

CATALYST

FUTURE OF CANADA CENTRE


Voices of Indigenous youth leaders on reconciliation

VOLUME 1: BUILDING OUR KNOWLEDGE BUNDLE

Deloitte.

CRE
Canadian Roots Exchange

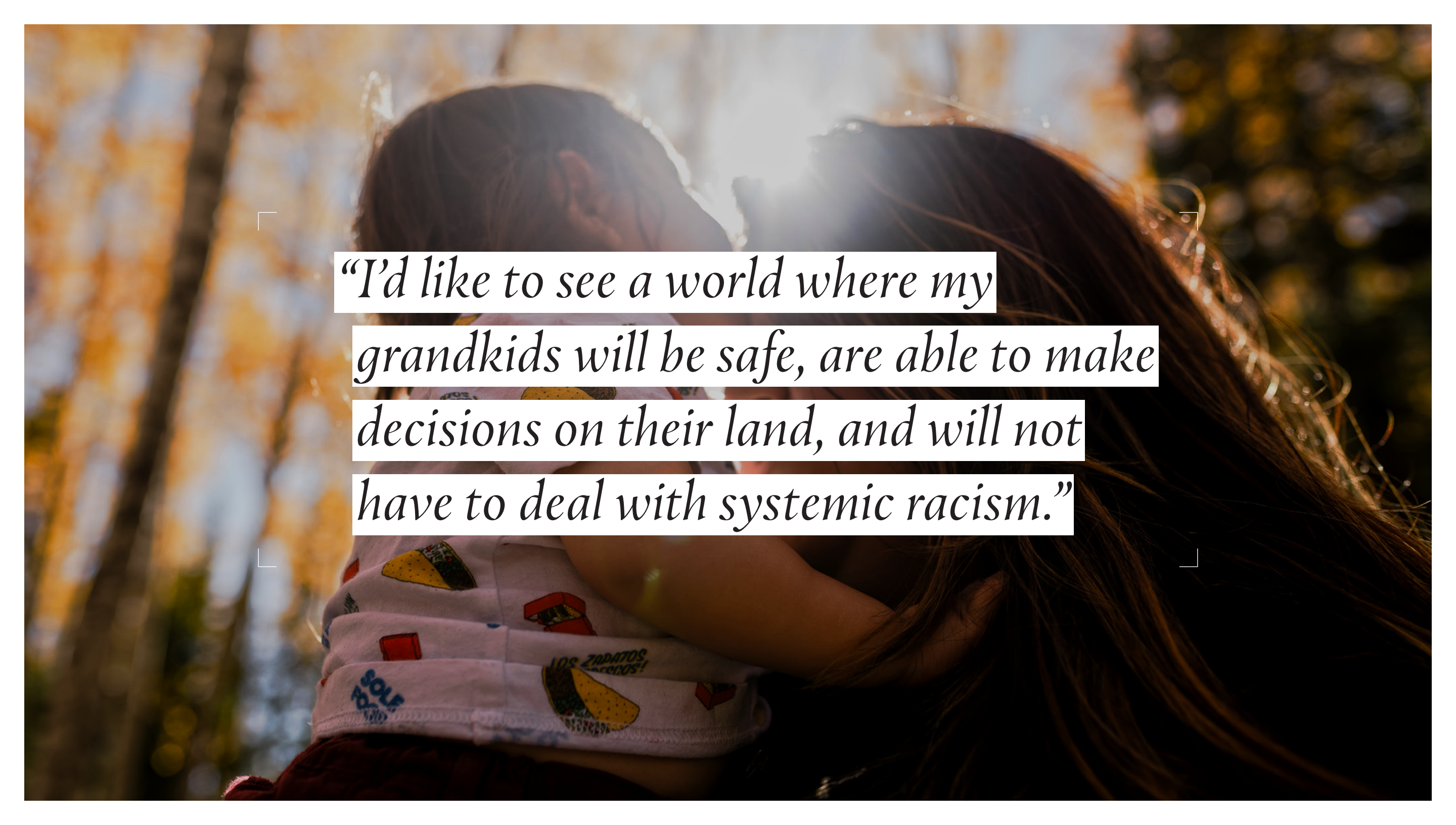


An aerial photograph of a vast, dense forest landscape. A winding river flows through the center of the image, surrounded by lush green trees. The terrain is flat and extends to the horizon under a clear sky. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular box in the center of the image.

