy.

Many thanks to our funders and partners:

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Kahnawake Survival School

First Nations Regional Adult Education Center

Indigenous Access McGill, School of Social Work

Our World

Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project

Les Savoirs guident nos Nations
Knowledge guides our Nations
First Nations Adult Education School Council

CHAIRE-RÉSEAU DE RECHERCHE SUR LA JEUNESSE DU QUÉBEC
PREMIÈRES NATIONS ET INUIT

Centre d'éducation des adultes
Nasivvik
Adult Education Centre

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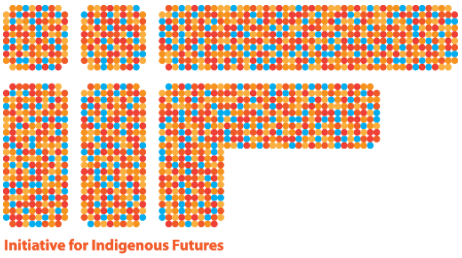
Air Inuit



ABTEC
Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace

DAWSONCINEMA COMMUNICATIONS

Miigwech, Nakurmiik, Niá:wen, Maarsii, Thank you to Vicky Boldo (Cree/Métis) and Elder Amelia Tekwatónti McGregor (Kanien'kehá:ka) for facilitation and guidance at our project celebration and web launch and to Tauni Sheldon (Inuit) and her son Alapi (Inuit) for lighting and tending the Qulliq as the stories were brought to light on February 16, 2021.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

> *"Storytelling is like air. It's that important—especially as a tool of decolonization and transformation. Stories have spirit and power and come to us as small gifts of wisdom, but they only have power if the ones that hear those stories embody them and act. Stories are about responsibility and action in Indigenous cultures."*
>
> *- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson*
>
> *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg Scholar, Writer and Artist*

The *First Peoples Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange* began from conversations, from sharing ideas and words, from stories essentially: stories of frustration, stories of reckoning, stories of potential and possibility; stories shared between Indigenous students and their teachers about education systems that were failing them, about things both lost and found at college far from home, and stories about educational futures that honour Indigenous knowledges and our relationship with this land.

For Susan Briscoe, the stories she heard from Indigenous students when teaching English at Dawson College, were a call to act. With Leanne Simpson's words in mind and driven by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, Susan initiated the *First Peoples Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange* in 2015. The aim was to address inequities in education through storytelling and create spaces for Inuit, First Nations and Métis students to share stories among themselves.

As a settler, Susan recognized she had a responsibility to contribute to decolonization and she was committed to doing the work. She also knew it was essential that Indigenous initiatives be led by Indigenous people. She assembled a marvelous team of Indigenous scholars and educators to guide and nourish the *First Peoples Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange* or *FPPSE*.

I am a Métis educator and filmmaker with a passion for collaborative media making and mentorship. Susan asked me to be a Co-Investigator of the FPPSE and work with students and community members to document their stories of education on video. Susan had been a supportive ally and advocate in our decolonizing work at Dawson, and I was thrilled to be part of it. SSHRC awarded the project three years of funding. We held the first talking circle of the *FPPSE* at Dawson College in the fall of 2016. With food, ceremony, elder support and open hearts, Indigenous students, graduates, and educators shared stories of struggle, hardship, growth and realization. There was a lot of trust in that circle, and the relationships formed that day grew during the project. I only wish Susan could have seen the circle expand, and I wish she could be writing these words.

A year into the *FPPSE* Susan was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She left us in the summer of 2018.

Susan had asked if I would take on her role of Principal Investigator. It has been an honour to carry forward this initiative that Susan began.

I am so very proud of what we have achieved through the *FPPSE*. Research in Indigenous communities has been damaging and harmful in the past, and extractive methods continue today. It was imperative that we pay close attention to ethical and cultural protocols in creating spaces for support, exchange and growth. We worked with a brilliant team of young researchers who gained skills and experience in decolonized research methodologies that many are putting into practice in their communities. And there are so many tangible outcomes from this project: a website created in collaboration with *AbTec (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace);* film workshops with *Our World; st*udent, family and teacher resources; and a community of educators, students, emerging and established scholars working across communities and institutions.

At the heart of the *FPPSE* are the stories. Students, graduates and their families shared stories of resilience, transformation and solidarity; stories that speak to the urgent need for change in formal education; stories about how Indigenous identity and culture remain an enormous source of pride, inspiration, and motivation.

As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson states, “Stories are about responsibility and action in Indigenous cultures.” As receivers of these stories, we call on you to act.

Heartfelt thanks to the storytellers, for your trust, for sharing your experiences, for teaching me so much. I am grateful to the incredible research team: Morgan Phillips, Elizabeth Fast, Vicky Boldo, Jason Lewis, Nicole Ives and Laura Shea; Community advisors and Collaborators Alex McComber, Petal McComber, Lucina Gordon, Jeannie Calvin, Anna Kristensen, Kahawihson Horne, Diane Labelle, Darryl Diamond, Mary Shem, Reisa Levine, Austin Lazare; Researchers Pasha Partridge, Mel Lefebvre, Christine Qillasiq Lussier, Jen Qupanuaq May, Angela Watts, Sandra Lynn Leclaire and Cheli Nighttraveller and so many others who contributed to FPPSE.

Together we are building self-determined futures.

All my Relations,

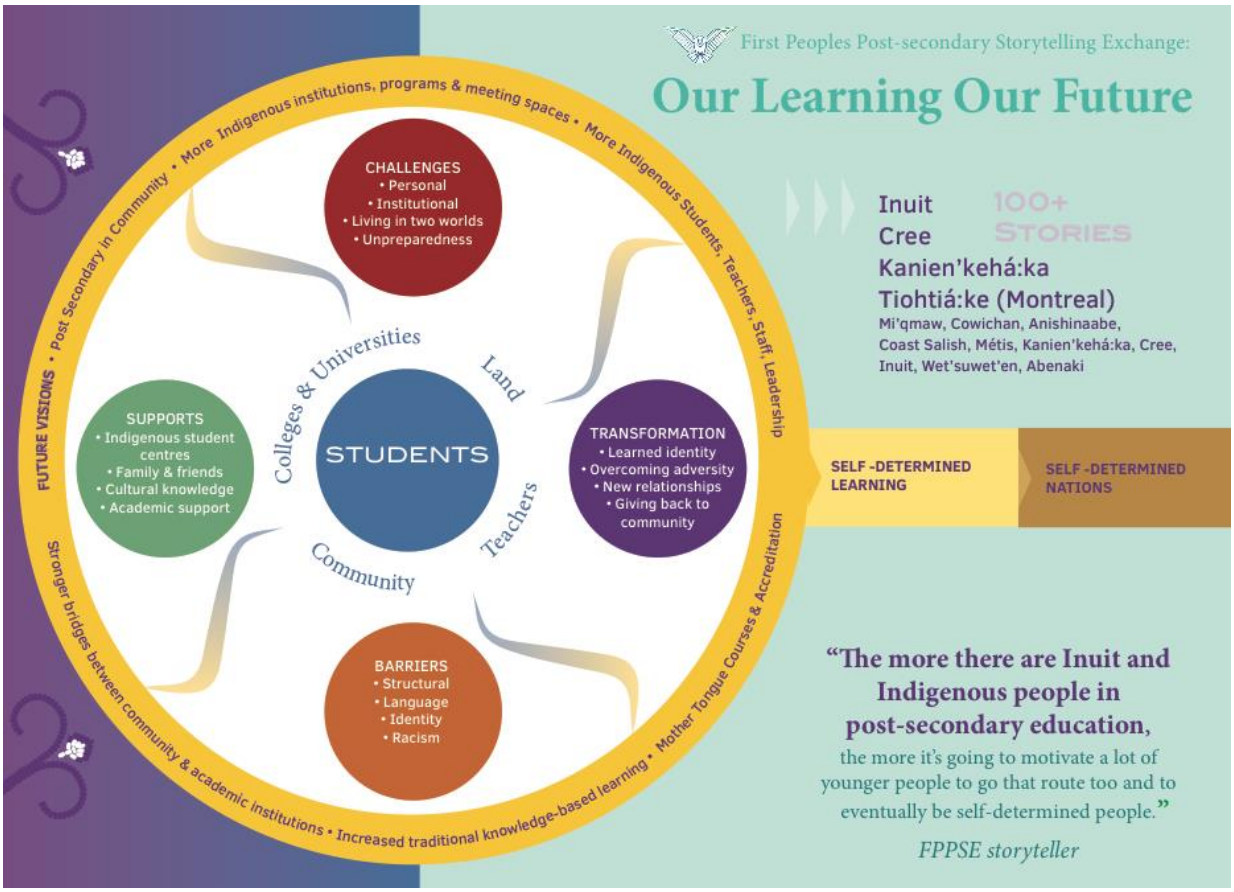
Ekoshi maga
Michelle Smith
April 12, 2022

SUMMARY

Relationships are the fabric of our communities, of our nations. Relationships across generations, with those that came before us and with the yet unborn, relationships with the lands, the waters and all the living beings– they make us who we are, give us purpose, teach us responsibility and guide us in our actions. The FPPSE is about honouring community and creating new relationships, where we are, coming together across nations to learn, share, support and resist, to be stronger together.

From 2016 to 2021, more than 100 individuals from 20 First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities shared stories of education and learning at post-secondary school, in family and on the land. Recorded on video and audio, these accounts of personal transformation, challenges, and resilience are the result of the SSHRC College & Community Social Innovation-funded project, *First Peoples' Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange* (FPPSE). The stories were shared through talking circles, individual and family testimonials, and narrative films created with the support of project partner, Our World (https://www.ourworldlanguage.ca/). These stories "live" on **fppse.net**, the project website created in collaboration with AbTec (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace - https://abtec.org). The stories highlight the need for pathways to more accessible and appropriate postsecondary education and for community-generated strategies. Storytellers' **future visions** include self-determined education, and program development and support systems designed to improve Indigenous student access to and success in postsecondary studies in accordance with the Colleges and Institutes Canada Indigenous Education Protocol; the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; the recommendations of Dawson's First Peoples Initiative's Visioning Session; and McGill's Indigenous Studies and Community Engagement Initiative. Research results are being shared with community entities, colleges, universities, government and non-government bodies in Québec and across Canada to support creating more responsive education for Indigenous students.

FPPSE has enacted reflexive, experiential, holistic and relational methods that continue to inform the research team and strengthen the community which has formed around it. Relationship building has been central to the process - across nations, between communities and educational institutions, among students, researchers and families. New partners got involved as the project evolved. Honouring these relationships and fulfilling our commitment to participants and community collaborators, we are bringing the stories back to community, sharing project results face-to-face. With an additional Connections Grant from SSHRC, Indigenous student research assistants will disseminate research findings through facilitated outreach activities to Kangiqsujuaq and Kuujjuaq, Kahnawà:ke, Kanehsatà:ke, and Tiohtiá:ke (Montréal), sharing major themes during community presentations, engaging youth, parents and community members to exchange knowledge on educational concerns and contribute to local, regional, and provincial discourse around increased access to culturally responsive higher education.



FPPSE recommendations can be found on page 52 of this report:

1. Future Visions Across Nations
2. Inuit Future Visions
3. Kanien'kehá:ka Future Visions
4. Cree Future Visions
5. Tiohtiá:ke (Montréal) Future Visions

THE RESEARCH SETTING

Research was conducted in Québec: largely in Kahnawà:ke Tiohtiá:ke (Montréal), Kuujjuaq and Kangiqsujuuaq. Kuujjuaq and Kangiqsujuuaq are located on the Ungava coast in Nunavik, in northern Québec. Kahnawà:ke (and Tiohtiá:ke) are situated on the original Kanien'kehá:ka (People of the Flint) traditional territory. Other Kanien'kehá:ka communities involved in this project include Ahkwesáhsne and Kanehsatà:ke.

Storytellers from Indigenous nations and communities across Turtle Island participated in the project. Storytelling exchanges took place in community centres, family homes, elder residences, universities and colleges.

The First Peoples' Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange (FPPSE) was developed and initially led by Dawson College faculty, the late Susan Briscoe, to advance the conversation about postsecondary educational opportunities for Indigenous peoples of Québec. Through storytelling exchanges between Indigenous students and their communities and postsecondary institutions, participants would contribute to the creation of more responsive programs and services for Indigenous students at the post-secondary level. After Susan became ill in 2017, Michelle Smith, co-founder of Dawson's First Peoples Initiative and the Journeys First Peoples Transition Program and Cinema-Communications Faculty, became Principal Investigator of this storytelling exchange project. The team is grateful for Susan's foresight and commitment to Indigenous education. Without her dedication, energy and leadership, this project would not have come to fruition.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified closing the gap in education between First Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians as one of the highest priorities of the complex social enterprise of reconciliation. Led by Dawson College with partners Concordia University, Kahnawà:ke Survival School, First Nations Regional Adult Education Centre, McGill University and John Abbott College, the FPPSE explored a new strategy to address this gap, improve Indigenous access to education and contribute to the decolonizing process in post-secondary education. Over four years, more than 100 individuals from twenty First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities shared stories of education and learning at school, college, university, in family and on the land. The FPPSE process was guided by Community Advisory Boards (CABs) and followed OCAP™ (ownership, control, access, and possession) research principles of the First Nations Information Governance Centre for data collection processes in Indigenous communities (First Nations Centre, 2007; Schnarch, 2004). All aspects of the project involved mentorship and capacity building with emerging Indigenous scholars.

Project outcomes -- stories and community guided analysis -- are being disseminated to community entities, colleges, universities, government and non-government bodies in Québec and across Canada to support the creation more responsive education for Indigenous students. Research results include audio and video stories, narrative films, analysis, recommendations and a resource rich project website, fppse.net. Community-specific booklets (Cree, Kanien'kehá:ka, Inuit and Tiohtiá:ke (Montréal)) are being created to offer communities tangible materials to draw from for their local educational processes and

projects. We will continue to work with FPPSE partners and new collaborators to have the widest possible outreach and impact.

PROJECT GOALS

1. Co-create new stories about postsecondary education to inspire and support Indigenous students to pursue their academic goals
2. Advance the academic institutional decolonizing processes
3. Honour and strengthen Inuit, First Nations and Métis perspectives of education, teaching and learning.
4. Strengthen community/college/university ties
5. Provide recommendations and calls to action related to:
    - Making the school environment more welcoming for Indigenous students;
    - Making programs more relevant to both Indigenous students and the needs of their communities;
    - Advocating for more student support centres and programming at postsecondary institutions;
    - Calling for more teacher training and striving to eradicate racism in education.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. Build capacity of Inuit, First Nations and Métis students in Indigenous research and scholarship.
2. Reinforce community-based efforts and processes for creating postsecondary learning opportunities at home.
3. Co-create more accessible and positive postsecondary educational contexts for Indigenous students.
4. Contribute to Indigenizing and Decolonizing work in post-secondary:
    - Incorporate Indigenous pedagogies across disciplines to benefit all students.
    - Include Indigenous cultural production, knowledges, and ways of knowing at all levels.
    - Create culturally grounded resources for educators to enhance curriculum and teaching materials to support more Indigenous youth in reaching their educational goals.
    - Educate non-Indigenous students and sensitize faculty regarding Indigenous culture and concerns as well as the ongoing effects of colonialism.
6. Contribute to and push for change in Indigenous education policy in Québec.

