

# CATALYST

FUTURE OF CANADA CENTRE

## *Voices of Indigenous youth leaders on reconciliation*

**VOLUME 2:** BRIDGING STUDY AND WORK FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS


**Deloitte.**

**CRE**  
Canadian Radio Exchange



Artwork: *Growth* by Atheana Picha, 2023





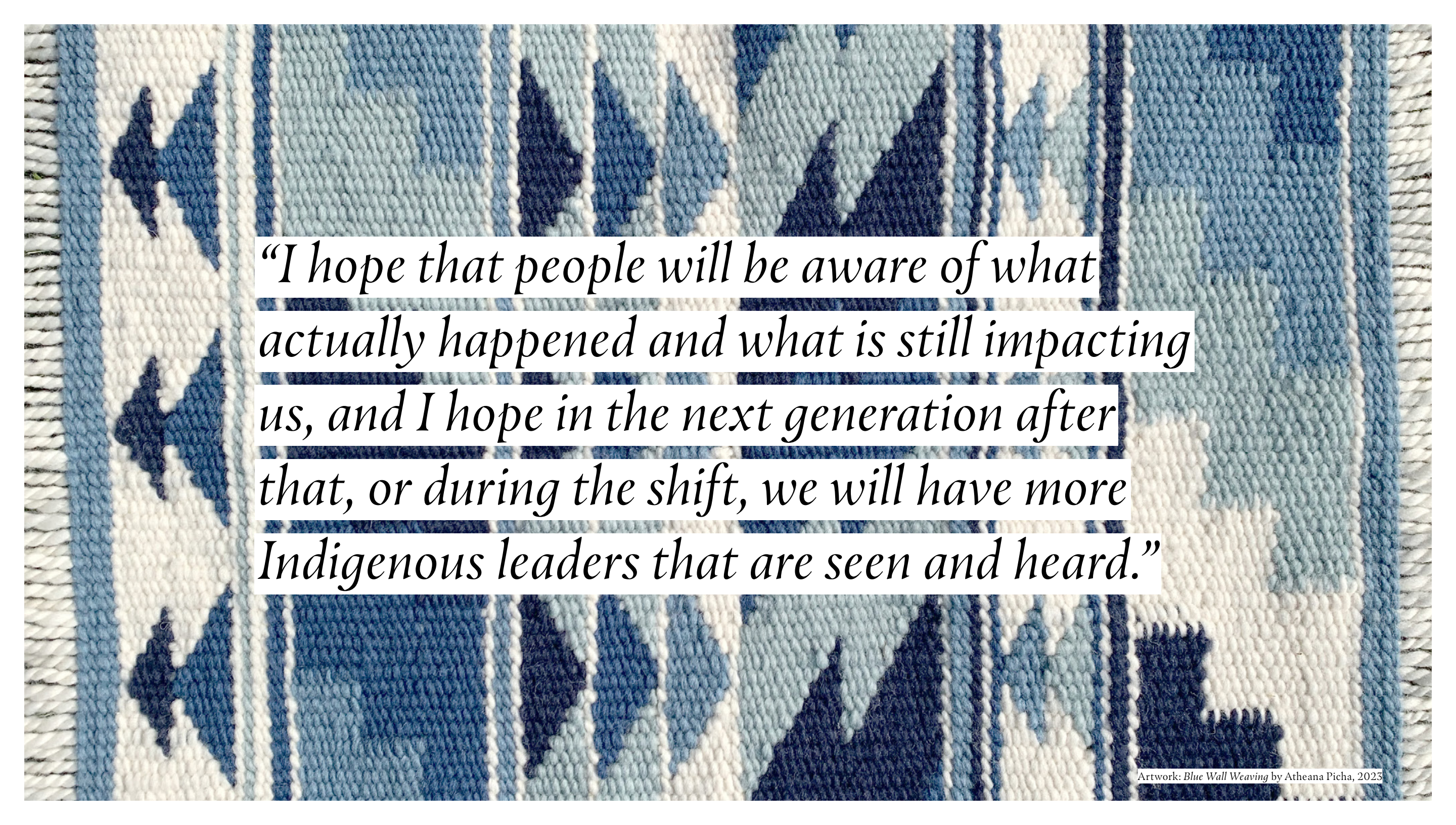
*We acknowledge that Deloitte offices reside  
on traditional, treaty, and unceded territories,  
now known as Canada and referred to as  
Turtle Island by many Indigenous Peoples.  
We acknowledge this land is still home to  
many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.  
We are all Treaty people.*

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To learn more about how this report came about, read volume 1 in this series: [Building our knowledge bundle](#).