We acknowledge that Deloitte offices reside on traditional, treaty, and unceded territories, now known as Canada and referred to as Turtle Island by many Indigenous peoples. We acknowledge this land is still home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We are all Treaty people.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	→	04
SETTING THE SCENE	→	06
<i>How this project began</i>	→	07
<i>Methodology</i>	→	08
PRIORITIES FOR RECONCILIATION	→	09
<i>The current state</i>	→	11
<i>The four themes</i>	→	13
1. <i>Education</i>	→	14
2. <i>Access to services</i>	→	15
3. <i>Environment</i>	→	16
4. <i>Indigenous sovereignty</i>	→	17
WHAT'S NEXT ON OUR JOURNEY	→	18

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is seen from the back, holding a baby. The baby is wearing a white t-shirt with colorful graphics, including a taco and the text "LOS ZAPATOS SON VERDES!". The scene is set outdoors in a park-like setting with trees and sunlight filtering through the leaves. The text is overlaid on the image in a white serif font, enclosed in a white box.

“I’d like to see a world where my grandkids will be safe, are able to make decisions on their land, and will not have to deal with systemic racism.”

In recent years, Canada has faced growing pressure to respond to calls for reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Indigenous peoples from coast to coast to coast are still experiencing the impacts of colonization, with younger generations inheriting the results of the missteps by Canada’s political and business leaders over the decades. But they’re also living in a moment of heightened opportunity, with the groundswell in calls for action to redress the past giving them more visibility to influence decisions around reconciliation. Specifically including young Indigenous peoples in making such decisions is critical for effecting meaningful and sustainable change.

And as they look to the future, what do Indigenous youth want—for themselves, their families, their communities?

“I want to see people healing and communities thriving... I want to hear that we have all the things everyone else has.”

This is what one young Indigenous person told us during a recent interview exploring the issues that matter most to Indigenous youth—and what they want the country’s top policymakers to be considering. The interview was one of several conducted by Deloitte’s Future of Canada Centre, which explores the country’s most pressing challenges and opportunities from a policy perspective, as part of an objective to amplify the messages that Indigenous youth have for business and government.

Those messages revolve around four issues that a group of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth from across Canada identified as crucial to advancing reconciliation: education, access to services, environment, and Indigenous sovereignty. Each will be explored to ignite meaningful dialogue about harnessing the potential of Indigenous youth and to offer recommendations on how government and business—even individual Canadians—can participate further in advancing reconciliation through policy and action.

The series of themed explorations begins with this introductory report, which lays the groundwork: it addresses the *raison d’être*, research and data-gathering approach, participant composition, and current state of reconciliation in Canada.



Setting the scene



How this project began

Under the inclusion pillar of our *Reconciliation Action Plan*, Deloitte pledged to seek collaborative opportunities to support Canada's reconciliation journey, including by co-publishing a paper on reconciliation efforts.¹ This commitment led to working with Canadian Roots Exchange (CRE), a national Indigenous youth-led organization that provides programs, grants, and opportunities to strengthen and amplify the voices of Indigenous youth.

In 2022, Deloitte and CRE collaborated on an *Indigenous Youth Advocacy Week (IYAW)*, the first of its kind in Canada. The purpose of the event was to connect Indigenous youth from across nations, coasts, and disciplines of interest with government leaders to share their ideas for federal policies on a range of key issues, and to build their confidence to consider a career in policy and advocacy. Issues discussed included health care and Indigenous languages, among others.²

Deloitte and CRE saw an opportunity to keep the IYAW momentum going by exploring in depth the issues that are most important to participants, reporting our findings, and proposing concrete recommendations for action. In doing this, we hope to elevate the voices of emerging Indigenous leaders to government and business.

Why is this important? Because Indigenous youth have significant potential to enact change for themselves, their communities, and Canada as a whole, given the changing social landscape and their young, growing population. On average, Indigenous peoples are **8.8 years younger** than their non-Indigenous peers, according to 2016 figures. And their numbers are growing—**from 1.8 million people** in 2016, it's projected that the Indigenous population in Canada could reach between **2.5 and 3.2 million people** by 2041.

More Indigenous youth are completing high school than ever, at a **rate of 70%** in 2016—that's **up from 57%** in 2006.³ They're also taking on more advocacy and leadership roles for their communities. For informed and sustainable decisions to be made for the future of this growing demographic, the voices of these emerging Indigenous leaders and voters should be heard in policy discussions.

And they have things to say.