MEET THE TEAM

Research Team

- Susan Briscoe (Dawson College), former Principal Investigator
- Michelle Smith (Dawson College), Principal Investigator
- Elizabeth Fast (Concordia University), Co-Investigator
- Nicole Ives (McGill University), Co-Investigator
- Jason Lewis (Concordia University & AbTec), Co-Investigator, Website Development
- Morgan Kahentonni Phillips (McGill University), Research Coordinator
- Laura Shea (Dawson College), Institutional Liaison
- Austin Lazare (Kahnawà:ke) Video Production

Research Assistants

- Lucina Gordon (Concordia University)
- Jeannie Calvin (Concordia University)
- Kahawihson Horne (Concordia University)
- Pasha Partridge (McGill University)
- Anna Kristensen (Dawson College)
- Mel Lefebvre (Concordia University)
- Christine Qillasiq Lussier (Concordia University)
- Angela Watts (Concordia University, York University)
- Jennifer Qupanuaq May (John Abbott College)
- Sandra Lynn Leclaire (McGill University)
- Cheli Nighttraveller (Concordia University)

Collaborators

- Vicky Boldo, Cultural and Spiritual Advisor
- Tiawentí:non Canadian (Dawson College, First Peoples' Centre)
- Courtney Montour (Indigenous Access McGill)
- Reisa Levine, Web and Social media Coordinator
- Allan Downey, PhD (McGill, First Peoples House)
- Rob Cassidy, PhD (Concordia, Director of Centre for Teaching and Learning)
- Orenda Boucher-Curotte (Concordia Aboriginal Student Resource Centre)

Partner Representatives

- Petal McComber, Kahnawà:ke Survival School

- Lisa Neilsen, Our World
- Natasha Blanchet Cohen Chaire-réseau sur la jeunesse du Québec - Premières Nations et Inuits
- Louise Legault, John Abbott College
- Diane Labelle, FNRAEC, Kahnawà:ke
- Alex Prévost, Nasiviik Adult Education Centre
- Air Inuit, Pita Aatimi

Community Advisors

- Alex McComber
- Lucina Gordon
- Jeannie Calvin
- Kahawihson Horne
- Pasha Partridge
- Anna Kristensen
- Lorrie Oke
- Mary Shem
- Angela Watts

Our World Filmmakers

- Nigel Adams
- Aldku, Annie, Eyetsiak, Glenn, Jennifer, Judith, Lisa, Lizzie, Ned, Peter, Putulik & Tiivimasiu
- Neekallak Annanack
- Vicky Boldo
- Kanerahtens Bush
- Jackson Coyes
- Joy Katsi'stano:ron Deer
- 'Chef Maluh' Marlene Hale
- Mark Kadjulik
- Leena
- Pasha Partridge
- Brooke Rice

Contributors

- Jesse Bochner, Video editing
- Guillermo Perez Lopez, Video editing
- Cheryl Delaronde, Graphic Design

- Glen Gear, Filmmaking *Our World* workshops
- Yolande Mount, Translation
- Sophie Tukaluk, Translation
- Lizzie Tukai, Translation
- Kim Delormier, Graphic design and administrative support
- Leilani Shaw, Logo design
- Lucas LaRochelle, Web design
- Michael Hemingway, Web design
- Valerie Bourdon, Web design
- Matthew Coutu-Moya, Report Copy editing

Note: Some positions and affiliations may have changed.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Shaped by the main question, "*What are your stories about postsecondary education?",* individual and family interviews and Talking Circles were recorded with permission in audio and/or video with an open-ended approach that allowed storytellers to share experiences and perspectives they determined to be important. Story exchanges took place at Dawson College, Concordia University, the Native Friendship Centre and in private homes with individuals, groups, pairs, and in talking circles. Research assistants were trained and supported to facilitate talking circles and conduct story exchanges.

Main Research Question (individual interviews/family interviews/Talking Circles):

- What are your stories or experiences about postsecondary education (past or present)? This open-ended question allows storytellers to share experiences and perspectives that are important to them.

Sub-Questions:

- Can you provide an example of challenges or barriers faced by you or your community in postsecondary education?
- Can you think of a success story about postsecondary education?
- What kind of supports are/were important to you during your educational journey?
- What kind of postsecondary experiences do you envision for Indigenous students – now and in the future?

Stories were then transcribed and coded, revealing major themes and sub-themes indicating challenges, successes, facilitators, transformative experiences they faced while in school and away from their communities, and the changes they propose for the future. They contributed to the creation of

narratives that will make college and university programs and services for Indigenous students at the post-secondary level more responsive.

Indigenous research methods were prioritized throughout the process, with the team incorporating "western" approaches when relevant. Given the volume of stories shared, transcribing and coding for instance were useful tools for determining common themes in the stories. It became clear that there were many shared experiences among the participants, similar barriers across the institutions they attended, and a common desire for opportunities to learn and practice their culture while in post-secondary. In addition to conventional research approaches like determining themes in a "data set", it was important that the integrity of each story be maintained and that each unique story and storyteller be celebrated. The stories of consenting participants "live" on the website fppse.net as largely unedited videos and storytellers were honoured at a private ceremony.

In addition to talking circles and story exchanges, we collaborated with *Our World,* an organization that partners with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities across Canada to provide access to media arts training as a means of empowerment through artistic & cultural expression. In a process of digital story-making we engaged a local team of Indigenous filmmakers *to* work side by side with students to create their own narrative films.

METHODOLOGY

Decolonizing as well as Indigenous and participatory methodologies guided this community-driven process. These research approaches have been essential to this project at every step. We recognize the harm that research has caused in the past (and continues to cause). We believe in relevant, equitable, respectful and meaningful community-driven research (Graeme, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2003; Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2001).

The *FPPSE* included researcher preparation, decolonizing and relational ethics, protocols for knowledge gathering, and making meaning by centering Indigenous voices. Doing ethical research within an Indigenous framework requires time and attention. There are many factors to consider related to possible impacts on individual participants and their communities:

- How do cultural protocols shape the research project?
- What is the overarching goal of the research project and who will benefit most?
- How will the research benefit the community where the research occurs?
- How will the knowledge gained from the research be shared/returned to both individual participants and their respective communities (including the urban sector)?

To address such questions, we invited students and community representatives from the nations involved in the project to be part of Community Advisory Boards (CABs). The CABs' role was to oversee the research process and guide important aspects of decision-making. In line with First Nations

principles of OCAP™ and the Kahnawà:ke Schools Diabetes Prevention Project's (KSDPP) Code of Research Ethics, Community Advisory Boards were essential in helping ensure accountability to the communities involved and continually reviewing the relevance of the research and project activities. CABs helped develop and test interview questions, vetted preliminary results and guided dissemination of outcomes.

During storytelling exchanges, each participant had the choice of telling their story on audio or video, individually or with a friend or family member. Some storytelling exchanges took place in personal homes, some at school. We made sure participants had food and drink and offered cultural and spiritual support. All FPPSE participants were gifted with an honorarium. All stories were transcribed, and participants were asked if they preferred this be done by a non-community member. Many of our communities are small!

The notion of Free, Prior and Informed consent was thoroughly discussed with the CABs. The project's goals, intended outcomes, and use of the stories were discussed with all participants. Individuals telling their stories were able to review them after sharing them. This involved taking the extra time needed to 'member check', which meant seeking approval from participants each time their stories or parts of their stories would be shared (from either written quotes or film clips). Participants could decide if their story was presented publicly or not. All participants had the option, and still have the option, to withdraw from the project.

This we believe, is 'lived' decolonized research. What we learned is that taking the extra time to add these steps into the research process contributes to building trusting relationships with each other, which usually end up being long-lasting. This has been rewarding for all of us.

Our process is detailed in a Research Manual co-authored by project team members.

https://fppse.net/wp-content/uploads/FPPSE-Research-Manual_V3-1.pdf

CAPACITY BUILDING

The FPPSE project provided participatory research opportunities for Indigenous students and emerging scholars across disciplines including social work, history, art, education, sociology, film and media, and Indigenous Studies. Eight graduate and undergraduate Indigenous students from Dawson College, Concordia University and McGill University were actively involved in the *FPPSE* project throughout the research process. They have gained experience in:

- Community consultation, engagement, project coordination, targeted training sessions
- Relationship building and networking
- Indigenous, participatory and community-based research methodologies and ethics
- Practical application in interview schedule development, individual interviewing and

Talking Circle facilitation

- Transcription, coding, data analysis
- Technical knowledge of audio and video recording
- Filmmaking, storytelling, scriptwriting, animation, and editing
- Conference presentations in local and international venues, in person and virtually
- Seeking solutions to community challenges that directly affect them
- Coordinating community gatherings, connecting with and inviting relevant community stakeholder groups and other participants, facilitating community gatherings
- Co-writing community-specific findings booklets and academic publications
- Media outreach and communication

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research findings are presented as a compilation of key themes and experiences expressed in the stories shared during FPPSE in talking circles, individual and family story exchanges. Nation-specific themes, experiences and individual and collective voices follow.

COMMON THEMES ACROSS NATIONS

Across almost all the stories, storytellers expressed a desire for better educational opportunities in their home communities. For the storytellers, a major hurdle to their success is being away from sustaining sources of love, support and tradition: family, community, ceremony, traditional food, and the land. Similarly, although appreciative of the support networks that exist in some institutions and the growing number of Indigenous faculty, many storytellers found themselves battling homesickness and feelings of loneliness, belonging and isolation. Many struggle daily in the duality of western academia's expectations versus their traditional ways of knowing and being. Often situated in classes that tokenize them, with teachers asking them to teach others in the class on Indigenous realities, storytellers expressed the stress of this burden and a need for training of non-native teachers and students on historic and ongoing colonization. There was an overwhelming indication of lack of academic preparedness, including language skills, reading, writing, grammar, western expectations and navigating city life.

Considering these challenging experiences, students expressed their resiliency, capacity for facing challenges, the transformative possibilities and the value of Indigenous education and pedagogy such as land-based learning. A future state of postsecondary education for the storytellers reflected possibilities of in-community college and university, adequate funding, more empathy and support, less racism, self-governance, culturally appropriate learning and human dignity. As indicators of success, many storytellers selected their own selves as exemplary, fully cognizant of the disparity they face and their

unique realities as Indigenous graduates.

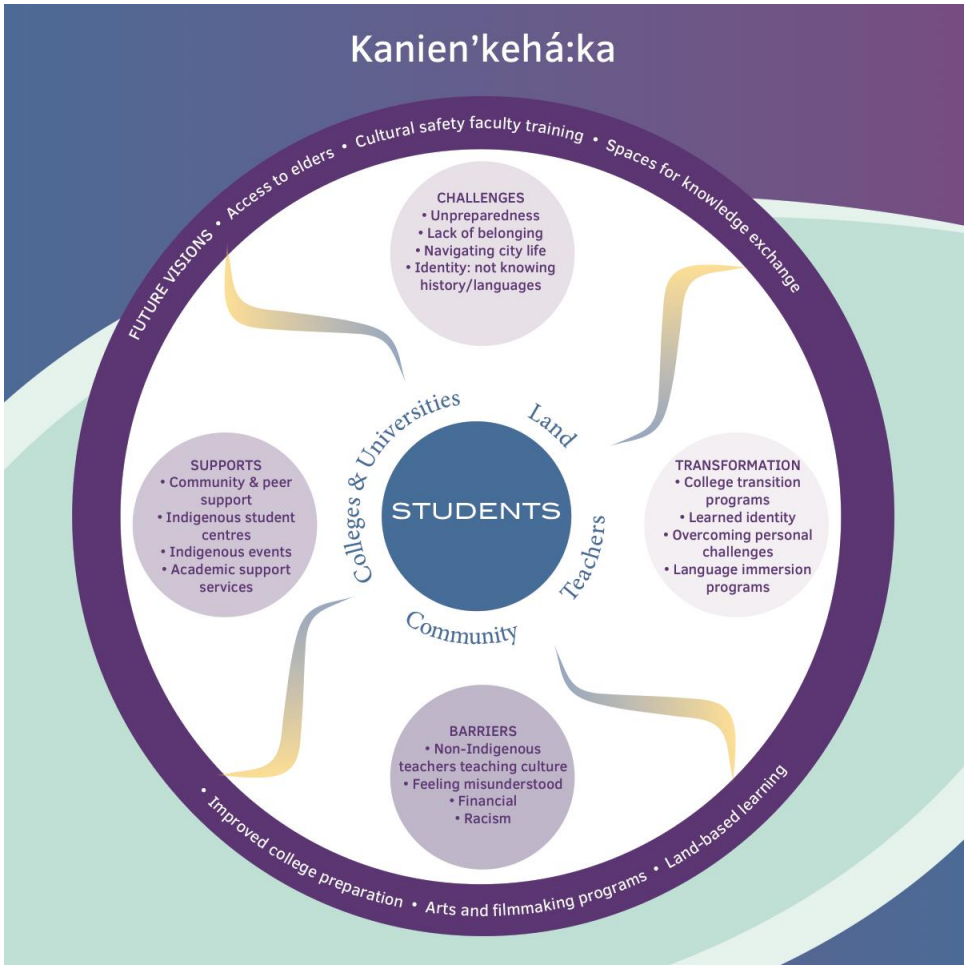
KANIEN'KEHÁ:KA VOICES

Between 2016 and 2019, the stories of 14 Kanien'kehá:ka people were gathered through interviews that were both audio and video recorded. There were seven individual interviews, two pairs, and one family which included three individuals from three generations – Grandmother, mother and daughter. Kanien'kehá:ka participants were either from the communities of Kahnawà:ke, Kanehsatà:ke, or Ahkwesáhsne.

Kahnawà:ke, meaning 'on the rapids,' is a Kanien'kehá:ka community located approximately 15 kilometers south of Montréal on the shore of the St. Lawrence River. The current population is approximately 8,000 people. Kahnawà:ke is one of eight Kanien'kehá:ka communities now spread out spread out in Québec, Ontario and New York State (see map). The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation are one of six Nations that make up the Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse) Confederacy, also known by its colonized name as the Iroquois, or the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy. The Kanien'kehá:ka are descendants of an ancient society with a rich, vibrant, and unique heritage, and despite colonial efforts to eradicate the culture and traditional teachings, our resilience has helped to keep much of the language and culture intact. In recent years, following the 1990 Oka Crisis, language and cultural revitalization efforts have steadily increased. Other Kanien'kehá:ka communities involved in this project include Ahkwesáhsne and Kanehsatà:ke.

Many students from these three communities who choose to pursue higher education, attend postsecondary institutions in the city of Montréal. For the Kanien'kehá:ka people, although education in Canada generally falls under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government allocates funding for tuition,

textbooks and living expenses and is administered in each community. Federal funding is transferred to communities and funds are administered through either Band Council's education funding, or education departments operated by Kanien'kehá:ka people within each community. Postsecondary students are also eligible to apply for scholarships, bursaries and fellowships across Canada.



CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

Through this journey of story gathering, **we learned about students' resiliency and capacity for facing challenges, and the transformative possibilities they recognized from their educational experiences**. We learned about the enormous hurdles Kanien'kehá:ka students face in higher education such as needing to feel a sense of belonging at school even though some students' commute to Montréal for post-secondary education is only a 15-20-minute car ride, (longer by public transport), grappling with intergenerational trauma, racism, lack of Indigenous representation, loneliness, inadequate support, stereotyping, settler educators' lack of cultural knowledge, and being disrespected by peers and teachers.

I was taking a phys. ed. class and I was getting to be friends with these people, like two of my classmates. They asked me where I was from. It was the first class. I said I'm from Kahnawà:ke, I'm Mohawk. And they're like "Oh." And their attitude toward me and their demeanor was night and day. It was like that [snaps fingers]. It just changed and they never spoke to me again, and I never spoke to them again... I guess the biggest problem I had during that time was like, loneliness. Just not having a lot of people I knew there. There's no- there were no support structures for Indigenous students, it was just- I was kind of by myself a lot of the time. And I didn't really care for- I dropped out after a year. (January 11, 2018)

I hope that each class will have more than one Indigenous student in it. It is very beneficial to have someone who is of the same status as you, that you feel comfortable talking with, to help proceed through courses. I say this because there can be instances where you make it known one time that you're Indigenous and there might be a class discussion where the teacher will call you out to gain an Indigenous perspective. The problem with this is that we are put on the spot when we don't want to be. Yes, it's good to have that perspective, but teachers need to understand that this is extremely uncomfortable to have 20+ eyes on you. (February 12, 2018)

There's a lot of work that needs to be done for us and for the stereotype to finally be broken, 'cuz it hasn't and there's a lot of people that still continue with the words, and the words have the biggest impact on us. And it's, they don't know how to communicate with us in a respectful manner, because for them I guess it's like a norm. But they're attempting to teach Indigenous topics to the students but it's not being taught the way that it should be. It's like they don't come and they don't reach out to us. They don't ask an Elder, like what's your perspective on this, or how do you think we should bring it forth? When they really should put that into consideration because the Elders hold the stories, they hold everything. It's an oral tradition you know, it's not written in the book. (June 4, 2017)

Even myself when I was going to school here, we weren't allowed to speak Mohawk. And that was a small school. Every time somebody would speak Mohawk, the teacher would get up and we would get strapped. So finally, a lot of the kids, they'd drop out of school 'cuz they didn't want to get strapped. 'Cuz a lot of them didn't want to speak English, they'd speak Mohawk 'cuz that's how they're used to it in their homes, speaking Mohawk to their parents. So, when they come to school, they have a hard time... So that's the way it was, even in the little school. So, what do you expect, to go out in the big school, it's gonna be the same. You're not comfortable. Even when we used to go, when I was a teenager or something like, we used to wanna go fishing. And we weren't allowed to go fishing...we weren't allowed even to go hunting. We had to have a paper to do all that stuff. And here it was our land, and we had to get a paper from the Band Office to go fishing. (June 4, 2017)

Some academic concerns expressed by Kanien'kehá:ka students that **impeded upon academic success** included the transition to a **Eurocentric school system**, issues around the **French language barrier**, **workload expectations**, and the need for students to see an **increased presence of Indigenous staff and**

faculty at the postsecondary level. Kanien'kehá:ka students have expressed professors should not put pressure or rely on Indigenous students as 'experts' in the classroom.