*“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 will have more Indigenous leaders that are seen and heard.”*



INTRODUCTION

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth are in a pivotal moment of opportunity. Their post-secondary graduation rates are improving at all levels. They have labour force participation rates comparable with those of their non-Indigenous peers. And they continue to be a growing segment of the population in Canada.

With efforts toward reconciliation beginning to be made by organizations in both the public and private sectors, businesses and higher-learning institutions are starting to see the unique value that Indigenous youth offer to advancing academic discourse and unique perspectives in the workplace. But progress remains slow going: these young people continue to face systemic barriers on their path to academic and career success.

Young Indigenous voices are largely absent at decision-making tables on reconciliation and our research found that the benefits from any progress are not being felt at the individual level, as had been hoped. To build more inclusive environments in which Indigenous youth can succeed, organizations need to listen to the voices they say they’re trying to include.

We have heard their voices. We want to amplify their perspectives about their present circumstances and their recommendations for the future. We encourage decision-makers to examine the progress of their reconciliation work in a manner that is informed by the experience of young Indigenous Peoples and, ultimately, ensure their efforts have truly positive impacts.

This is the second volume of the Deloitte Future of Canada Centre’s *Voices of Indigenous youth leaders on reconciliation* series, which acts on our commitment to ignite meaningful dialogue on four themes identified by Indigenous youth as crucial to advancing reconciliation. This report focuses on reconciliation in the context of higher education and early employment.

All recommendations come solely from the youth.