In the first Government of Canada report on the state of youth, published in 2021, the young people who contributed emphasized the need for governments to acknowledge that “*Canada was built on colonization and continues to thrive off of it today,*”⁴ such as through its lands and resources. For Indigenous youth, the effects of colonization continue to be felt—intergenerational trauma, family disruption through child welfare apprehensions, marginalization, and systemic discrimination.

And, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic increased pressures on Indigenous communities.⁵ Among other impacts, public-health restrictions on movement made access to learning and mental health supports even more difficult.

Despite the challenges, Indigenous youth continue to demonstrate strength and resilience. For example, those who attended the 2022 IYAW said they felt a collective responsibility as caregivers to future generations and a passion for advocacy as future ancestors. They stressed the importance of having their say in deliberations about the critical issues of today, as policy decisions made now will have a profound impact on both their lives and those of future generations.

Methodology

Research approach

Conducting research with Indigenous youth today requires a more collaborative approach than how it has been done in the past. Participants should have control over the questions asked and themes explored,⁶ and researchers should employ a strengths-based approach in discussions.⁷ This holds the research to an ethical standard that centres on self-determination⁸ and empowers people by encouraging their decision-making and understanding of the tools and technologies used in the research process.⁹

This means that the Indigenous youth who participated in our research provided input and informed the questions we asked. In addition to the interviews we conducted, we reviewed our findings with the youth, gave them debriefs on our progress, and used their feedback to revise our approach. We described our data-gathering and storage practices, how their contributions would be acknowledged in the

report, and who to contact with questions or concerns. The participants retain control over their data: it will be destroyed or given to them upon request.

As a result, the data presented in the reports will be aggregated unless individual credit is given with consent. We will review external evidence that both tests and supports the participants' statements as we study each topic in greater detail, and incorporate secondary source data where relevant, such as shown in *Figure 3*.

Data-gathering methods

We adhere to research ethics and guidelines related to Indigenous data sovereignty and personal privacy each time we collect data. This includes observing the First Nations principles of OCAP: Indigenous data **ownership, control, access, and possession**.¹⁰

For this series, we gathered data from primary and secondary sources using qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary sources included the 24 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth selected by CRE to participate in IYAW. They ranged in age from 19 to 29, and were from communities across the country. Most identified as First Nations and reported living in an urban setting.

We conducted a survey of 17 of these participants. On CRE's counsel, four of the youth were invited to participate in in-depth, follow-up interviews with Deloitte on topics

related to reconciliation, the issues facing them and their communities, and how they felt government, business, and society should respond. The surveys and interviews were conducted from June to September 2022. Those who participated received honoraria.

Secondary sources included academic publications, government reports, and aggregated datasets from Statistics Canada pertaining to Indigenous youth specifically and reconciliation generally, on which our researchers conducted analysis.

We're pleased to present our early findings in the following sections. We'll apply a similar data-gathering approach throughout this series: illustrating participant perspectives through an interwoven narrative of data, quotes from IYAW participants, and secondary literature.