Not unlike other Indigenous students, Kanien'kehá:ka students rely on their Indigeneity for strength and stress the importance of cultural knowledge such as the Seven Generations Philosophy.

> McGill used to come to Kanehsatà:ke and give us classes...if you want to start reaching communities and people and start bringing that inclusiveness, then you need to come out of your box and come and meet us halfway. It's not only us that we have to come out of our box and meet you. It has to be both. So I think some way, somehow, somebody can manage to create something where the people who have difficulties, who are way up north, that they can somehow manage something to meet them halfway. Maybe come down to Montréal and do part of their education here, and maybe half of it out there... We're used to change, we're use to movement, we like interacting, we like working with our hands, we're visual. So those skills need to be understood when teaching a lot of Indigenous people. (June 4, 2017)

> There's like a lot of dropouts, but I hate to use the word dropout because people do things at their own pace. Like there's no set rule saying school needs to be completed in this time span, where people are different... students should know that it's ok to try school, and if you don't like it, then it's ok to take time off... I think if students are reminded that you can go back to your education because it's good to take time off because after my first semester, I took a semester off...it was kind of like I was in the Western colonial school system for half of my year and then the other half of my year was in my traditional home. And learning traditional knowledge, like picking medicine... I think that when you're getting overwhelmed with that workload, it's good to take time off. (January 31, 2018)

> We heard Mohawk throughout our education, but we had to kind of set that aside because we had to immerse into the mainstream. So we understand quite well, but we can't speak it because we were gone all day, we were speaking English and had to take French. So when we'd come back, we would hear it. From time to time my grandmother would ask us to speak Mohawk... We were split. So it was hard for us to know where to be... you're getting pulled and tugged in different ways. Socially, emotionally, your body, you know, your family. Maybe your economic status or your social status, what's going on in the community, you know if your family's in distress. All of these issues are so important and pertinent to the factors of what that student walks into your class with. (June 4, 2017)

> My entire life from the age of 4 to the age of 16, I was educated in Kahnawà:ke by community members or by people who I built relationships with...they tried really hard to prepare me for post-secondary. You know I knew kind of what to expect in terms of workload and time commitment and independence and yet going to college was such a culture shock for me. I remember the first day I got ready for school. I had already bought my books which in itself had been like this little adventure I had in the city and I had to reach the bus but my class is at 8, so I

had to get like the 6 o'clock bus and I remember just feeling so sad that I cried. I didn't want to go, I cried. So, then I got to school and it was like an airport, the way the college was laid out. You know the biggest school I've ever been to in my life. I felt lost and I felt alone. (June 18, 2018)

Students describe that the daily challenges of being Indigenous often include **financial barriers to education** and that what might be a factor of consideration for settler students may be far more of an obstacle for Indigenous students. Indigenous students tend to have **greater difficulty accessing loans, bursaries, employment, housing, resources within the city and navigating those resources**. and lower general levels of wealth and intergenerational wealth than settler communities.

> I knew I wanted to go to university since I was at high school, but I didn't know how I would pay for it. It was always going to be the struggle, because I came from like a more working class, working-poor background, and I knew that my family wouldn't be able to help me so I kind of went in it blindly that like under good faith like probably that I would be able to get the loans and bursary from the government...I was accepted at university but I wasn't able to get the loans and bursary... I would say the darkest time of my life was when I was out of school because I like really wanted to be in school and I was denied that opportunity... just because of money. (November 7, 2017)

> I think those are like steps that can help create awareness and help get people to be more involved and understand I guess, be more supportive to Indigenous students, but I think a big part of it is like understanding the lived reality is not always going to be the same and the obstacles aren't always going to be the same, they're going to be a lot more intense, for housing, for shelter, for like food, for like money, because when you're leaving your community to go to school, you're a lot more vulnerable and you're a lot more and you're a lot more vulnerable to the things that can happen and you don't always have the support system that you would normally... (November 7, 2017)

RESOURCES & SUPPORTS

Considering these extensive challenges and barriers, students found support at the various institutional resource centers as well as through their peers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty and staff, and most importantly, their families and friends. These **supports provided confidence, community, motivation, comfort and access to cultural activities**.

> It was one of the best things I ever did. I found a community there...that's one of the reasons why I was able to succeed...it was called the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre... I had friends who are going to the university that I was comfortable with. I had researched and found services for students with disabilities for transportation and then just by luck I ended up taking classes in a program that I ended up loving that I was completely out of my field. So I majored in religion

and within that program, there was just a wonderful supportive network of professors and my cohort was wonderful. I have met some of the best friends I've ever made in my life there. So I was really happy. (June 18, 2018)

I went to Kiuna Institute in Odanak. It was Cégep. And it was probably a good two years that I was there, it was fun, I met a lot of nice people. I met new Natives from all over North America. It was really good because they incorporated a lot of cultural activities and really incorporated a lot of everybody's culture, so we didn't feel left out of our traditions and stuff like that. But school's always been hard, always, for me. And I'm pretty sure it's hard for a lot of other people in Native communities because they don't feel at home... (January 31, 2018)

I personally find that there is enough information out there to know about Indigenous events. There's Facebook, the Concordia Website, Native Montréal, etc. I think the problem is being comfortable enough to visit these places. It can be very intimidating coming to the city, and basically starting over. You have to make new friends by visiting events yourself and getting to know the people there. What's important is making these spaces comfortable for someone who is traveling alone; that they feel included and not greeted and then pushed to the side. If someone doesn't have Facebook, that's where it can be challenging. unfortunately, I don't know how that can be accommodated. Possibly, visiting the Concordia website and searching the different centers and then the connections continue from there. (February 12, 2018)

Holding to those strong role models as teachers, I learnt how to be a better teacher myself. So when I would teach...whether it's basket making or beading or sewing or anything like that, I would take those examples from those teachers and that's what I would integrate into myself. So teachers need to understand that there are models for everybody. And if they allow those behaviors or ways of interacting be positive, then it's a win-win...when you start reaching students, then your job becomes a dream...You've got students who want to work for you and who are producing, and I think that's real power when you get people, students who want to actually work, to help, and to do good things. That's real power for me. (June 4, 2017)

SUCCESSES & TRANSFORMATION

Success, as defined by Kanien'kehá:ka storytellers, was wide ranging and includes seeing **role models** succeeding and sharing their experience, **being in post-secondary** as an Indigenous person, incorporating traditional learning, **returning knowledge to community**, overcoming or managing challenges such as addiction, achieving one's academic goals, and **reconnecting with land** and community.

I don't want anyone to give up. It doesn't matter if you have a baby. It doesn't matter if you're at rock bottom on drugs and alcohol... Keep fighting, and the only time you're gonna feel horrible about yourself and feel like... I might as well just go do drugs in Montréal and live on

the streets. That's if you give up. You know, and you don't have to. Like I could've said: Oh, well, I have this illness, I might as well just drink myself to death. And I could've easily done that. I could've been dead right now and I'm not, so I think that it's important for [students] to keep in mind that you don't have to give up and, like I said, you never fail unless you stop trying. And this September I am registering for the assistant to nursing. (November 10, 2017)

It would be nice to have more Indigenous students come into university, graduating, and getting those jobs. My uncle...spoke at the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre when my sister graduated, he was given his honorary PhD by the university...he said: When you graduate, your whole family, your whole community graduates with you. And that's what we need. We need more kids, aspiring to get the education to follow their dreams. Because it will bring the money in with their careers. That would make the communities better... It's not as hard as you might think. It seems like it's a world away sometimes. Half an hour away from town. But when I first started, it was like I was going to the edge of the universe. I never really knew anything about the city, or the people, or academia itself was so foreign to me. And actually, getting into it wasn't that hard...we're all smarter than we think we are. (January 11, 2018)

Maybe just the fact that I'm here. It's a success story for me, at least. Because I never had high expectations for myself. I always thought that I would be working in a garage or being a manual laborer, construction worker. I guess more of a personal thing. I just had to dig myself out, find out what really mattered to me. And now I'm on my way to becoming an environmental technician. Natural environment is like what I really care about. I care about conservation. So just the fact that I'm here. I had an opportunity provided and to actually follow that path was a pretty good success. (January 11, 2018)

...I ended up leaving Vanier, told not to come back until I figured out what I want to do with my life. And I did the Ratiwannahní:rats Program in Kahnawà:ke. So it was years of adult language immersion. And we're immersed in our language and our culture and our history and I think that was exactly what I needed leaving high school. It took two years and because I immersed myself in my culture, I left there with a better understanding of who I was as a Kanien'kehá:ka woman and then I was ready. I knew what I wanted to do, I wanted to go back to school. I thought I was gonna go back to Cégep but somehow the Education Center told me like well you're 21 now maybe you want to consider going into university. So I signed up as a mature student at Concordia University and I loved it. (June 18, 2018)

FUTURE VISION

The unique experience of each student is expressed in their own story, yet common themes stood out regarding the future of Indigenous students in post-secondary studies. This included **recognizing the need for faculty training in cultural safety, policy change, and First Nations, Inuit and Métis**

involvement in transforming the education systems that have long caused harm. The importance of engaging with role models in community was highlighted along with integrating cultural-specific curricula.

> I think just people who have [gone] to school in their communities need to talk more to the youth who are thinking about it, or who are thinking that they could keep going on or can't. I think there just needs to be more examples. But there were a lot of examples of people pursuing post education, for me when I was in high school, but I didn't know any of them, none of them really came to talk to us. If they did, they went to the school in town. I feel like I was kind of at a disadvantage because I went to school out of town. (January 31, 2018)

> My hope for the future would be having people look at as us the same as everybody else. Not having that stereotype anymore. Having more Indigenous teachers teaching classes to us. Having more hands on, possibly, like I understand that it's good to be learning about education and psychology and sociology, but I also think that not just little life skills like managing money but really the big ones. Like for us, sewing, making baskets would be really cool...and having the same...credentials, as you would as a normal institution. Having that, that would be really awesome to see. That would change a lot. And I think it would actually bring in a lot more people to want to come and learn. Because for a lot of communities they do art, they do hands on stuff, and that's their means of income. So why not actually learn it in a safe place, and to continue the same way how you've been taught for so many years by our Elders and pass on these stories and to keep the culture alive. (June 4, 2017)

> I was born here for a reason, in this time, change is gonna happen. It's there, I see it, it's upon us...gotta start that road and keep going, and make sure that this doesn't happen to everybody else in the future. So, some deep stuff, that's what it is. I mean, right now it's rocks, all rocks. One day we're gonna have cement and it's gonna smooth, smooth driving. And we're not going back to dirt, and we're not going back, we're just gonna keep going straight for everybody else. That's why I think it's awesome, being in an institution, I was making a network with everybody that I've been with,and talking and making connections with all these different teachers, and these different workshops and seeing that there are some teachers that are interested in making changes for the students and for Indigenous teachings and whatnot. It's a positive, it's positive and it brings hope, but there is still a lot of work to do. And like I said before there's still a lot of stereotypes that have to be broken. (June 4, 2017)

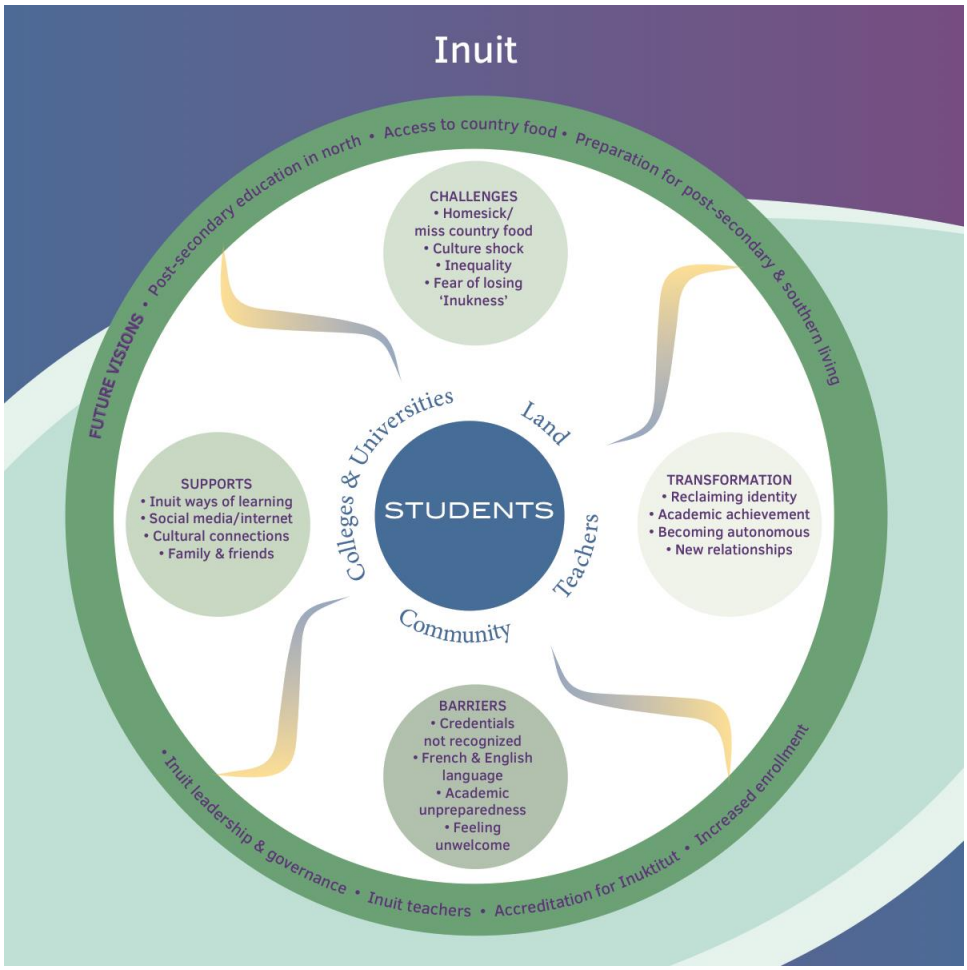
INUIT VOICES

Nunavik is home to almost 14,000 people. It is one of four regions in Inuit Nunangat (homeland) and includes 14 communities on the Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay coasts in northern Québec. Twenty-six participants from the Inuit communities of Kuujjuaq, Kangiqsujuaq, Kuujjuarapik, Inukjuak

and Salluit in Nunavik shared their educational experiences by audio or video in talking circles and one on one interviews. Most storytelling exchanges took place in Kuujjuaq and Kangisujuaq while some took place in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal).

Nunavimmiut talked about culture shock, isolation, discrimination and trauma as challenges to their success. Their stories highlight how identity (language, values, connection to the land) provides a strong foundation and source of pride and confidence. Many students have been supported in post-secondary education by Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (Nunavik School Board) and the student support programs at postsecondary institutions. While some post-secondary certificate programs exist in Nunavik, most Inuit wanting higher education must go south. All Inuit storytellers shared their ultimate hope of having a college or university in Nunavik with a curriculum centered on Inuit ways of knowing, learning and being.