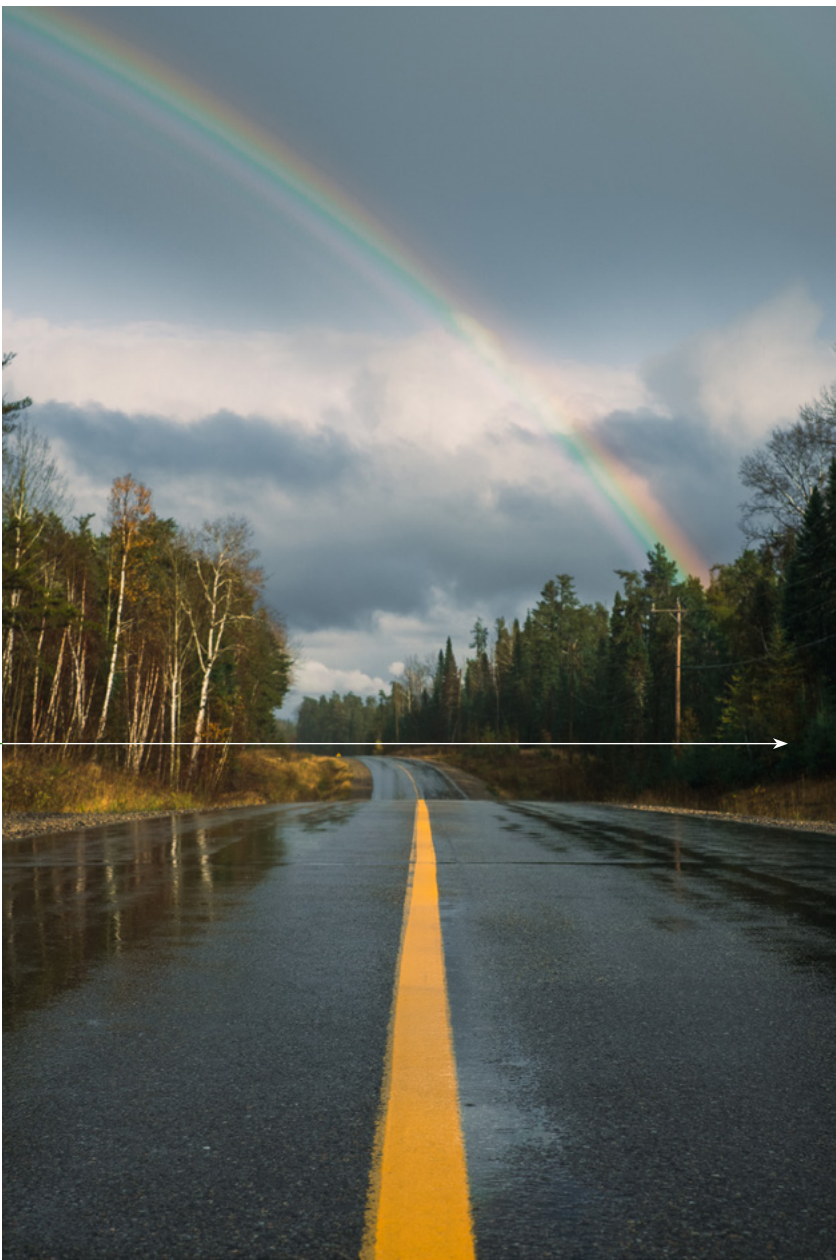


Photo by Damien Bouchard

### ***Our approach***

This report takes a youth-centred, “two-eyed seeing” research approach, which balances the use of Indigenous and Western research methods.<sup>1</sup> This means we collected data and developed our findings in keeping with First Nations ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP®) principles. Given our focus on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth, we also relied on an inductive approach to our inquiry to identify key themes and findings, as they are experts in their own lived experience.

We structured the report as a journey, from post-secondary learning through the transition to the labour force and, finally, to the early stages of their chosen career. Each section outlines colonial barriers identified by the

participants of the 2022 Indigenous Youth Advocacy Week (IYAW) organized by the Canadian Roots Exchange (CRE) and the recommendations they had for advancing reconciliation efforts in these areas. We acknowledge that many post-secondary institutions and employers have made varying levels of progress on overcoming these barriers; in these cases, we encourage organizations to maintain, improve, scale up, and continue to build awareness for such efforts.

### ***Our methodology***

We began by surveying Indigenous youth participating in CRE’s 2022 IYAW, who ranged in age from 18 to 29. We held follow-up interviews with four of them to dig deeper into the challenges they faced and to consider possible solutions. We then distilled their reflections and recommendations into nine broad categories.

We supplemented and validated their recommendations with secondary sources, including academic publications, analyses of aggregated data sets from Statistics Canada, and interviews with both Deloitte and industry specialists experienced in implementing reconciliation mandates in post-secondary and employment spaces.

The recommendations are not exhaustive, but we hope they offer readers a starting point and fresh ideas on how to enhance reconciliation in their own work.

# An Indigenous youth-centred approach

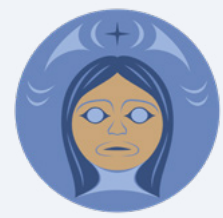
A note about the young Indigenous leaders themselves: they participated in our research anonymously, so we created three fictional personas to help bring their experiences to life.



**Kyle** is a member of a semi-remote First Nations community in the Prairies. He attended school on his reserve from kindergarten to Grade 12, and had to move away from his community for the first time to attend university in Calgary. Kyle misses his home and family; he's been struggling to figure out life in the city and to keep up with school.



**Ahnah** is a member of an Inuit community in Nunavut. Her family moved to Ottawa for health care before she was born and has lived there ever since. She will soon graduate from university and is eagerly searching for employment, but she has felt out of place in most of her job interviews so far. Ahnah wants to find a workplace that aligns with her cultural values and provides her with access to Indigenous co-workers and leaders she can identify with.



**Jesse** is a two-spirit person raised in a small town who now works in the professional services industry in a nearby city. At birth, they were adopted by non-Indigenous parents and recently discovered their First Nations family. Jesse wants to express their identity more freely at work and have the flexibility to visit and connect with their family and culture more often.

Artwork by Atheana Picha

# Setting the scene

We define reconciliation through education as empowering Indigenous Peoples' learning journeys and enhancing knowledge-sharing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, with the objective of self-defined positive employment and life outcomes.

What does this look like?

## ***An inclusive understanding of success***

While the career experiences in this report relate mostly to what's often referred to as "professional" employment spaces, we recognize that success can be defined more broadly. Through our research, we learned that some of the ways Indigenous students define success include having the opportunity to fulfill their dreams, contribute to their community, and support collective self-determination.<sup>2</sup> The youth leaders we interviewed expressed the importance of respecting successes that don't meet standard definitions. For example, a choice to not participate in higher education shouldn't be seen as failure even though it's one of many learning journeys to gaining knowledge and experiences.