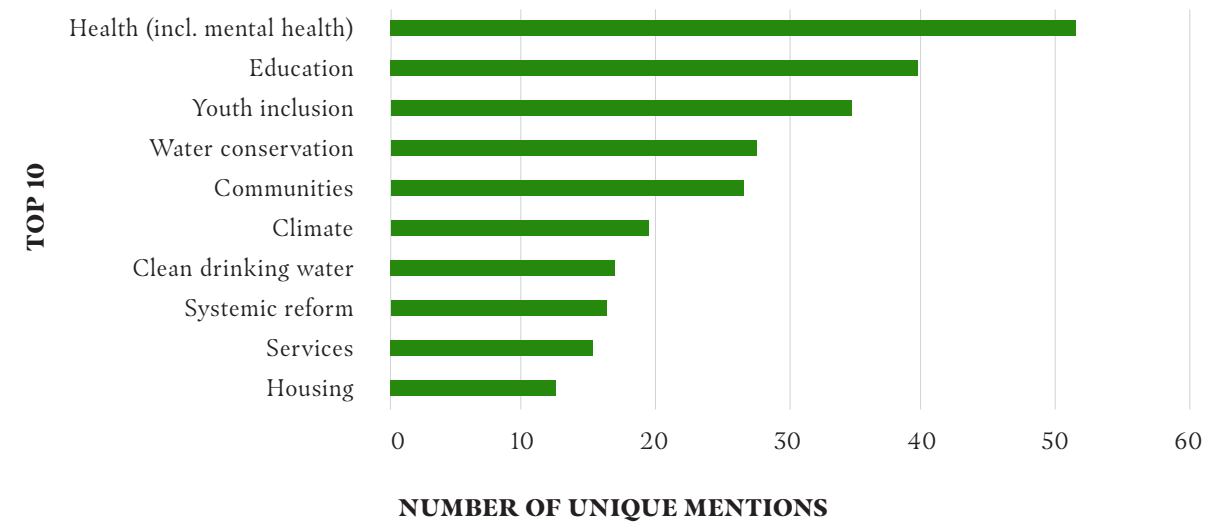


Priorities for reconciliation

As part of the application process to participate in Indigenous Youth Advocacy Week, applicants were asked to share their reasons for wanting to participate and to identify the issues they considered most important. We analyzed word frequency in the survey they completed to determine common themes. They described a desire to get **involved** and have a **voice**. They also described wanting to make lasting **change** that cuts across **communities** and **generations**. As shown in *Figure 1*, their desire for change spanned several major issues, ranging from health and education to environmental conservation.

“*It’s about forgiveness, for them to right their wrong.*”

Figure 1: Issues youth would want to raise with senior political leaders



Source: Indigenous Youth Advocacy Week applications

IYAW applicants were asked what they would want to discuss with Members of Parliament and Senators. Deloitte did an analysis of word frequency to identify the top issues for deeper exploration.

The current state

Dialogue around reconciliation, especially in research and media coverage, suggests there's growing alignment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on issues impacting Indigenous life in Canada. This is especially true among young people of both populations, who generally agree the historical wrongs inflicted on Indigenous peoples are ongoing and that making positive change is needed to reach common life goals.¹¹ For example, **67% of Indigenous youth** feel that relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can only improve by addressing socio-economic inequality; **69% of non-Indigenous youth** feel the same.¹²

For Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth alike, the most common vision for reconciliation expressed in the federal government's 2021 report on youth was *"rebuilding a relationship and trust between the two populations."*¹³ When we asked the IYAW participants in our study what reconciliation involves, they said that it's not simply a task to be completed but a *"vision for a society where past and current injustices are recognized and addressed."* This, they said, required a collective understanding of the truth about what really happened when settlers arrived, and who was here before they arrived.

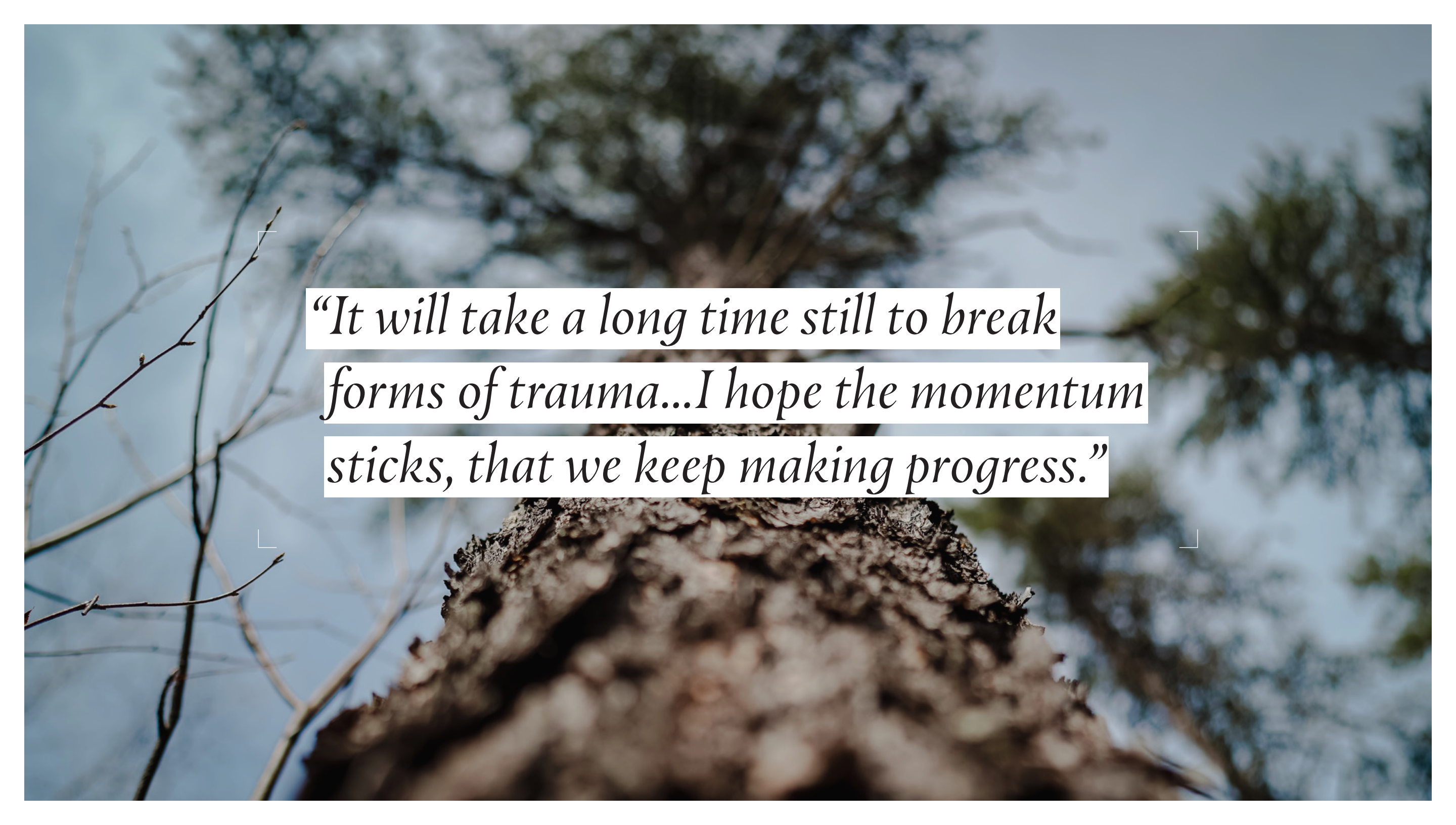
Because we're living in a time when reconciliation is discussed more openly and we're exposed to more accurate accounts of Canada's colonial history, frank discussions on where to go from here can be had. Here's what a few participants told us:

"I'd like a future where we are taken seriously and that there's accountability."

"I hope that people will be aware of what actually happened and what is still impacting us, and I hope in the next generation after that, or during the shift, we have more leaders that are seen and heard."

"There is no true reconciliation until all our people are healed. Reconciliation is equality and having our nations healed."

As for reconciliation efforts in the business sector, corporate Canada has begun to heed the calls to action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to support Indigenous self-determination. In recent years, businesses have made public commitments through action plans and community partnerships with Indigenous nations and non-profit organizations. It's an encouraging start but, as the young people in our study emphasized, reconciliation efforts by corporate Canada should include Indigenous voices at the table and, as one participant noted, *"given the higher education rates of Indigenous youth, now is a good time to be prepared"* to respond.



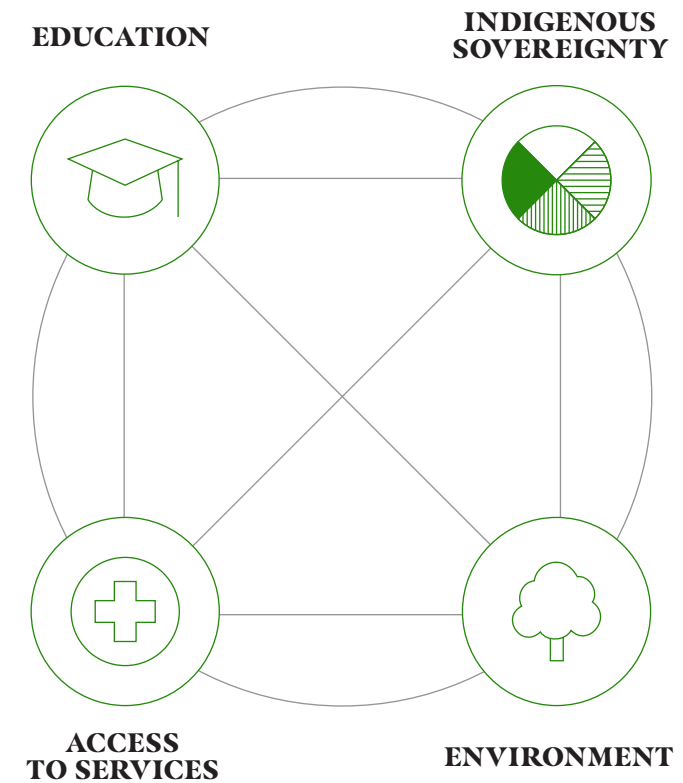
“It will take a long time still to break forms of trauma...I hope the momentum sticks, that we keep making progress.”