(Makivik Corporation https://www.makivik.org/nunavik-maps/)



CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

Inuit have had to adapt, change or put their traditional land-based ways-of-being on hold in order to accommodate western institutions, having to choose between their own culture/community and their desire for post-secondary education, found almost solely in the south (Arctic post-secondary: Nunavut Arctic College since 1995; College of the North Atlantic since the 1960s; Yukon University, first university in the Arctic, 2019). Some family and community members discourage potential students from making the journey, seeing it as lacking relevance or as a form of colonization that diminishes the tie to one's Inuit identity especially since Inuit knowledge is not included in southern post-secondary western curriculum. Storytellers shared that their families worry about them leaving for the south and/or they worry about their own children as they make the journey, considering things like safety, disconnection, finances, navigating city life and when they will return home:

> As Inuit, this is our land and our home. When our children travel very far for a higher education it is hard. When they are going through a hard time and are unsure it is very hard for us as

> parents because it is not easy to go see them. The fact that we cannot help them the way we want to, hurts us. (Oct 22, 2018)
>
> I worry a lot because it's her first time away from home and her first time being on her own in the south. Whenever she went down south, she would always come with me so with her being gone without me I worry about her on a daily basis. I worry if she's safe. Does she have enough food? Is she doing her assignments well? Is she adapting well? I worry about all these little things that I don't think she even knows I worry about. I keep in regular contact with her but having known what it was like when I was a teenager and being new to the south I fear for her safety, most of the time. (Oct 23, 2018)

Current and former post-secondary Inuit students shared that northern primary and secondary schools are not at the same level as those in the south and so varying degrees of **preparedness for western academia** is experienced in areas such as English or French reading, writing and language skills. This has contributed to students feeling overwhelmed, discouraged, inadequate and acutely aware of the differences between the western way of learning versus how Inuit have learned on the land since time immemorial:

> I remember the first day I went into college, I felt very intimidated because I was like one of the one or two people in the whole room that was Inuk. And it seemed like all the other students knew what to do and I had no idea what I was doing and I was painfully shy back then. So, it was even harder for me to adapt because I didn't know. Okay. Why do they have all these notebooks, why do they have all their stationery equipment ready? What's going on? As Inuit we usually learn by watching, by looking. So, we learned a lot by watching our fellow students...we were like why are they writing so much? Because we usually keep our information, and we don't need to take notes. (Oct 23, 2018)

Storytellers pointed to the **interconnected social issues in community** that contribute to students leaving elementary and secondary school including unemployment, addiction, hunger, intergenerational trauma and suicide. S**ettlers are often ignorant of or misinformed** about the causes and context of these issues even though they may perpetuate them, e.g., settlers taking jobs in the north; making decisions for Inuit or that directly impact Inuit. These social issues make it difficult for Inuit students to commit to education when they and their families are faced with these other challenges.

> Back in the day when non-Inuit came to our land, they took over and made us feel small. They became our leaders. There are many Inuit that felt that way. For example, Hudson's Bay managers. This has to change. It's not that we need to feel bigger, we just need to feel equal and feel that our culture is not any less than anyone else. I breath, and they breath. Our cultures may not be the same, but we are not any less of a person than they are. We are equal. Our way of life may be different, as well as our way of thinking but we are Inuit and that is a part of our identity. For too long, we have felt little pride in ourselves. We have felt that our culture is not equal to others and have lived that way for many years. As soon as the government, missionary,

> Hudson Bay managers and whalers came around, Inuit started to feel less than equal. It has been too long that we as Inuit have let go of who we are. (Oct 22, 2018)

> In the society up North, there's a lot of social issues that makes it very difficult. A lot of families are dealing with some addictions, unemployment, and all these tragedies, too, that happen in the North. Like, when I was in high school, one of my best friends, she was going through a lot and it was hard for me to see her, because it was hard for her to continue going to class because she lost two of her really good friends to suicide. It's very a touchy subject, but it seems like even being in Montreal for school, I still deal with these things where I get affected even though I am so far away from home because there are still a lot of people that are committing suicide. It makes it difficult for me to focus on my studies when all this is happening in my community. (June 18, 2018)

Language is a barrier in the community and in the south. Inuit students must learn English and/or French in the north, depending on the school and provincial laws and as such, risk losing their mother tongue. Storytellers shared that because they were forced to learn English and/or French, they lack skill in Inuit languages, which leaves them feeling ashamed and disconnected from their own people. Although settler languages are necessary to study in the south, many Inuit storytellers found that they were not prepared to read and write in these languages, causing stress and setbacks.

> English is my second language, but I never took any English classes at all. I never read English, I never wrote in English and then when I got to John Abbott I was expected to read and write. It was a big learning curve to get past. (Oct 22, 2018)

> I am kind of reclaiming my Indigenous knowledge through Inuktitut classes. I think that being at the ASRC [Aboriginal Student Resource Centre] having other Inuit be there, I feel like I want to be able to speak with them in 'my' language. That's another challenge that I didn't talk really about, is that, since I got to university, for the first time, I am with other Inuit. And I am very much the 'white Inuk' and I know that probably for most of them I'm probably not considered Inuk because I don't speak the language... to be in the ASRC and have other Inuit there who don't accept while I'm really trying to give to the cause, and I'm trying to relate to them by taking Inuktitut classes, talking to them as much as I can, showing them. It's not that I want to show them, it's also that I want to show myself that I can learn that language. (Jan 31, 2018)

> When I started learning French, my Inuktitut started diminishing, I started stuttering – a lot, at some point, when I started taking in French. Umm, probably because I didn't want to learn French, but I had to and I was kind of having conflicting emotions so now whenever I have to speak a language, I get a little angry that I have a speak a language [laughs] because I don't know what language I want to speak it in...I didn't realize that losing my language or you know, being Inuit and then losing my language later on kind of really impacted the way I felt about myself, like I felt less empowered. (Jan 31, 2018)

Some participants have been students in Nunavik Sivunitsavut (NS), a 1-year program in Montréal which started in 2017, offering courses focused on the history, politics, governance, culture, and language of Inuit and other circumpolar peoples. All courses are tailored to the exploration of issues that centre Inuit contexts. Graduates of NS are eligible for college credits, for completed courses designed for Inuit students to explore their Inuit identity and history and connections to Nunavik communities. NS supported students in "feeling like you belong in the education system" (Oct 23, 2018). One participant noted that the key to success was that "...it was only Inuit. The biggest thing that made a big difference [was] not feeling too alone...I'm going through the same thing all together, so the system was even bigger and better...It was very easy to get support at NS because we're all Inuit and we were staying in one classroom" (Oct 23, 2018). This was in stark contrast to Inuit students' experiences in other post-secondary programs in Montréal.

Inuit students moving from northern communities south to Montréal and the surrounding area for post-secondary studies have all experienced a **sense of loss and loneliness at leaving their families and communities** behind where they have love, support and can practice their lifestyle. Many talked about culture shock, the reality of living in two worlds, compounded by unreliable funding situations and having to work while studying:

> The challenges I faced is that you're alone. That there is not enough people that can help you. That you have to do it on your own...there was not a lot of family there so I missed my home. (Oct 22, 2018)

> It was scary because you don't know the big cities, how they work and the transport. Where to go and how to spend your money. I guess I don't know much about big cities and- but you know more about smaller communities. (Oct 22, 2018)

> I was very very homesick. I wasn't used to the city life. That affected my grades. I was starving for traditional food as well. I asked for traditional food from anyone that was coming from the north. And I learned that the honorariums and allowances was barely enough to survive on. So I had to work during the summer holidays just to make it by 'cause it was barely enough to survive off of... Being around family, like these are all things that southerners take advantage. They don't even realize what it's like to be homesick because they have their family in the city they live with their family, so missing our family and being homesick is a big, huge hindrance. And it really takes away the focus of what's important and what was important back then was to go to school. But because I was so homesick I couldn't focus on the school. (Oct 23, 2018)

Many Inuit storytellers expressed confusion and a sense of being **overwhelmed by the demands of western education** and how southerners learn: by listening and writing things down. Inuit have a long tradition of learning by experience:

> The idea of learning in a classroom is very different from Inuit tradition. My parents, grandparents and all the people before us, taught on the land, about the land. (Oct 22, 2018)

During classes, Inuit storytellers were acutely aware of being a minority, stating they were repeatedly **asked by teachers to identify themselves and educate the rest of the class** on their lived experience and past and ongoing colonization. Within First Peoples studies programs, they felt the content to be very personal and heavy **without debrief or aftercare**:

> I envision Indigenous students to feel comfortable in the classroom, to not feel like you're the token native, and people are going to look up to you for answers, because that's very uncomfortable. Because I don't know everything. You shouldn't ask me a question where it's not in my field, or it's not even in my nation. Why should I know? I'm Inuk, so if you're asking me something related to a totally different nation, I can't answer that. Just to be aware that there are a lot of Indigenous people from different nations. Just for the teachers and the students to be aware of that, even, and to be aware of the social issues that we face, and to be aware of basically, a lot of the realities that we face. (Jun 18, 2018)

There are certainly challenges for **Inuit who go back to community after they complete their studies**. Oftentimes there is **a lack of employment opportunities in their fields of study, or they may be seen by the community as outsiders** now that they participated in education down south. Students are also faced with feelings of living in two worlds as the importance of education is up against being true to and present in their community and culture.

> Let's just say, if you want to become a doctor, like a real doctor, like a surgeon, and you go to school here, go through all of that, the schooling and stuff, and you become a surgeon, right? And you go back home and you want to be a surgeon and there's no hospital. (June 18, 2018)

> Sometimes, whenever I go back home, I feel like an outsider now because I strived or succeeded in some way, unlike my family members. When I graduated college they still thought I was just gonna go back home, but I decided I wanted something more than that. So they've been asking me how long it's gonna take and it's really stressful. Like wanting to please them, but also wanting something more for myself is a struggle that I always deal with. I want to be home just to be with family but I can't achieve my education up there. So I think my passion for education stems from the social issues that I grew up in or saw in my community. And my goal is to help in some way when it comes to the social issues that we face as Inuit people. And I want to really encourage students to go to college, so that's why I wanted to be a part of this circle so I could bring that to my community. (Nov 24, 2016)

RESOURCES & SUPPORTS

A key element in successfully navigating the educational process in the south was support. Support was described in myriad forms, including social/emotional, financial and academic. Family and peer support was essential as were the student services at specific institutions.

> It was all just encouragement. Just them saying like don't worry, just do the best you can, we're always here to support you. They always told me that they're there. And if I was having a bad day I would call them up. I think I called home every day. And despite the fact that my parents live in the city with me, I get to see them, so I have easier access. And I think that's also one aspect that I had that not a lot of Inuit or other First Nations students have, is having my parents an hour train ride from me, or car ride. It's just a lot easier to have family close by, but when I first started my education in the city, they were in the North. It got really hard, but I would just call home every day, just to hear them, and be told that you can do this, it's just those words, really gave me that extra push. And not everyone gets that. (January 11, 2018)

Reflecting on the support another participant received from her family members and peers going through the same experience, she commented that "if I didn't have their support, I don't think I would have succeeded" (October 23, 2018). She also appreciated Student Services at John Abbott College, noting that "the support of the Student Services was very helpful too 'cause they guided us on courses to take, how to go about things and what our options were. It was helpful to know those aspects of going to college." Support was critical to helping students feel more comfortable with the unknown of leaving their communities and moving to Montréal.

Counselors from Kativik Ilisarniliriniq were mentioned as supportive to students studying in the south. One participant recommended that KI counselors not only provide logistical and financial support but also support centered on addressing some aspects of culture shock that students felt. This participant advocated for a more holistic orientation by Students Services at KI, recommending:

> …expand their horizon and also the parameters on how to support students, like, for example, maybe spend at least a day on how to live in the city. What is the bus system? What is the metro system? Where is the best place to shop? What is the best way to get services like going to health services? They don't know where to go. Where do they go for dentists and how do they do the first time…If they go to the health services or dentists, they realize they have to pay for everything, so they need to learn how to live in the south…that you collect your receipts and get it refunded. [For] things like that, I think they need to have more support. Not just in going to school but how to live in the south. (Oct 23, 2018)

Although some of the southern post-secondary institutions have dedicated centres to support Indigenous students, some students shared that were difficult to access. Storytellers also mentioned a need for **Inuit representation at support centres**, more academic resources and education on gender and sexuality.

Another participant worked to **dispel myths Inuit students may have regarding academic support**. He has encouraged youth to attend college as he did, not worrying about being "the smartest person" by focusing on "the amount of work that you're going to put into [the program, as] that will dictate if you're going to succeed or not." He praised the academic advisors at John Abbott College.

> Start lining up your tutors already…[…] some students are under the impression that tutors are for people that are not smarter or can't do it and I said no, they're there to help you, just take advantage of that. (Oct 22, 2018)

Students expressed that it is important to develop and maintain relationships throughout the post-secondary process. **Peer support**, someone to share successes and hardships with, to battle that isolation, was incredibly important.

> The support system was the biggest one because when you're going to a big city for school and leaving your hometown, the whole family and everything, it's very hard. But once you see familiar faces, it gives you ease, it keeps you going and not that afraid. But yeah, it's when you have somebody to talk to and be with somebody that's when I know that we can succeed because you're not alone even though it feels like it sometimes. (Oct 22, 2018)

Those Inuit students who were able to access various post-secondary supports and services highlighted the need for **more visibility around the supports, promotion and communication.** These resources need to be accessible in the community before students make their way down south to the city so that they are prepared and know where to go and who to ask for guidance.

> I think it's the communication and promotion. I know there are services. I could say that there's quite a few services that we can ask for, like we can go to. The organization has to promote it more and communicate to other native communities and so when a student in a community wants to come to the city, he or she can rely on them or ask about what can I do this, what can I do that. (June 18, 2018).

SUCCESSES & TRANSFORMATION

Past and present Inuit post-secondary students indicated **several factors that contribute to success** and the variety of shapes success can take. Fundamentally, it remains important for Inuit students to **look to their ancestors and within themselves for the determination** needed to thrive in these settler institutions.

> We are an amazing culture with many things to be proud of. Our ancestors survived one of the harshest climates and lands in the whole world. My grandmother was able to survive without electricity or houses and that amazes me. If my Grandfather's Grandfather was the type to give up easily, I would not be here today. They survived by following animals to feed themselves as well as surviving starvation. They did not have guns, but they survived. Our ancestors were amazing. If only these little things were shared, we would be able to truly understand that we come from a great people. That is a little light of us that has been extinguished for too long. If we want to be ok with ourselves, that little light has to shine bright. We need to remember how hard our ancestors fought to stay alive. (Oct 22, 2018)

The **growth of Indigenous presence in college and university** indicates for some that educational success is attainable and that Inuit are represented in institutions, allowing students to feel welcome, a sense of belonging and more at ease in these spaces so that success is possible. That presence also points to getting those coveted employment positions back home and being able to help their communities.

> We are here and we are still continuing. For me the word success, how I define it, is you face challenges and you overcome them. So, the success is Inuit for example there were only a few Inuit students in the past going to post-secondary but now it's like more and more. That to me is success. I encourage other Inuit or other natives to come to school if they want to. (June 18, 2018)

> For me, the number one thing is to try to get an education and eventually get those positions. That's how we're going to bypass this whole thing of being left on the outside. (Oct 22, 2018)

FUTURE VISIONS

There was a distinct sense of a future where there is more Indigenous presence within institutions, to create spaces of comfort and belonging, to see each other roaming the halls:

> I envision every class to have an Indigenous student and to walk around and to see Indigenous students everywhere. And to for us to feel like we belong here too. Not to feel like a guest all the time. And for us to not be Kangusuq [translation: shy]. Like, we don't feel comfortable, we don't feel confident to exist here. Every time we do have something to say we need to whisper amongst each other. (Jun 18, 2018)

The strongest thread running through all stories was **the hope and dream and longing for post-secondary education centered in their northern communities**, or even hybrid programs where some education would take place in the north and some in the south.