“*You don't just have to be a lawyer or a doctor to be a success story.*”

– Ahnah



“*It was assumed Indigenous students wouldn't pursue university and would only be in trades, so there were no supports in that area, but now it's gotten a little better.*”

– Kyle







# *Navigating the post-secondary education path*

Artwork: *Blue Blackfish* by Atheana Picha, 2022. Image courtesy of Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art.



Reconciliation efforts in the education field to date, while commendable, need to go deeper for Indigenous students to feel their effects. While Indigenous Peoples are making considerable gains in completing university, as shown in Figure 1, there is still a significant gap compared with non-Indigenous people (Figure 2). This raises an obvious question: is enough being done to eliminate barriers for Indigenous students in their post-secondary pursuits?

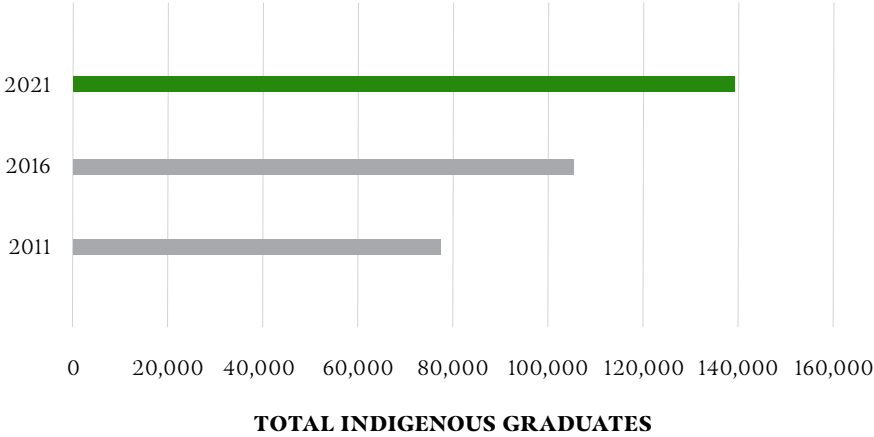
Young Indigenous leaders told us that navigating university can be an intimidating and isolating experience. Research confirms that many students, especially those leaving their communities, felt they did not belong.<sup>5</sup> The lack of support and ongoing isolation tended to have negative impacts on their academic performance, other specialists told us.



***“Education takes a toll personally: I grew up on reserve and when you leave the community, you get support to go to the city but then all those services are lost. We get more support in first year, but it diminishes over time.”***

– Kyle

**Figure 1: Total number of people of Indigenous identity\* with a bachelor's degree or higher**



Source: Statistics Canada Catalogue Table 98-10-0423-01; original analysis by the Deloitte Future of Canada Centre

\*Statistics Canada defines Indigenous identity as “persons who identify as First Nations (North American Indian), Métis and/or Inuk (Inuit) and/or those who report being Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the Indian Act of Canada), and/or those who report having membership in a First Nation or Indian band.”