The four themes

As our researchers listened to IYAW participants and analyzed the data, it became clear that our original commitment to co-publish one report on reconciliation efforts was insufficient to elevate and explore the issues deemed important. In response, we committed to publish a series of reports, each of which would explore an individual reconciliation theme and encourage dialogue on the recommendations to advance reconciliation.

The Deloitte team and CRE then aggregated participant responses into broad themes, with cultural revitalization as a cross-cutting priority interwoven throughout. The themes are education, access to services, environment, and Indigenous sovereignty.

Figure 2: The key reconciliation themes identified by program participants



1. Education

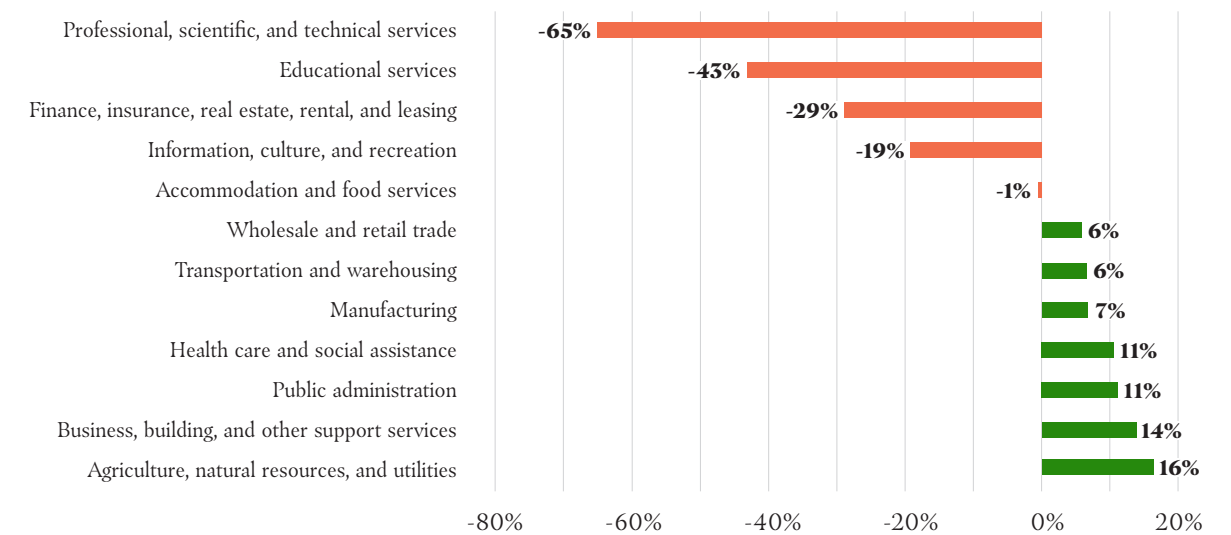
We define education as Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of sharing knowledge and learning as they relate to employment outcomes. Education includes earning formal credentials, such as post-secondary education, and obtaining certifications to pave career pathways, such as professional development. It also includes Indigenous language revitalization and transmission of knowledge in Indigenous laws and customs, community, and well-being.¹⁴ The IYAW participants in our study said there was a general lack of support for Indigenous youth moving through the school system.

The status quo has led to an employment situation in which Indigenous youth are much less likely than their non-Indigenous peers to be employed in key industry sectors such as professional and financial services.



Students get lost in the shuffle and slip through the cracks, for those trying to succeed.”

Figure 3: Employment of Indigenous youth relative to non-Indigenous youth, by industry (2021)



Source: Statistics Canada; original data analysis by Deloitte Canada.

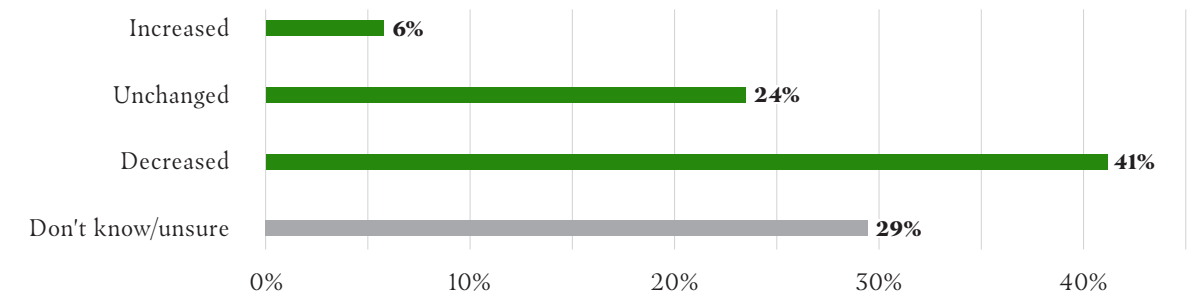
Deloitte analyzed public data to determine the extent to which Indigenous youth are represented in labour markets. We found those aged 15 to 24 were **65% less likely** to be employed in key sectors, such as professional and financial services.