> I have wondered if that is the only way. I wonder if it is possible for someone whether it be someone from Kangiqsujuaq or Kuujjuaq, not to have to go south [to] have the opportunity. I have never said anything but I've thought about it. (Oct 27, 2018)

> ...the first half of it can be in the north because I still think that it's better for us as Inuit that we need to see what's outside of Nunavik. (Oct 22, 2018)

The bottom line for all participants was to bring courses and degree programs closer to home so that students and families can continue to maintain relationships, support each other, live together.

> They are our children, our responsibility. […] We have to try to help them understand that they can do it and we will be ok and we will be here [at home in Nunavik] when they finish their

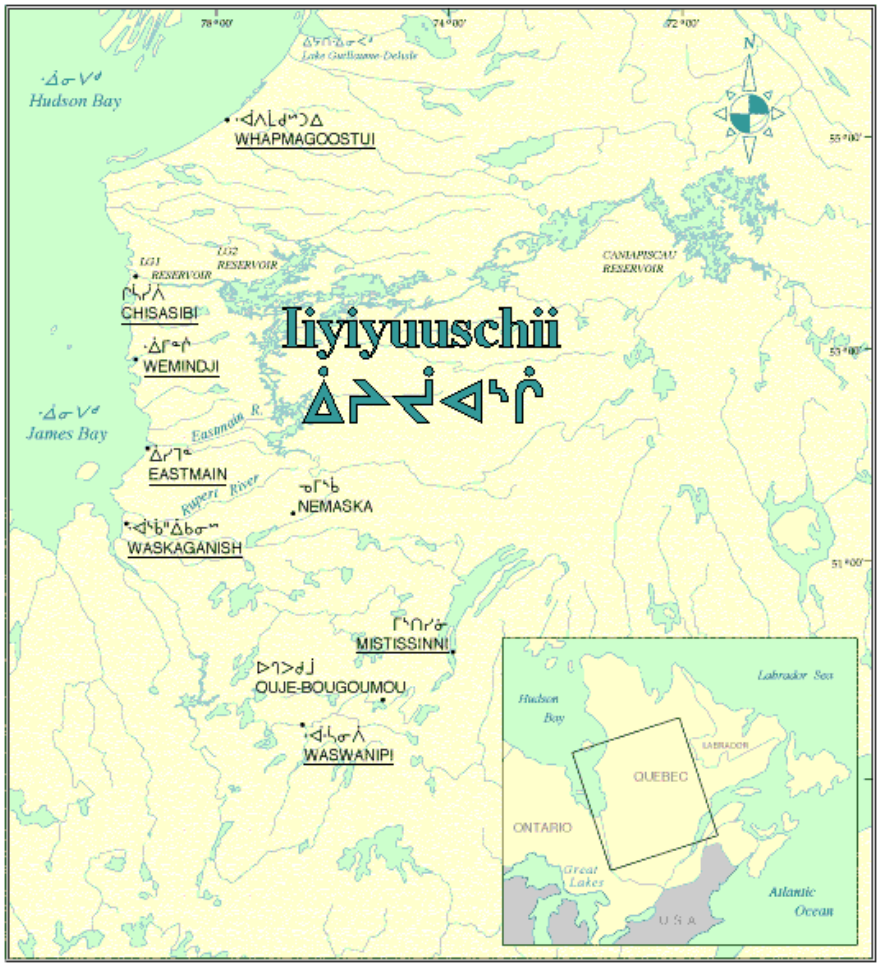
education. We must keep calm inside and out for them no matter how much we worry about their wellbeing at school, if they need money, if they are hungry and so on. They are always on our mind. When they call or write to us on-line we just tell them we are fine and we hope that they are too. We have to stay strong for them. This is a very difficult thing for us to do as Inuit. It hurts. (Oct 22, 2018)

A college or post-secondary institution in Nunavik would be amazing, like it might be one of my life goals to create because I love school, and I've always wanted to kind of stay in school for the rest of my life because I kind of like the environment...Some Inuit might need to travel to like a different Inuit community but at least instead of going to a big city where the people don't speak your language, you won't feel so alienated, and so alone in the world, like a support system is really important to be able to pass school so having an Indigenous education in Inuit communities, like having a post-secondary education in Inuit communities is uh, that would be amazing. (Jan 31, 2018)

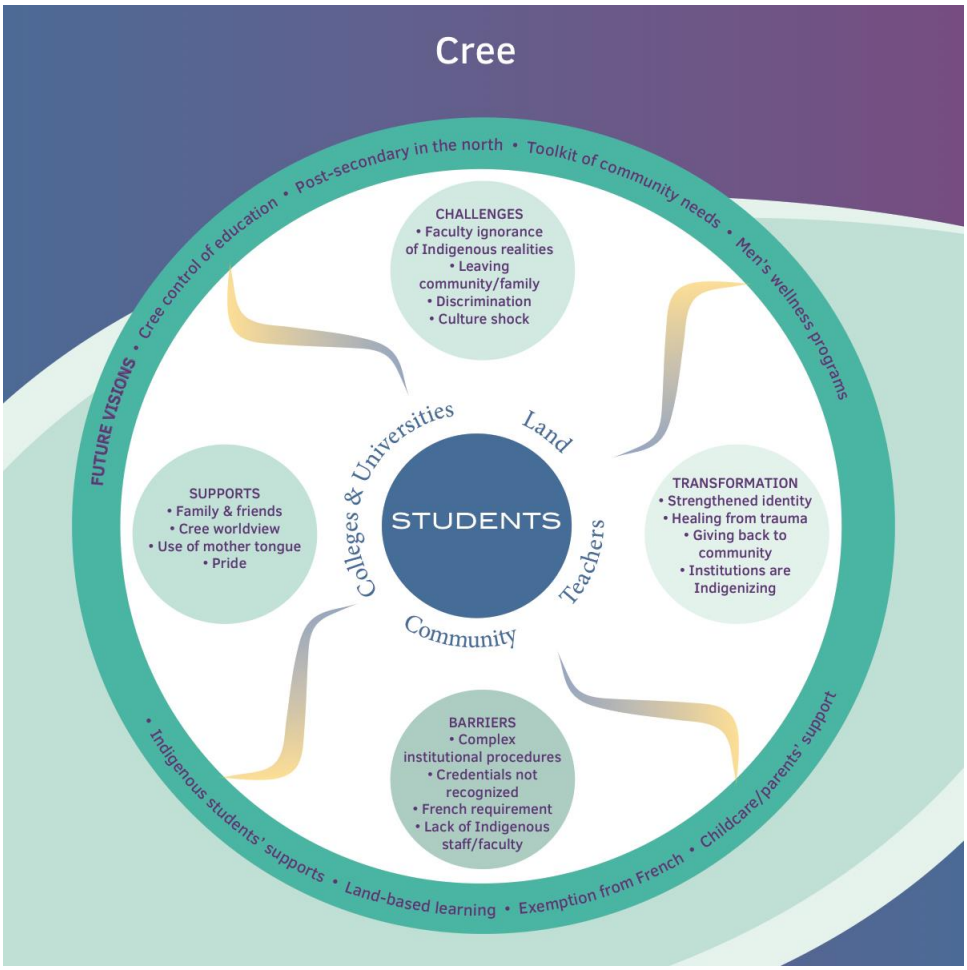
CREE VOICES

FPPSE brought together a total of 14 current and former Cree post-secondary students in Tiohtiá:ke (Montréal) to share **stories of their experiences in post-secondary institutions.** Of the 14 people who took part in the project, 9 storytellers were part of a Talking Circle, and 5 individuals were interviewed between March 23, 2017 and March 28, 2019. The storytellers originate from five Cree communities – Eastmain, Mistissini, Waswanipi, Waskaganish and Whapmagoostui – and participated in one-on-one interviews and in Talking Circles. They talked about their challenges and barriers as well as successes and thoughts about the future of education. Prominent themes across the stories included leaving community to study in the south navigating western concepts of success, living in two worlds, (re)connecting with traditional experiential ways of learning, and the roles that family and community play in achieving academic goals.

The Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee - We call ourselves Eeyou. Our land—Eeyou Istchee—which means the People's Land, comprises eleven Cree communities and over three hundred "traplines," or traditional family hunting and trapping grounds. Our traditional territory, an area of over 400, 000 square kilometers, or two-thirds the size of France, is located primarily in northern Québec and includes the lands on the eastern shore of James Bay and south-eastern Hudson Bay, as well as the lakes and rivers that drain into them. In addition, our traditional territory includes lands which we have historically occupied in Ontario, across the Ontario-Québec border. Eeyou Istchee is home to over 18,000 people. (Grand Council of the Crees, www.cngov.ca)



(Proust, F. et al., 2016)



CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

The absence of post-secondary institutions in northern communities means travelling south for education where students are faced with being away from sustaining sources of love, support and tradition: family, community, ceremony, traditional food, and the land. Students longed for the traditional knowledge held by their communities, which is often undervalued by western education institutions. Without transitional services to bridge the gaps between Indigenous versus western realities, students found it difficult to adapt. Over and above this, complex institutional procedures and navigating city life proved challenging, contributing to culture shock and further isolation.

> I was taking Quantitative Research Methods for practitioners. I didn't understand my professor. He was so eloquently spoken; I didn't understand a word he said. I walked out of there thinking I'm dumb. I couldn't even approach him because right away he says, well this is university level. Just that statement alone is like: Oh I'm supposed to know this but I don't. There's no transition. Nobody is really willing to support you to find a place. When I was 16 I was lucky enough and my

father came and I lived in a hotel for maybe two weeks. Now that I was coming back to university and I had a child and I had a permanent job I was able to prep four months in advance to come here and look for a job. I can't imagine being 16 and being able to do that on my own...there's a gap, there's no bridge there. (March 23, 2017)

We always speak Cree. Especially my Grandpa [says name]. He is like my mentor. He finds education the most important thing. He went to residential school. He always guided me through my education.. I spoke to him about my first year at Dawson. I said: It's so hard, I can't do this. I honestly didn't care about my grades. I always told myself: as long as I get a 60. I got frustrated my first year. Especially living alone too. When I came back in the Fall, this past fall. I told myself I'm gonna suck it up. I'm gonna work harder this time. Plus I have a roommate from Wemindji. Me and her we help each other out. When we have our moments when we're tired or were frustrated. When we get frustrated with our assignments to, we tend to rant with each other. It's helpful when you have somebody that speaks Cree and that's there for you, to talk to you. (March 23, 2017)

When I came here, I felt... a language barrier. When you're back home you speak English or Cree. So when you forget English you can just say oh yeah it's this in Cree. But when you're writing an essay or something like that, you can't just write a Cree word. It's really just like…confusing sometimes....There's also the culture shock...Back home its closely knit. It's a community. Everyone is all together so when you're here you're missing out on a lot of things back home, like feasts and two weeks ago my brothers killed their first moose. That was a really big deal… but we weren't there. Fuck… And so… I don't know. Everyone is really close.... and both of us will be the first ones to go to university and we have like 40-50 cousins. We have a really big family. (March 23, 2017)

Cree students describe being supported in post-secondary through the *Cree School Board* and discuss the distinctive aspects of Cree education. Despite this support, both current and former post-secondary students shared that their community primary and secondary schools are not at the same level as those in the south and so **varying degrees of lack of preparedness** for western academia is experienced in the areas of reading, writing and language skills. Western concepts of success related to expectations and workload also resulted in students feeling overwhelmed, discouraged, confused, inadequate, intimidated and acutely aware of the differences between the western ways of learning versus those in Cree culture and community.

We really aren't prepared when we come...there are a lot of social issues and that are predominant within the school setting, especially amongst the youth. So let's say in high school, our English teacher was just happy if we could just write a journal entry. And that's what is preparing us for college. I remember going into college when I was 16, they were like 5 paragraphs… what is 5 paragraphs. I didn't know these things, It never was introduced to me. There's a difference. People going to school here, there's a structure. They have all these different electives. It was non-existent in high school. That's, I think, is a huge challenge… you

> know also when I was growing up, in a way I was struggling with my identity...I was introduced to English in grade 3. Us, it was 100% Cree until then. (March 23, 2017)

There was an overwhelming indication expressed by the storytellers of **challenges within the Québec education system**, particularly regarding the French language. At the policy level, some students have suggested being exempt from mandatory French courses and are calling for accreditation and recognition of their mother tongue in lieu of French language programming. Many Indigenous students come from families who were not allowed to use their mother tongue at school and are striving to revitalize many languages that are currently endangered.

> After that I took another year off. It's hard for me to leave back home. It's hard for me to adapt, especially the language barrier around here. I can hardly speak Cree and especially not being able to go out on the land and go hunting and do all the cultural stuff. I finally decided to go to Dawson because I wanted to improve my French and English...My first year at Dawson, I struggled so much with English, especially English writing and essays because I noticed that I was...two three years behind compared to college level. In high school, I never wrote 1500-word essay on a certain topic. So that was hard to do...Especially my French. French is really hard for me right now because back home we always speak Cree. (March 23, 2017)

> I recall hearing a lot of questions about, oh do you still live in teepees and use bows and arrows and very media referenced understanding of being Indigenous. So, I recall that, the language barrier was huge, and I didn't know how to express yet that I still speak my Cree and that's not my first language, French and so forth. Unfortunately, I did experience barriers as well. (March 28, 2019)

Students recognized that the presence of Indigenous faculty and content is growing in post-secondary institutions yet expressed their awareness of **being Indigenous in non-Indigenous spaces**, often situated in classes with non-Indigenous teachers that tokenize them, asking them to teach others in the class on Indigenous realities. With Indigenous content often containing challenging topics such as the Indian Act, residential schools and genocide, students found themselves needing debriefing sessions and aftercare to process emotions and information, yet that remained unavailable. Many faced racism, stereotyping and prejudice, and expressed the stress of this burden and a need for training of non-native teachers and students on historic and ongoing colonization.

> …even though you have teachers that teach Native studies, Indigenous studies to the people, they don't really know what it's like to be Native, or Indigenous in what it takes to be who we are, like our language, they don't know what it's like to live on the reserve, so it's seems like the people that teach these classes don't really know what they're talking about yet, they're still teaching it, so that's why I really think that it should be Indigenous people that teach these classes to whoever wants to take these classes. (December 5, 2017)

Storytellers - students and former students - spoke about how these challenges and barriers to accessing the education they desired culminated in **physical, mental and emotional distresses**. Many spoke about the homesickness and living in two worlds causing feelings of loneliness, isolation and a disconnection from their identity. In response to non-Indigenous faculty and students and western curriculum, many students experienced racism, discrimination, tokenization and stereotyping, often put on the spot to provide the class with Indigenous-focused information and at other times, felt their history, cultures and realities had been erased. Students were forced to choose between an education and safety, culture, support and love.

> ...in order to succeed, the version of success is Western ideology, what they deem success. What they think success is. So we're setting ourselves up, we constantly have to fail or feel like we're failing, even my daughter bringing her here it was so hard first year because she was two years behind...And now it's so hard for me to get her to speak Cree. Now I'm torn. Just to do this and then to go back I have to struggle to contend with the fact that, oh what is this going to do to my daughter's identity if she loses her language. So it's like choosing one or the other and were made to because we have to leave. I think it's difficult and it's hard not having that type of support system you can get at home. That sense of security. To be able to understand and work with the systems that exist. In society, we do need to get more educated. (March 23, 2017)

> I took two courses in First Peoples Studies, I don't recommend anybody does that. There was one on The Indian Act, and then the First Peoples education, in one semester. It was very, very hard, I remember sitting at home, just struggling...reading the articles. What helped me was the elder [says name of Elder] that was here. I was like: where do I go? How do I honour my parents and all those who survived and those who we lost? So my one on one session with [says name of Elder] was what I really needed and I think that it's really important that we have that kind of support available. We need to deep breathe, we need to talk about and say: how do I deal with all… the topics that really hit you. (March 23, 2017)

> ...it would be helpful if the Cree School Board to maybe have an elder. For students to have someone to talk to. To have someone to talk to. When I speak Cree it's more easy to explain things than in English. I had it in my head and I lose it again. To have an elder come down and help Cree students when they are here. Maybe have workshops… to have Cree culture teachings; while I am here, I miss Cree culture activities. We should look ahead how we can help the future students from Mistissini or in Eeyou Istchee. I know that it is difficult for youth to decide to come down to study (because of the feeling of homesick), I was afraid of that too. The feeling of homesick... (March 23, 2017)

RESOURCES & SUPPORTS

To inspire and support students to pursue their academic goals, **support systems, culturally relevant curriculum, spaces for and modes of learning, and Elder involvement in education proved necessary** elements for success. For those participants who left their community for post-secondary studies, particularly critical supports included: having access to peers, Elders and grandparents, and Traditional Cree food, and support from post-secondary Indigenous resource centers and Cree language speakers.