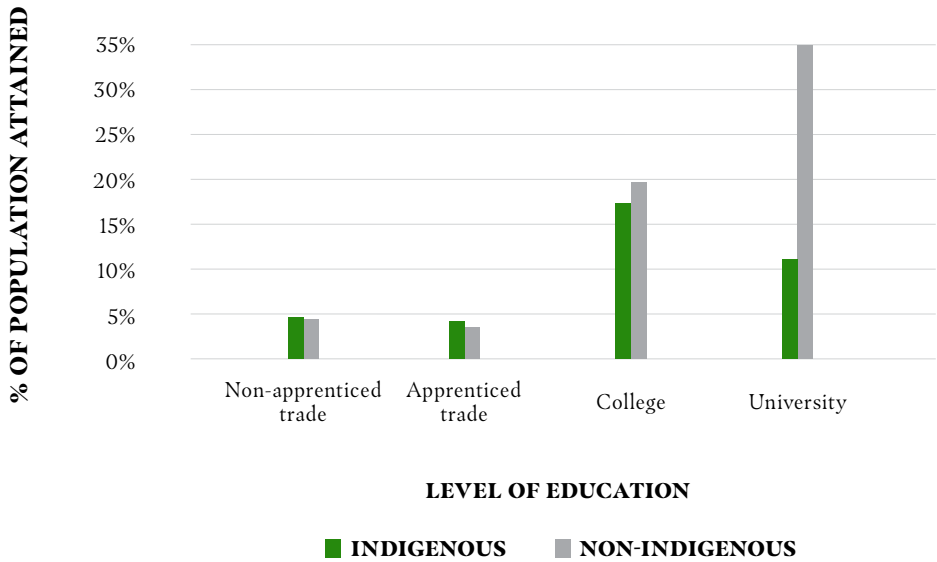


*“Even though they are coming to a new place, with a new culture, a new city, some people expect that they will be okay because they are staying in the same country. Institutionally, we need to have supports along their journey and ask ourselves what supports we’re providing students.”*

– Serena Dykstra, Professor and Program Coordinator,  
Aboriginal Community Advocacy Program, Confederation College

The impact of colonialism and residential schools on post-secondary education systems in Canada cannot be overlooked. Colonial values still influence many, but institutions are attempting to advance reconciliation by updating their program offerings. Among IYAW survey participants, 70% indicated they somewhat or frequently saw Indigenous worldviews and learning reflected in their most recent post-secondary experience. However, they noted that they still saw non-Indigenous professors teaching Indigenous content and pointed to the limited presence of Indigenous instructors. They also said pan-Indigenous approaches were being used to teach cultural traditions, making them uncomfortable because they felt the instructors failed to acknowledge the diversity of cultures. This lowered the students’ confidence that the teachers genuinely cared about the material being taught.

**Figure 2: Level of post-secondary education obtained by people of Indigenous identity (ages 20-34)**



Source: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0414-01; original analysis by the Deloitte Future of Canada Centre

“

*Why do we have to prove ourselves to get respect from others?”*

– Jesse



Racism and prejudice also persist. One IYAW participant recounted sharing their grandfather's experience in residential school in class one day: “I was shot down by my classmates. It made me think I am very strong mentally but what about others? No support was offered during these hard discussions.” Such negative experiences do not necessarily make Indigenous students give up—rather, they can feel it motivates them to become stronger.<sup>4</sup> Still, the classroom should be a safe space for learning and discussing challenging topics.

Despite these barriers, university can be a transformative experience, empowering Indigenous youth to make a positive impact in their lives and communities. The IYAW participants said they felt that, for the most part, it gave them the knowledge and confidence to inspire other local youth, have a voice, and eventually impact policymaking. They felt it was important for them to complete their post-secondary education to realize their aspirations.

There are ways that educational institutions, employers, and policymakers can work together to ensure that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students are in a learning environment in which they can fully express themselves and pursue their aspirations.



## 1. Take reconciliation to the institutional level

*Post-secondary institutions can create a safer and more welcoming learning environment by making a more concerted reconciliation effort. This means including more Indigenous voices in decision-making, hiring more Indigenous Peoples for all areas and levels, using trauma-informed approaches, and accounting for the realities and cultural needs of Indigenous learners by engaging relevant First Nations, Inuit, and Métis nations in reconciliation agendas.*

Many higher-learning institutions and employers are making steady progress in their reconciliation commitments. In 2023, for example, Indspire (a national Indigenous post-secondary charity) reported that of the 109 post-secondary institutions it polled about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, 51 reported having created an Indigenization or reconciliation plan and 46 had taken steps toward Indigenization without a concrete plan or strategy.<sup>5</sup>

Our research found that a systems approach to cultural competence is needed to ensure Indigenous involvement in governance, management, teaching, training, and research.<sup>6</sup> The specialists we spoke with also expressed the need for more Indigenous representation in leadership and student participation at decision-making tables at the institutional level. Only when Indigenous voices are respected at all levels can systemic change genuinely occur.