2. Access to services

This theme refers to the infrastructure and services needed to sustain healthy individuals and communities. It includes mental health services and assets such as community gathering spaces and housing supports, all of which are resources Indigenous youth and others need to build healthy lives and homes.¹⁵

“*When you have mental health issues, you need help now—not six months from now.*”

Figure 4: Perceptions regarding access to mental health services during the pandemic



Source: Indigenous Youth Advocacy Week participant survey

Some IYAW attendees (41%) noted a decrease in accessible mental health services during the COVID-19 crisis and nearly a quarter (24%) saw no change despite an increase in telehealth services off-reserve in Canada. This corroborates similar data on the mental well-being of Indigenous persons during the pandemic.¹⁶

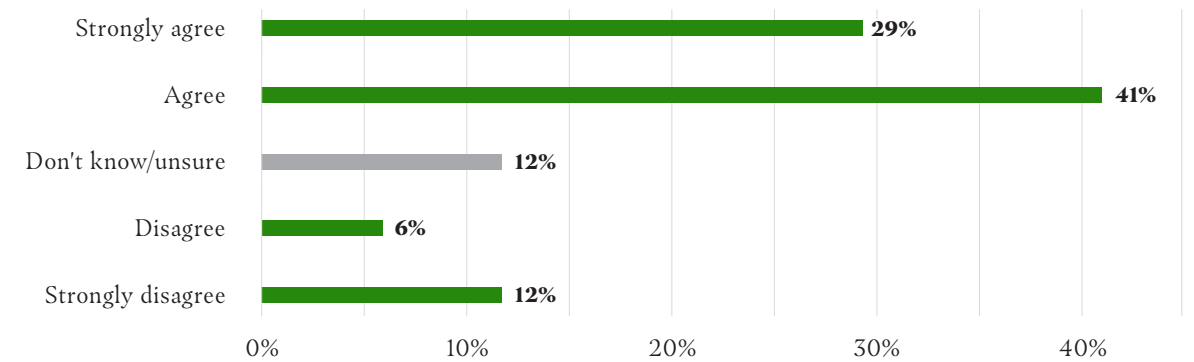
3. Environment

We chose environment as a theme over more specific issues like climate change because it encompasses broader issues: traditional stewardship, resource development, and sustainability, among others. The youth leaders made specific references to the need for more action on land conservation, protection, and rehabilitation, and the need for both government and private business to consult more with Indigenous communities in a manner that respects engagement principles and Indigenous autonomy. Collaboration is sorely lacking these days, according to the participants.



It seems like no one wants to do consultation. They make it so inaccessible. They need it tomorrow, and it's always so hostile.”

Figure 5: Agreement that climate change is being experienced locally



Source: Indigenous Youth Advocacy Week participant survey

A large majority (70%) report seeing the effects of climate change in their local communities, suggesting a sense of urgency to see action to mitigate the impacts.

4. Indigenous sovereignty

We define sovereignty as the agency and capacity of Indigenous peoples and communities to make decisions for themselves regarding their own future, relationships, and spaces in which they live. Issues in sovereignty may include, for example, the concept of *land back* and what that means to individuals and institutions in Indigenous communities.¹⁷ It's not just about the physical aspects of land and about reclaiming control; it's also about relationships.

“

Settlers is not the issue, it's the exclusion of Indigenous voices on what happens on the land that's the issue ...

Our voices are just as important. Give back value to our voices.”



*What's next on
our journey*





Throughout 2023, we'll address each of the themes in a format similar to this introductory report: engaging with Indigenous youth, elevating their voices, validating findings with external evidence, and speaking with relevant subject matter experts. And we'll employ an Indigenous-centred research approach that complements non-Indigenous qualitative and quantitative research.

Each report will also include a set of practical recommendations for government, private business, and the public to help address, rectify, or advance the issues raised about that topic and the actions the Indigenous youth leaders wish to see in advancing reconciliation efforts in Canada.