> John Abbott was spectacular that the Cree School Board had a partnership where there was a tutor onsite for us Indigenous students, a personal counsellor, a coordinator, and we had a location on campus where Indigenous students at that school were able to network with each other. And being in the program I was in, there was about four or five of us that knew each other from that orientation. The orientation...we were given tutorials on note taking, abbreviations, essay writing, we were given a tour of the campus. And we learned a little about the services and then we got to know the staff that were working there. So this sense of community and peer support came into the picture right from the week before classes started. So with that intent of knowing my community my Cree Nation needed really good workers, and having that support system in place at John Abbott really gave me a good idea of how to pursue my school. (March 28, 2019)

> I know there will be another journey or process of figuring that out. I envision more of a support network. I like it here but I can't work here. There's a lot going on and there's a lot of people. I prefer working at Cree School Board because they have a living room area and a sectioned off and with a kitchen so I can bring my daughter, we can stay there for hours and it's kind of homey so she can be there so for me that's accommodating because I have to work and take care of my child. Indigenous students need to have that, in order to envision that future there has to be a transition point or accompaniment somehow, your kind of left to your own devices to figure things out. (March 23, 2017)

> There's a common kitchen and I received a beaver from up north and the fur was still on and I had no idea how to skin it. So [says Cree student's name], who had to leave early, had some knowledge because her parents were both hunters and trappers. So she knew what to do so she said okay let's all get together at the common kitchen as Espresso Hotel where all Cree patients stay...we went Saturday morning and we cooked. [says Cree student's name] bought her fish, it was pike. I bought a goose which I had in my freezer. And then we skinned the beaver and cooked it in the kitchen so then we had some side dishes. We had so much fun. It was just like getting together and the patients who all came down, it was just that family, that community, that sense of community, just getting together. I'd like to encourage that because I think it's important that we support one another in that way if we can and then also be able to enjoy some food as well. It helps a lot. It almost reconnects us to a little bit of home away from home. (March 23, 2017)

SUCCESSES & TRANSFORMATION

Indigenous students who experienced such challenges/barriers while attempting to commit to higher education, manage to enjoy their learning experience, stay motivated, find community and ultimately, graduate. **As indicators of success, many participants selected their own selves as exemplary**, fully cognizant of the disparity they face and the distinction they represent as Indigenous graduates. These opportunities further engage Indigenous youth and others in the process of seeking solutions to community challenges that directly affect them. Improving Indigenous student access to and success in postsecondary education requires *listening* to students as they identify what needs to change and then making those changes.

> I would really say my mother's incredible success story. I mean she did her PhD at McGill. And this is while I was also a kid right, so she was. She started it when I was around nine 10 years old and she finished I was probably 16 and my sister was like 14. So I would say she was an incredible success story because I mean this little Cree lady you know managed to get a PhD from one of the best regarded institutions in Canada and she did amazing and she did this while raising two girls. (March 28, 2019)

> Success stories...my postsecondary experience, listening to my parents, is that they wanted us to learn customs, language. They wanted us to be a family and then pursue schools as well. Success is, being Indigenous and from post-secondary, is taking the best form of education you're receiving and merging it with the wisdom of your ancestors. That way you know what works best for the people you choose to serve. Success is becoming in healthy individual that you're not going to pass the hurt that was given to you or that you experienced, to anybody else. Success is developing character of yourself that really aligns to who you want to honour in your in your life and maintaining that. (March 28, 2019)

> I think it's success comes when you have fulfilled something that you really wanted to do like even just creating moccasins, like I just started sewing and that's success too because that's like you're the one moccasin-making, you know? Or even when you make your first hand-drum, that's still success. So whatever you want to, if you-my late dad used to say, if you have a goal, and if you see the goal, and if you fulfilled it, that's a great success, so that's what I do and that I keep that in mind and in my heart when you ummm, finish something, when you've accomplished something, so that's success. So to me when I graduated, for my Masters, I felt good and it was successful. (December 5, 2017)

FUTURE VISION

Stories from FPPSE participants illustrated **a deep desire for better educational opportunities in their home communities**. A major hurdle to their success was being away from sustaining sources of love, support and tradition: family, community, ceremony, traditional food, and the land. Similarly, although appreciative of the support networks that exist in some institutions and the growing number of Indigenous faculty, many participants found themselves battling homesickness and feelings of loneliness, belonging and isolation. Many struggled daily in the duality of western academia's expectations versus their traditional ways of knowing and being.

In light of the challenging experiences, students expressed their resiliency, capacity for facing challenges, transformative possibilities they recognized in educational experiences, and the value of Indigenous education and pedagogy such as land-based learning. **A future state of postsecondary education for participants reflected possibilities of in-community institutions, adequate funding, more empathy and support, less racism, self-governance, culturally-appropriate learning and human dignity.** All Cree participants long for post-secondary opportunities close to home and in community. (Re)defining success for Cree storytellers includes incorporating land-based learning and support from Elders into education, returning knowledge to community, achieving one's academic goals, and reconnecting with land and community upon returning home.

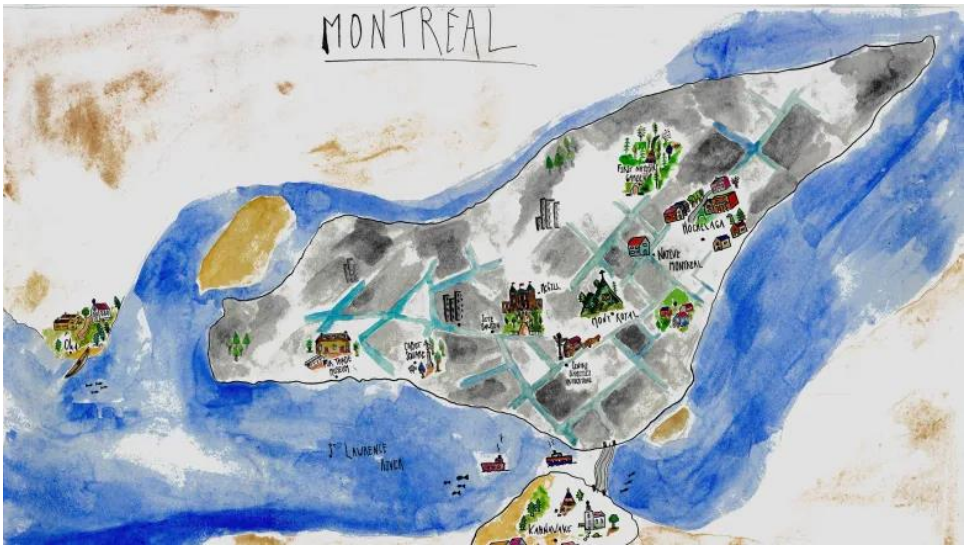
> I was talking to the chairman of the Cree Schoolboard this past December and that's been in the talks now. They're talking about building a college in the Cree communities but they can't decide which Cree community they're going to focus on. But I've heard a lot of people suggesting one particular community because it's right in the middle. It would be great to have a college or university in one of the Cree communities. it would be awesome for the future high school graduates. To stay in the community, it would be less stress for a lot of people. But the only thing is the professors. I know there's Cree teachers, but they mostly have their degree in elementary schools. So Indigenous people have to work hard to get their degrees or PhDs to teach in an Indigenous school. (December 5, 2017)

> I really do like that these institutions are Indigenizing. That they are becoming more aware, that they are getting more classes about these topics. But it is hard for us. Because they are talking about stuff that affect us personally. And then you're always hearing all these negative things about what native people go through. It's just tough. But I really do appreciate that people are getting a little more educated on this topic, on this matter. Tis nice that we're getting recognition for the things that we have to be going through. Recognize more. Start to understand why things are the way they are. And I think that the general population is now starting to get more informed on these matters. I think that's a success. (March 23, 2017)

> What I envision is, for youth back home to continue going to school. For them to succeed in whatever they do even though we might not be prepared. Look at us. We're still here. We're still doing what we never thought we would do. It's very hard, like I said [incomprehensible] a lot of people, they have a their own experiences. We're still here. Were still going to school no matter how hard it was. And I believe that the youth back home can do it to. Just to have people

to talk to and to have somebody tell you keep trying. Keep trying. Although we weren't prepared that's for sure. Were still here, still going to school. (March 23, 2017)

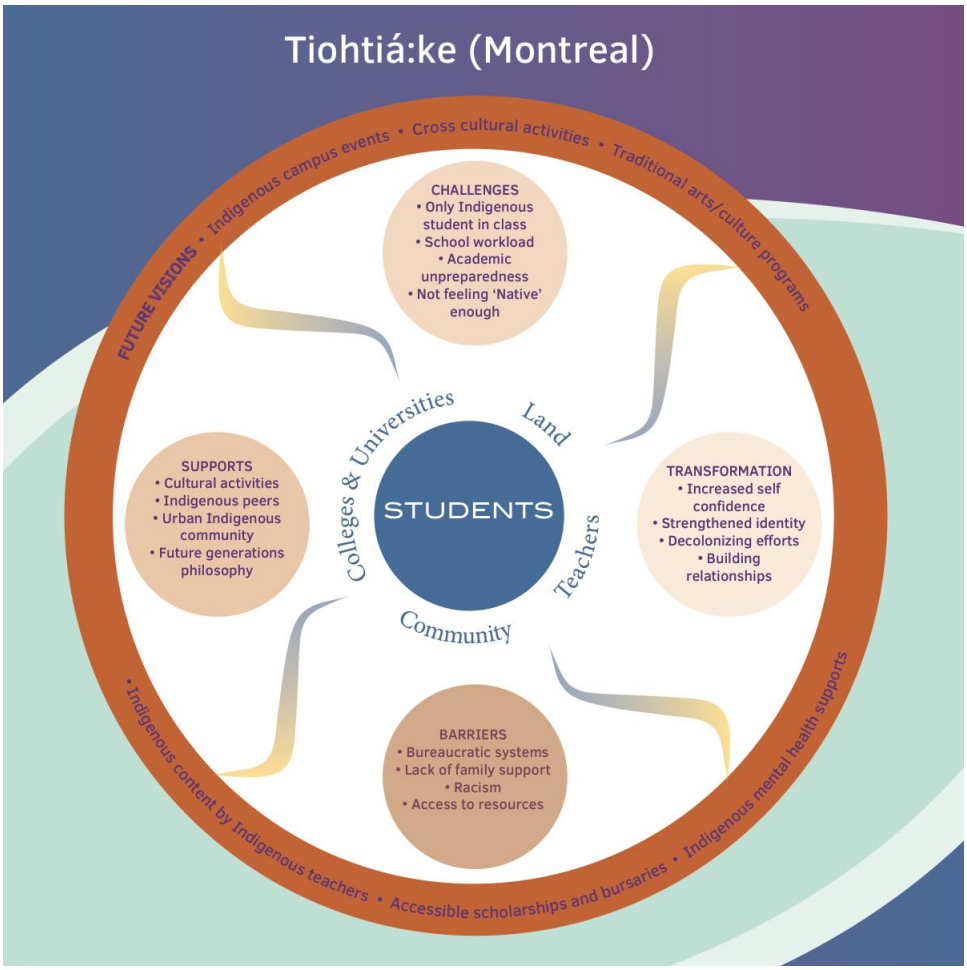
VOICES OF TIOHTIÁ:KE



https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/Montréal/Montréal-together-spaces-reconciliation-1.4117290

FPPSE brought together 49 current and former Indigenous post-secondary students living in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal). They are from many nations across Turtle Island, from the west coast, prairies, eastern shores, Nunavik and other regions of what is known as Québec. Some have grown up in the city, some have relocated permanently from their communities, some are there to study or are simply passing through. Some storytellers identify more closely with their home territory, some are very much connected to their urban Indigenous community.

In one-on-one interviews and Talking Circles at Dawson College, Concordia University and the Montréal Native Friendship Centre, storytellers were posed questions about their experience in post-secondary Québec institutions. Their recorded audio and/or video stories are filled with reflections on living and going to school in Montréal, providing thematic illustrations of the challenges to and facilitators of educational success. Urban Indigenous stories included hurdles to success as being away from sustaining sources of love, support and tradition such as family, community, ceremony, traditional food, and the land. Through these poignant and honest perspectives, college and university programs and services for Indigenous students can strive to be more responsive and culturally appropriate.



CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

Urban Indigenous students come from **a multitude of Indigenous nations and build community in urban centers**. Pursuing post-secondary studies in the city means reclaiming these spaces, affirming their Indigenous identity and honoring the stories of connection to the land that lies beneath and beyond the concrete. Although appreciative of the support networks that exist in some institutions and the growing number of Indigenous faculty, many participants found themselves **battling feelings of internalized colonialism, lack of belonging and isolation** as well as **coping with issues around gender, racism, disability, stereotyping, trauma, mental health and identity**.

> ...people don't really know a lot about the long-term effects of trauma and how they can affect not just your ability to connect with people and learning by the way is social, it is social. Like you learn through socialization and trauma, especially in my case, has really put a dent in that. That's the other thing, I didn't know that trauma could affect any of my executive functioning skills until most recently. (Feb 22, 2017)

I was as intelligent as anybody in the classroom and had as many resources as they did, frankly it seemed like a lot of the time I had teachers who had no clue what to do with me, how to talk to me. (Feb 22, 2017)

I think the first word that comes to mind when I think about my educational journey is lonely. I'm the first person to ever finish high school in my family, and the first and only one that's ever gone to postsecondary. So, I had no role models....to me that pretty much is having to make a decision to be on my own and to go at it alone and not have that much support. (Nov 24, 2016)

My first year, it was really hard to adapt. I come from a small community, I graduated with only 3 other students. And then I go to Abbott and the classrooms have 30 students. I was so overwhelmed. I was so shy, and I was freaking out, I did not want to speak. I was scared to even say my name in class when we had to. And I hated having to have to talk to other students. I hated speaking out loud. It created a lot of anxiety but I'm slowly getting over that now, finally. So that part was hard but I made some friends, mostly friends from the Aboriginal Centre, or Inuit friends from other communities in Northern Québec, which made it a lot smoother. (Feb 22, 2017)

And I wished I would have had Indigenous faculty as supervisors. I think it would have made the road a lot easier. And so I want to do that for students, I want to be that person, one of those people, you know and just make them see that they could do it, if they want to do it, if it has value, that there are good ways of doing it... But I feel like there's all these awful things that are happening to students on a daily basis that [my colleagues] don't understand how things can be so harmful. And so it's that daily fight for students and to make students' voices heard, that there's still so much learning to do and it's not up to us to necessarily teach that. It's their responsibility. I think we should start another institution... So maybe our group will transform into that. (Nov 24, 2016)

...since I got to university, for the first time, I am with other Inuit. And I am very much the 'white Inuk' and I know that probably for most of them I'm probably not considered Inuk because I don't speak the language, I don't bead, I don't throat sing, I don't do any of those things. And it's a very alienating thing. Because I'm going in anthropology, I'm shaping my direction in postsecondary education to give back to my community, to Nunavik, and probably Kuujjuaraapik and Salluit in particular because I have ties there. But to not be able to associate myself with the other Inuit is something that is very heavy for me. I really find it a battle, an everyday struggle to be in the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre and have other Inuit there who don't accept while I'm really trying to give to the cause, and I'm trying to relate to them by taking Inuttitut classes, talking to them as much as I can, showing them. It's not that I want to show them, it's also that I want to show myself that I can learn that language. (Jan 31, 2018)

Many participants described their struggle with being situated in classes **low in numbers of Indigenous students and finding themselves tokenized**, expected to educate others and provide knowledge on a pan-Indigenous experience. With a distinct lack of cultural safety in the classroom -- amongst other students, in the curriculum, and provided by the teachers -- participants expressed a pressing **need for training of non-native teachers and students** on historic and ongoing colonization as well as Indigenous content and Indigenous instructors.

> I went to [Kahnawà:ke] Survival [School] where I had familiar faces at least. And then from there, at 18 I went to Dawson which was, well, quite a culture shock because I had been raised in one way for most of my life, and to hear other people, for example, telling me that my way of life was in some way bad. Or, for example, one teacher even told me that Residential Schools were actually not involved in his curriculum, this was for a War and Genocide class. Or, for example, having to watch the Oka Crisis video, 270 years of Resistance. I had to sit in class the whole time while people knew where I was from, but these people in front of me would laugh every single time something terrible happened. People I knew would show up on screen being angry, and these people would laugh at it. (Nov 24, 2016)

> The First Peoples' class that I took, there was about 75 people in the class, and it was a non-Native teacher teaching a First Peoples' Studies, and the first thing she asked was how many Indians in the class, well I don't know if she said Indians, how many First Nations, 'cuz we say 'Indians' amongst each other. How many First Nations people in the class? So, I think there was two or three of us that put our hands up. And she's like ah, great, you're going to help me out, help me teach the class. And I'm just like laughing, whatever. Anyway, so the next class, she gets a guest speaker in, again the guy's non-Native, and he comes in to teach us about the Bering Strait Theory. (Nov 24, 2016)

> ...in a Native Studies course where I was the only person who identified as Indigenous, it was a small seminar course with only 20 people. In that course the professor, he was non-Indigenous, and he didn't really moderate it at all. He just let it to the students to decide how they were going to structure the classes... I remember one particular time; it was a few months after my friend had gone missing. And they were talking about Listiguj and, that's where he's from, and they were just like really out of touch and being racist in a lot of ways and talking about it. I ended up leaving that class crying. (Feb 22, 2017)

There was an overwhelming indication of **inadequate financial support, access to resources** as well as **challenges particularly regarding the French language** within the Québec education system all of which led to feelings of confusion, inadequacy and frustration. Storytellers expressed **trying to find or hold on to cultural ways** of knowing and being, especially those coming from rural and remote communities, amid western academia's expectations and the reality of living in two worlds.

> So, after my daughter was born, I was like I didn't really speak my mother tongue to her. So right now, she kind of understands stuff I say but she can't speak it and right now she's learning

French and I don't know French. So, it's like I can't even really help her with that but I'm trying to teach her Inuktitut too. And then I get confused with should I just let her go out, like should I take a year off or two to let her go to school up North so she can learn her mother tongue, or should I leave her here so she could have structure and it will be easier for her to learn French and be a part of, I don't know. So that's been really complicating for me. Just trying to figure out where I stand has been really difficult. But I only realized how important my language and my culture, and everything was when I got here. I didn't realize that when I was home. I learned so many things about myself, about my community, about people around me that I didn't know. (Feb 22, 2017)

Until I found the program here that I wanted, there wasn't much support in how to transfer, so it was a hard process but I got here and I love it. I love the program so much, it suits me, it really is something I want to do for my career, and I'm glad I found it, otherwise I don't think I would have stayed where I was before. The hardest part was my level of English was very low. The only time I spoke English was twice a week for my English class and from that to a college level of writing, that was a hard process. One thing that I'm struggling with the most is French. (Feb 22, 2017)

After that I took another year off. It's hard for me to leave back home. It's hard for me to adapt, especially the language barrier around here. I can hardly speak Cree and especially not being able to go out on the land and go hunting and do all the cultural stuff. I finally decided to go to Dawson because I wanted to improve my French and English and everything else. My first year at Dawson, I struggled so much with English, especially English writing and essays because I noticed that I was a couple years, two three years behind compared to college level. In high school, I never wrote 1500-word essay on a certain topic. So that was hard to do especially, my English was a little bit low. Especially my French. French is really hard for me right now because back home we always speak Cree. (Feb 22, 2017)

RESOURCES & SUPPORTS

Living in two worlds and trying to bring together Indigenous and western worldviews has posed numerous challenges and barriers for urban Indigenous learners, especially for those leaving their communities for life in the city. Finding the education system difficult to navigate, Indigenous students express their **need for supports related to family, community, guidance from Elders, life outside the institution as well as role models and mentors** who can show them the way forward. Some of these supports exist within post-secondary institutions in Québec and when participants were able to access them, they **achieved their goals**, found mentorship and offered support to peers, connected with and contributed to the urban Indigenous community, fostered self-esteem, and could envision steps toward Indigenous futures in education. However, these supports were not always available, lacking in efficiency, were difficult to find and/or navigate leading to some students feeling as though they failed.

And I always have mixed feelings about it because it means basically going from one world to the next. And though I want this for them, I also fear what will happen to them once they leave. The way that the educational system is set up, services or affordability of services are only contained within your sector. And once people move off to postsecondary, that's where the responsibilities are supposed to end, and they become someone else's responsibility. And I have a really hard time with that because, apart from the fact that we get very, very close during the time that they're working on their goals, I know what some of the challenges are once they leave the community and go off to postsecondary. And I also know that availability of resources, though they might be there, they won't know necessarily about it, or not feel comfortable in accessing it. So, it's for me to always try and find a way to keep the door open so that if there's any issues they can come. (Feb 22, 2017)

I would say my journey to postsecondary wasn't always easy. I wasn't focused and I guess the school system would say that I was a failing student, a failure, I wasn't dedicated or something. But now I learned that it was actually the schools themselves and who conducted it and it wasn't a reflection of myself, it was who was teaching it, and the environment. I've finally gone to postsecondary and I'm only in my second semester, so my first year. So, I'm still going through all this, I'm learning different ways, but the resources given to us really helped out a lot. Like many of yous, we don't know what we're getting ourselves into, we don't know how it works, what to do, pretty much in a nutshell, what to do. And having those resources there are really helpful to kind of help you with your schedule. (Feb 22, 2017)

And it was in reconnecting with my biological family, and then getting these really, really good grades in postsecondary. And I thought wow, I'm not stupid. And then the more I started connecting with the urban Aboriginal community and being more around culture, it helped me so much to understand the way, like that yeah, I think differently than the box that was always trying to be stuffed into. So that has been huge, so where now, here I am a grandmother of four now and I'm actually thinking well maybe I do want to do some more schooling. (Feb 22, 2017)

I just remember not just the mental suffering but the physical suffering that I went through just to get into class... I'm trying to figure out how to deal with my disabilities because I have all of these eight years of undergrad...I don't know what I'm going to do with them... if it weren't for the support systems I wouldn't have been able to come back, being recognized as disabled and being given that power and opportunity to learn how to negotiate for myself as a disabled student through Concordia, the disabled student centre there. (Feb 22, 2017)

So, I'm still a student at Concordia right now... I still want more and I'm still not going to give up. Although I've had many, many bumps in the road. But I find the difference between when I was here [Dawson] to Concordia, with the Native Center. It's so much more welcoming to be at Concordia because of that Native Center. It's like your home away from home you know. And over here I didn't have anything at the time, and I was just alone...I just gotta get home and make supper and change my baby. But I did it. So that's another reason why I want to be a part

of this circle, is to be a role model to show girls that, young women, that they can overcome any challenge. (Nov 24, 2016)

...I think what I'm really inspired seeing coming to our different alternative kinds of postsecondary that I really value, Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledge and not trying to decolonize the institution but really building it based on the skills and the knowledge that we have as Indigenous peoples because often times we're told it's not good enough knowledge, it's not valued knowledge. But something I definitely saw in my degree in anthropology is that they're always coming to us for their knowledge. But they make it seem as if it's their theory. And so, what I want to see is see change, that people realize that we are intelligent, and we have so many strengths and not to see us as being less than, or inferior, or in needing of having to reformulate our words because they're strong. And people, elders and hunters and community members, should be given a high status for what they know. So that's what I feel for postsecondary and wanting to see maybe it's not about recreating something that's already inherently trying to break us down but creating new things with the abilities that we already have. (Nov 24, 2016)

SUCCESSES & TRANSFORMATION

Storytellers were clear about their personal challenges, many of which involved **feeling conflicted and struggling with self-doubt and belonging**. And yet within these issues, **students experienced transformation, realization and acceptance by others and of themselves**. They shared stories of becoming leaders, mentors and role models, creating community in the city, graduating, accessing traditional knowledge and finding pride in their Indigenous identities.

It was hard for me because I never felt like I belonged anywhere in university because being part Métis, but also Mennonite, I knew who I felt connected to, but I didn't feel like I would be accepted by other Indigenous students, and I didn't feel like I could go to the First Peoples' House at McGill. And I ended up doing my PhD around identity, so clearly it was a huge preoccupation for me. But when I started getting more involved in the community, it was never an issue, nobody ever, I was always accepted. Then I was so upset because I waited so long because I felt so alone, and that I was struggling all these years, and that I should have just taken that chance. Now as a faculty, I feel it too, I feel so welcomed. (Nov 24, 2016)

I guess I could say delayed and also lonely were my first two experiences because I had a child young, I was 17. And I knew that I had the ability, the potential to get good grades, so even before I had her I was a straight 'A' student. After having her I decided I don't want to be just a statistic and have another baby and another baby, you know, not go anywhere with my life. And also having her sort of pushed me to go back to school because I said I don't want to be a role model mother that just had a child young and just kept popping out babies and stayed barefoot

and pregnant. That's a statistic, I said I want my daughter to have a good role model, and she'll have a role model, someone who went to school, someone who was smart, even though that I had her young, that I still went back. (Nov 24, 2016)

Sometimes, whenever I go back home, I feel like an outsider now because I strived or succeeded in some way, unlike my family members. When I graduated college, they still thought I was just gonna go back home, but I decided I wanted something more than that. So, they've been asking me how long it's gonna take and it's really stressful. Like wanting to please them, but also wanting something more for myself is a struggle that I always deal with. I want to be home just to be with family but I can't achieve my education up there. So I think my passion for education stems from the social issues that I grew up in or saw in my community. And my goal is to help in some way when it comes to the social issues that we face as Inuit people. And I want to really encourage students to go to college, so that's why I wanted to be a part of this circle so I could bring that to my community. (Nov 24, 2016)

Now that I'm going to Concordia and I see more people like me and I see more Native people in my class, it's been a wakeup call because 'cuz I realize, wait, this is how I naturally am. I'm not a naturally angry person, but the fact that being in school had duped me into thinking so...it has been a journey in finding myself and realizing that the things that... I have seen or experienced were not right. The more I hate the fact that I make excuses for people all the time, constantly. I was always made to feel like as if I was just overly emotional, or sensitive. I grew up feeling like I was always inherently flawed, like there was something wrong with me to begin with. So, it's a journey in realizing that the things that happened were not particularly right and I feel like attending this project in a certain way can help remedy that to some degree or other. (Nov 24, 2016)

And I've encouraged so many people now, any Indigenous students, any Indigenous people I see, young people, I say you really have to go to school. I think that's going to be what saves the Indigenous population. We get educated, we do it ourselves, take care of ourselves and stump other people who think we're relying on a government that's not there for us. So, I hope that future generations will get educated and we'll fix that problem. So, nothing but a good experience. (June 13, 2018)

FUTURE VISIONS

After experiencing firsthand what Québec post-secondary institutions offer Indigenous students, **storytellers provided concrete, achievable actions to change policy and procedure toward the success of future students.** Participants expressed the desperate need for post-secondary education in northern communities for students to learn with their support systems of family and community intact. For those Indigenous students venturing to urban centers, participants recommend cultural safety training for

non-Indigenous faculty, accessible land-based education and other Indigenous pedagogical approaches as well as an overall increase in Indigenous faculty, staff and student body.

> One of the things that we did this year that made me feel good was that we actually brought it into the community. So rather than a group of people leaving to go to college off territory, we brought the college into the community. We found how much easier it was for people to adapt to the study level and to the expectations. The success rate is very high. We had a meeting on that this morning and realized that it makes a very big difference as to where you have it. The cultural sensitivity is crucial in success. So, to me that says well there's a lot more effort that has to be made to actually bring education to our communities, and to make sure that everybody has equal opportunity to also feel safe during the time that they're pursuing postsecondary education. (Feb 22, 2017)

> The constitution is founded on so many Indigenous principles. There's so much intellectual depth in our stories and we're not taught that we have, that those are our birthrights, that we have a birthright to a very strong, beautiful, deep, intellectual life. (Nov 24, 2016)

> I've definitely come to the same conclusion that you have, I think that it is an incredible task to try and get the system to change. And I really believe that it's time to simply build our own. Whatever that's going to look like. And the success is in the stories that will come from that, from the people who will be able to keep it going and have it be sustainable. And I know that we're not alone. Not even as Indigenous people on this continent. We're not alone. (Feb 22, 2017)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since this project began, many of the recommendations expressed in the stories are playing out in institutions and communities which will have a profound impact on Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. For instance, Concordia First Peoples Studies classes are now taught largely by Indigenous faculty. Students in nursing and other faculties are pressing their departments to include Indigenous perspectives and content in the curriculum. More northern students have the option to stay home to study. School boards in Nunavik and Eeyou Istchee are creating in-community college programs, enacting self-determination in post-secondary education.

Yet the vast education gap between First Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians remains. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) of the non-Indigenous population aged 25 to 64 had a postsecondary qualification in 2011 compared to 45% First Nations and 28% Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat. Of these, only 5% of First Nations living on reserve and 5% Inuit obtained a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2011). Participants' stories give voice to the challenges and experiences behind the statistics.

To support the transfer of knowledge of the stories shared in this project, and address the disparity, we call for action from post-secondary educators, administrators, community organizations and policy makers. The future vision expressed by over 100 First Nations, Inuit and Métis storytellers put forward concrete recommendations for change:

FUTURE VISIONS ACROSS NATIONS

- Post-secondary in community so students have the option to study at home
- More Indigenous institutions, programs & meeting spaces
- More Indigenous teachers, staff, leadership
- More Indigenous students
- Stronger bridges between community & academic institutions
- Increased traditional knowledge-based learning in all disciplines
- Mother Tongue courses & accreditation
- Make French language learning an option
- Childcare and Family support
- Better access to and support in science and math-based programs
- Training for teachers to better understand Indigenous students' contexts and better address sensitive topics in class
- More transition programs

INUIT FUTURE VISIONS:

- Post-secondary education in the North
- Access to country food
- Preparation for post-secondary & southern living
- Inuit leadership & governance in and outside of Nunavik
- Inuit teachers
- Accreditation for Inuktitut language
- Increased student enrolment
- Additional support for transition from College to University
- Access to science and math prerequisites in community
- Support for students with children

KANIEN'KEHÁ:KA (MOHAWK) FUTURE VISIONS:

- Access to elders
- Cultural safety faculty training
- Spaces for knowledge exchange
- Improved college preparation
- Arts and filmmaking programs
- Make French language learning an option
- Land-based learning

- Indigenous people in leadership in post-secondary institutions

CREE FUTURE VISIONS:

- Cree control of education
- Postsecondary in Cree communities
- Toolkit of community needs
- Men's wellness programs
- Indigenous students' supports
- Land-based learning
- Exemption from French
- Childcare/parents' support
- Access to science and math prerequisites in community
- Honour goose break and other cultural events. Students should not be penalized for missing school to attend goose break; other college students can miss school for religious holidays.

TIOHTIÁ:KE (MONTRÉAL) FUTURE VISIONS:

- Indigenous campus events
- Cross-cultural activities
- Traditional arts/culture programs
- Indigenous content by Indigenous teachers
- Accessible scholarships and bursaries
- Indigenous mental health supports
- Catch up with other regions in terms of decolonizing and indigenizing institutions (Québec is behind)

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

With initial collaborating partners and many new partnerships created over the course of the project, we are building relationships and expanding knowledge exchange among communities, organizations and networks engaged in post-secondary and Indigenous education.

Outreach and knowledge sharing with Indigenous community members, specifically current, pre- and post-secondary students, families, schools, community organizations, school boards, and governing bodies is a priority as they are the primary stakeholders in educational change.