For we are all on this journey together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Deloitte's Future of Canada Centre and Deloitte Indigenous gratefully acknowledge Canadian Roots Exchange, including Megan Lewis and Kim Wakeford, for their collaboration in the development of this report. Deloitte also wishes to thank Alexandra Biron, Ayesha Chughtai, Robert Falconer, Dean Janvier, Regina Mandamin, Mike Nethercott, Charles Perron, Maya Prager, Alexandra Wilkinson, and Wilson Zhang for their support and contributions to the research and writing of this report.

THE FUTURE OF CANADA CENTRE

The Future of Canada Centre facilitates an exploration of new ideas, viewpoints, and insights about our country's most important national issues, with the aim of helping propel Canada into a new age of growth and competitiveness. It houses a team of Deloitte's most innovative thinkers and experienced leaders, who are valued influencers in their respective fields.

ENDNOTES

1. Deloitte, *Reconciliation Action Plan: Shaping a shared path for reconciliation*, 2020, p. 16.
2. CRE, *Indigenous Youth Advocacy Week: Final Wrap-Up Report*, July 2022.
3. Thomas Anderson, "Chapter 4: Indigenous Youth in Canada," *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report*, Statistics Canada, 2021.
4. Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada, *Canada's First State of Youth Report*, 2021, p. 25.
5. Ibid, p. 22.
6. MacDonald et al., "Youth-Led Participatory Video as a Strategy to Enhance Inuit Youth Adaptive Capacities for Dealing with Climate Change," *Arctic Institute of North America*, vol. 68, No. 4 (2015), pp. 486-499.
7. First Nations Information Governance Centre, *The First Nations Principles of OCAP*.
8. Thambinathan and Kinsella, "Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20 (2021).
9. MacDonald et al., "Youth-Led Participatory Video as a Strategy to Enhance Inuit Youth Adaptive Capacities for Dealing with Climate Change;" Halsall and Forneris, "Behind the Scenes of Youth-Led Community Events," *Youth Engagement in Health Promotion* (September 2016), Vol 1(2).
10. First Nations Information Governance Centre, *The First Nations Principles of OCAP*.
11. Environics Institute for Survey Research, CRE, and MasterCard Foundation, *National Youth Reconciliation Barometre 2019*.
12. Ibid.
13. Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada, *Canada's First State of Youth Report*, 2021, p. 22.
14. Dockstator et al., "Insights Into Community Development in First Nations: A Poverty Action Research Project," *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development* (2022), 2(2), pp. 81-108.
15. Andersson and Ledogar, "The CIET Aboriginal Youth Resilience Studies: 14 Years of Capacity Building and Methods Development in Canada," *Pimatisiwin* (2008 Summer), 6(2), pp. 65-88.
16. Arriagada, Hahmann, and O'Donnell, "Indigenous people and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic," *Statistics Canada*, 2020.
17. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous Adolescents," 2007; Bonnie Freeman, "The Spirit of Indigenous Youth: The Resilience and Self-Determination in Connecting to the Spirit and Ways of Knowing," *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing* (2017), vol. 2 issue 1.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Damien Bouchard is an Anishinaabe father, photographer, videographer, and content creator based in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He's originally from Aroland First Nation, part of Treaty No. 9 territory. Damien owns his own private business, Crow Creations, in addition to working full time for the communities of the Greenstone district with Minodahmun Development. Damien's work focuses on natural landscapes, drawing inspiration from his surroundings and people celebrating their culture. He loves to capture moments that are both unique and inspiring.



www.deloitte.ca

This publication contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this publication, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor. Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this publication.

About Deloitte

Deloitte provides audit and assurance, consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory, tax, and related services to public and private clients spanning multiple industries. Deloitte serves four out of five Fortune Global 500® companies through a globally connected network of member firms in more than 150 countries and territories bringing world-class capabilities, insights, and service to address clients' most complex business challenges. Deloitte LLP, an Ontario limited liability partnership, is the Canadian member firm of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited. Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee, and its network of member firms, each of which is a legally separate and independent entity. Please see www.deloitte.com/about for a detailed description of the legal structure of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited and its member firms.

Our global Purpose is making an impact that matters. At Deloitte Canada, that translates into building a better future by accelerating and expanding access to knowledge. We believe we can achieve this Purpose by living our Shared Values to lead the way, serve with integrity, take care of each other, foster inclusion, and collaborate for measurable impact.

To learn more about Deloitte's approximately 330,000 professionals, over 11,000 of whom are part of the Canadian firm, please connect with us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), or [Facebook](#).

© Deloitte LLP and affiliated entities.

Designed and produced by the Agency | Deloitte Canada. 22-6328166