Educators at the postsecondary level (Cégep and university faculty, staff and professionals, student services, counselling, academic skills and support) as well as institutional leaders, scholars and

policymakers also comprise important audiences as institutions across Québec are engaged in processes to improve Equity Diversity and Inclusion. While efforts have been made to respond to the TRC Calls for Action in education there remain important gaps in services, supports, and knowledge of Indigenous experiences. The stories and results disseminated comprise multiple voices and perspectives, reflecting the diversity and complexity of Indigenous identities and cultures in Québec in creative and compelling ways. Knowledge transfer is contributing curricular material as well as first-person lived experience and recommendations which postsecondary educators and administrators can leverage for institutional change. In collaboration with the Québec Youth Chair and other partners, this project contributes important and essential voices for policy recommendations in the realm of Indigenous education.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

In February of 2021, a live virtual gathering and celebration was held to share FPPSE project highlights and launch the website. Storytellers, research assistants, and project leads discussed the challenges and barriers faced by Inuit, Cree, Kahnien'keha:ka and Tiohtià:ke-based Indigenous students and graduates as well as personal transformation, resilience, and visions for educational futures. Close to 175 people attended. The live in-person event scheduled for March 2020 had been cancelled due to the pandemic.

A private virtual ceremony took place before the public virtual event to honour the stories and the storytellers, partners and collaborators with elder Amelia MacGregor, knowledge keepers Vicky Boldo and Tauni Sheldon. Remotely from Ontario, Tauni and her son Alapi lit a Qulliq, a traditional Inuit oil lamp and kept the flame burning for the duration of the private and public events. We received very positive feedback from attendees, particularly about the presentations by student researchers involved in the project, and the website, a rich resource for teachers, students, families and advocates for equity in education.

A press conference was held the morning of the public launch. In preparation, the research team including research assistants attended virtual media training sessions with Seneca media educator Amanda Iako'tsi:rareh Lickers, building capacity in media literacy. See list of Media coverage on page 59.

FPPSE team members, including student researchers and emerging scholars, have presented at several national and international conferences and workshops as well as webinars. Films created in collaboration with *Our World* have been screened in film festivals and events locally and internationally. See list of conferences and screenings on page 57-59.

Social media was used before, during, and after outreach activities to inform community members and relevant parties of events, and to build audiences for the *FPPSE* website and engage in dialogue and exchange.

The audio-visual and digital content created during this project exists on the FPPSE project website, fppse.net. The website is a story hub where video and other documentation live, providing access to

community, postsecondary students and personnel as well as policy makers to provide guidance on developing actions towards effective change. To date **over sixty films and videos** have been created in collaboration with storytellers and partners and are available for screening on the site and through Vimeo. Postsecondary educators in multiple institutions and across disciplines have been using the web content on a regular basis with students in the classroom and to fortify their own pedagogy (McGill Education, McGill Social Work, Concordia First Peoples Studies, Bishops University, Dawson College: Journeys, Social Science, Arts Literature Communication, Vanier College: Communications , Cree School Board: *Iyeskuwiiu* and more).

WEBSITE (FPPSE.NET)

The FPPSE Project is about sharing stories from Indigenous students with the goal of improving the postsecondary experience for future generations. The project website of digital storytelling modules is key to mobilizing knowledge for communities, remote and urban, as well as educators, policy makers, administrators and educational networks.

The website contains dozens of video stories – individual testimonials and thematic videos – as well as animation, documentary and experimental films that can be used in the classroom and beyond. The videos are accessible, honest and youth oriented.

The site shares what we learned – research outcomes - in multiple forms: text, graphics, reports and PowerPoints and includes participants' recommendations for better educational opportunities.

It documents our collaborative methodology drawing from decolonizing and community-based approaches and contains our research manual which documents our approach in details.

The site provides resources for educators, students and families including various services available in Montréal related to counselling, medical, food banks, childcare, 2SLGBTQIA+, legal, family programs, sexual assault, domestic violence and more. Resources for educators include calls to action & recommendations, websites, podcasts, suggested readings on pedagogy, storytelling, research & ethics, and more to support in their collaborative processes of Indigenizing and decolonizing educational curriculum, pedagogy and institutions. Included in our extensive resource list is the Intercollegiate Decolonizing Network (IDN) website which hosts a compilation of key educational resources and links to useful websites.

Additional resources and material can be added to the site on request.

Web content has been and continues to be shared on social media for access and distribution far and wide.

CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS

2022:

- **Presentation:** January 14, 2022. First Peoples Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange: A workshop about compassionate pedagogy and using FPPSE resources in your teaching and learning, Intercollegiate Pedagogical Days, Michelle Smith, Laura Shea.
- **Presentation:** February 9, 2022. First Peoples Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange: Visions for post-secondary, Dawson College Social Science Week, Michelle Smith, Kahawihson Horne, Alexandrea Matthews.

2021:

- **Website Launch & Project Celebration Presentation:** February 16, 2021 – by Zoom. Video on First Peoples' PostSecondary Storytelling Exchange FB page https://www.facebook.com/groups/432830358163228/permalink/448527443260186
- **Presentation:** March 10, 2021: "Ethics and Participatory Media" with *"Mapping Participatory Media", Concordia University*, Michelle Smith, Pasha Partridge, Morgan Phillips. https://participatorymedia.redlizardmedia.com/first-peoples-post-secondary-exchange-michelle-smith-pasha-partridge-morgan-kahentonni-phillip/
- **Conference:** March 12, 2021 – Michelle Smith and Morgan Phillips: McGill University: 19th Annual EGSS (Education Graduate Students' Society). Digital Stories: Building Communities through indigenous Research and Storytelling.
- **Webinar:** March 17, 2021. First Peoples Post-secondary Storytelling Exchange (FPPSE). *Institut Nordique du Québec,* Michelle Smith, Nicole Ives, Sophie Tukalak, Pasha Partridge. https://www.inq.ulaval.ca/index.php/fr/formation/webinaires/fppse
- **Presentation: Lunchtime Talk:** March 26, 2021: Storytelling and Revitalization of Education. *Québec Youth Chaire-Midi Causeries* Michelle Smith, Pasha Partridge, Morgan Phillips, Sophie Tukalak. http://www.chairejeunesse.ca/node/1311
- **Presentation:** April 1, 2021: Experiences in the First Peoples' Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange, *First Peoples Week, Dawson College*. Michelle Smith, Kahawihson Horne, Alexandrea Matthews.
- **Presentation:** August 18, 2021, "Dear Teachers: Stories from the First Peoples' Post-Secondary Storytelling Exchange" at *Vanier College's Pedagogical Day, MOTIVATING STUDENTS IN A NEW LEARNING LANDSCAPE*, Michelle Smith, Pasha Partridge, Alexandrea Matthews.

2020:

- **Presentation:** February 3, 2020: Panel Presentation: Concordia University – *FIRST VOICES WEEK*: Indigenous Education systems: A First Peoples Postsecondary Storytelling Exchange (FPPSE) Dawson College 2016-2020.

2019:

- **Presentation:** October 24, 2019. Project Update to SSHRC Grant Partners at Dawson College: First Peoples' Storytelling Exchange: Project Update
- Presentation of films: Truth & ReconciliACTION: Cégeps & Indigenous Futures Conference at Vanier College, May 22, 2019.
- **Presentation of films**: March 13, 2019. Presentations of films made by FPPSE Participants in collaboration with *Our World* at the Skawenní:io Library in Kahnawà:ke.
- **Presentation of films**: March 23, 2019. Presentations of films made by FPPSE Participants in collaboration with *Our World* at the Nasiviik Residence in Kangiqsujuaq, Nunavik.

2018:

- **International Conference**: 14th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. May 16-19, 2018. Indigenous Research: A First Peoples' Storytelling Exchange: Decolonizing Postsecondary Institutions through Digital Storytelling. Panel
- **International Conference:** Aug 2018: 17th International Congress on Circumpolar Health, Copenhagen, Denmark, August 12-15, 2018. Research Team and Inuk postsecondary students. (*Presentation: First Peoples' Postsecondary Storytelling Exchange: Intersecting college and community circles*).
- **Presentation:** November 13, 2018: Presentation of Preliminary Data Analysis to Community Advisory Board, Dawson College.
- **Presentation:** Colloque sur la perseverance et la réussite scolaires chez les Premiers Peuples: Cheminer ensemble pour aller plus loin. Montréal, Canada. Oct 10-12, 2018.
- **Presentation** CICan 2018 Indigenous Education Symposium. Oct 14-16, 2018, Wendake, Canada.
- **Presentation of films**: April 9, 2018. Presentations of films made by FPPSE Participants in collaboratoon with Our World at Dawson College.

2017:

- **International Conference:** World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE); June 24-28, 2017. Panel: *A First Peoples Storytelling Exchange: Intersecting College and Community.*
- **Presentation:** (Dis)Comfort Zones: Negotiating Tensions and Cultivating Belonging in Diverse College Classrooms in Québec, May 17-18, Vanier College, Montréal
- **Presentation:** Colloque de L'Association québécoise de pédagogie collégiale (AQPC) June 6-8, 2017. Concordia University, Montréal
- **Presentation:** Colloque sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires chez les Premiers Peuples Oct 10-12, 2017, Québec, QC.
- **Presentation:** September 19, 2017: A First Peoples Storytelling Exchange: Intersecting college and Community Circles: PROJECT UPDATE to Collaborators/Partners, Dawson College

FILM SCREENINGS AND FESTIVALS

1. Oct 2018 ImaginNATIVE Toronto ON : The Story of Pasha 2:09 minutes by Pasha Partridge, Just Beyond My Front Door 4:21 minutes by Kanerahtens Bush
2. April 2018 Asinabka Ottawa ON:The Story of Pasha 2:09 minutes by Pasha Partridge, Just Beyond My Front Door 4:21 minutes by Kanerahtens Bush, Assimilation 1967 2:49 minutes by Vicky Boldo
3. Nov 2018Regent Park Toronto ON: The Story of Pasha 2:09 minutes by Pasha Partridge, Just Beyond My Front Door 4:21 minutes by Kanerahtens Bush
4. March 2019 SMITHSONIAN Native Cinema Showcase (NCS) in New York - the first time having the event in New York City: Just Beyond My Front Door 4:21 minutes by Kanerahtens Bush
5. August 2019 SMITHSONIAN Native Cinema Showcase (NCS) in Santa Fe, which occurs in August 2019 during Santa Fe Indian Market: Just Beyond My Front Door 4:21 minutes by Kanerahtens Bush
6. 2019 imagineNATIVE Film + Video Tour: The Story of Pasha 2:09 minutes by Pasha Partridge, Just Beyond My Front Door 4:21 minutes by Kanerahtens Bush
7. March 2019 Māoriland Film Festival: The Story of Pasha 2:09 minutes by Pasha Partridge
8. Nickel Film Festival-Sheshatshiu Innu School, Sheshatshiu:
9. May 27 Mealy Mountain Collegiate, Goose Bay: May 30 Labrador: Naullaq & Unaaq by Mark Kadjulik,MASKIHKIY by Jackson Coyes, ó:nen í:ke's Brooke Rice , My Life with Bannock Marlene Hale, Pingualuit - Leena
10. Truth & ReconciliACTION: Reimagining CEGEPs for Indigenous Futures, May 22, 2019 - Vanier College, ó:není:ke's by Brooke Rice, Just Beyond My Front Door by Kanerahtens Bush.
11. The Story of Pasha was selected by Lisa Jackson's for her latest installation TRANSMISSIONS. http://lisajackson.ca/Transmissions
12. Aug 2019 Montréal First People's Festival: Naullaq & Unaaq by Mark Kadjulik, Assimilation 1967 by Vicky Boldo & Just Beyond My Front Door by Kanerahtens Bush

MEDIA COVERAGE

Indigenous top ten https://mailchi.mp/academicagroup/fi1bbklpjd?e=899e104376

CBC Radio Breakaway https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-79-breakaway/clip/15826578-a-storytelling-project-help-indigenous-students-post-secondary-education

Radio Canada International https://www.rcinet.ca/fr/2021/02/16/un-nouveau-site-web-presente-des-recits-sur-les-experiences-vecues-par-les-autochtones-au-niveau-postsecondaire/CBC North Radio in Cree www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-146-winschgaoug-cree

Citi TV https://Montréal.citynews.ca/video/2021/02/15/indigenous-students-share-their-story/

Noovo TV https://noovo.ca/videos/nvl/nvl-du-18-fevrier-2021

The Link https://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/feature/new-virtual-project-aims-to-improve-indigenous-students-access-to-post-secondary-education

Free City Radio interview https://soundcloud.com/freecityradio

CKUT interview www.ckut.ca/

Toronto Star https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/02/19/exchanging-stories-to-improve-education.html

The Concordian https://theconcordian.com/2022/03/nunavimmiut-scholars-testimonies-of-purpose/?fbclid=IwAR1RL-aAlENMoBkw2lTe6U41zyzzBiDHl6Q_k_cwtrRyb-ojHbxsX6Q3kkc

Dawson College D News:

https://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/news/projects/powerful-stories-bring-indigenous-perspectives-to-higher-education/

https://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/news/dnews-issues/2021-03-23/

https://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/news/dnews-issues/2021-04-20/

https://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/news/dnews-issues/2021-05-04/

ONGOING KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Towards the end of the initial FPPSE: Intersecting College and Community Circles grant, the team obtained funds from SSHRC for Knowledge Mobilization. While COVID has delayed this process, we are working to fulfill our commitment to community partners by bringing results and stories back to communities.

Research findings will be presented to youth, parents, and community members through outreach activities in Nunavik and Kanien'kehá:ka Territories. Many student storytellers in the FPPSE identified the importance of role-models in demystifying the educational path and creating opportunities and openings for postsecondary education. Bringing knowledge back to community involves peer-to-peer knowledge transfer while contributing to local communities' educational initiatives.

In addition to the FPPSE web resources and films, booklets highlighting community specific project outcomes will be shared during these activities. They will be distributed in communities and across education networks to contribute to local, regional, and provincial discussions regarding access to

postsecondary education in Indigenous communities (i.e. in-community and distance learning, improved preparation and accessibility, increased student support, teacher training on historic and ongoing colonization, etc).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE VISION

The stories emerging from this research comprise multiple voices and perspectives, reflecting the diversity and complexity of Indigenous identities and cultures in Québec. Each story is unique, yet there are common experiences which underscore the numerous gaps in services, supports, and knowledge of Indigenous experience; and the need for fundamental change in post-secondary education in order to meet the needs and aspirations of Indigenous students.

While there remain significant challenges and barriers in post-secondary institutions across Canada there have been important gains, largely a result of advocacy by Indigenous communities, faculty and students who are pushing for more access to culturally safe learning environments and self-determined education.

In-community post-secondary programs are already in the works. *Iyeskuwiiu, a* one-year Cree-centred college transition program, was launched in fall 2021. Created by the Cree School Board and Sabtuan Adult Education Centre, *Iyeskuwiiu* offers Cree language, history and culture and land-based learning *in* Eeyou Istchee. A new Bachelor of Social Work program, offered by McGill University School of Social Work in collaboration with the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services will be delivered in Nunavik. Kiuna First Nations College is expanding programs; Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (KI), the Kativik School Board, is developing the first College degree program to be delivered in Nunavik, an Arts, Literature Communications DEC.

Indigenous pedagogies and methodologies are being incorporated by Indigenous faculty and students and allies in some colleges and universities, with new programs in language and culture revitalization and land-based learning. This transformation is happening at the academic level across the country through initiatives focused on educating about historic and ongoing colonization, Indigenous representation in faculty and the student body, and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, histories, and realities. Indigenous students are reclaiming and asserting their culture and identity while attending formal education. They are demystifying postsecondary education and becoming role models for youth.

As stated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, “not only does reconciliation require apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada’s national history, and public commemoration, but it also **needs real social, political, and economic change** (TRC report vol. 6 p 20).

Our hope is that the FPPSE can continue to be part of the change in the area of education, contributing to dialogue, advocacy and educational sovereignty movements. In the least, we believe that our

collaborative approach, foregrounding relationships, equity, collective care and mentorship, is one that can help carry us forward as we work together to build self-determined futures.

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