## 2. Make learning environments more inclusive

*Institutions can strive to create a more positive learning experience by bringing in more Indigenous knowledge and ways of learning into the classroom and by inviting Elders to teach specific course content. Incorporating Indigenous histories, knowledge, and perspectives into all disciplines would also be welcoming.*

Indigenous students have knowledge and experiences that should be respected. In a 2018 Indspire study, students said the inclusion of Indigenous culture in their studies played an important role in making them feel welcome on campus, which contributed to their commitment to continue their studies.<sup>7</sup>

Education advocates recommend shifting responsibility for creating positive learning experiences from students to instructors. Since some topics could trigger trauma for Indigenous students, instructors should take a mindful approach. Holding class debriefs, sharing circles, and taking walks together have proven helpful for students, said the specialists interviewed. Studies also show that land-based learning is a helpful teaching method. Connection to the land is found to benefit individual well-being and embed cross-cultural learning among students in a respectful setting.<sup>8</sup>



Photo by Damien Bouchard



### 3. Enhance student supports and make them more accessible

*To increase student success, offer more services and financial supports to help cover the costs of living, and offer them to Indigenous students of all ages. The institutions should also better promote awareness of this assistance and make it easier for students to access.*

Making ends meet during studies is a challenge, especially for non-status First Nations and Métis youth, as they are not eligible for as much funding or support as their status peers. In order to close the gap in post-secondary completion rates, funding for Indigenous students needs to be enhanced to adequately support their housing and living expenses, as well as expand their access to learning supplies and transportation.<sup>9</sup>

Since Indigenous students may return to or begin studies later in life—they are more likely to be older than 25<sup>10</sup>—the youth and specialists we spoke with called for more age-inclusive supports, such as childcare.

As for supports being accessible, one collaborative practice with Indigenous nations that's showing positive results is a third-party billing policy. Used by several post-secondary institutions, third-party billing enables institutions and Indigenous funding sponsors to work together directly on processing tuition and other transactions, thereby alleviating students of the burden of having to keep track of financial transactions and deadlines.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students thrive in settings that offer a sense of community, which makes Indigenous support centres crucial. Belonging is especially important for those coming from rural and remote communities. Our research shows that connection to community and culture also provides a protecting factor against trauma and structural racism.<sup>11</sup> University staff consulted in other studies note the following as being helpful for students: Indigenous-specific navigators, counselling and academic advising, transition-year programs, literacy training, cultural activities, and off-campus supports such as Indigenous friendship centres.

A specialist in our study suggested post-secondary institutions give more thought to how these services are marketed. Programs perceived as being handouts could further perpetuate negative stereotypes and make students less likely to access them for fear of attention or stigma.

***“They need to communicate better the supports and services available to Indigenous youth—it starts at the communication level.”***

*– IYAW participant*

# *Transitioning from education to career*



Artwork: *Sturgeon (Healer)* by Atheana Picha, 2022. Image courtesy of Kenji Nagai.



The transition from education to employment is an important time in a young person’s life. It can be particularly stressful and challenging for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth, who face unique barriers when searching for work; trying to break into the professional and financial services industries is especially challenging (Figure 3). The IYAW participants told us young Indigenous people also experience low self-confidence and lack effective supports.

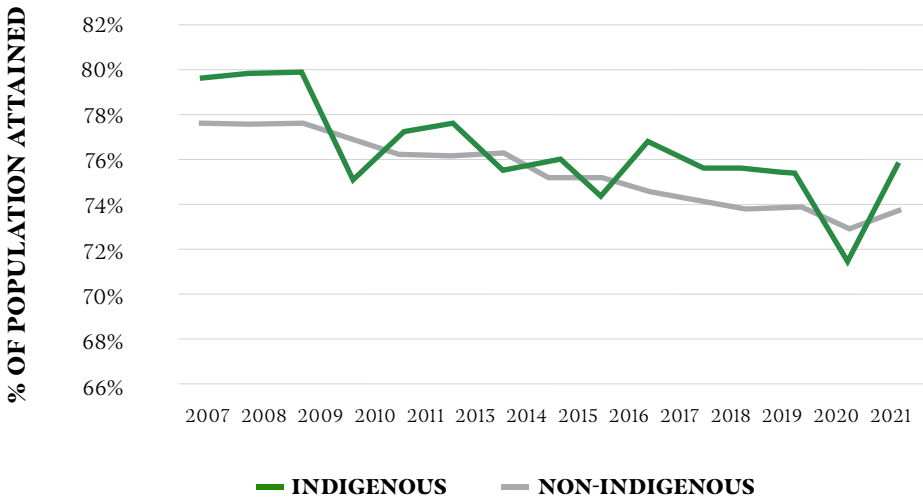


***“Most places want many years of experience, but an Indigenous person couldn’t get experience until recently. Positions aren’t going to get filled by a native person because they didn’t get the resources years ago.”***

– Kyle

Despite similar labour force participation rates as their non-Indigenous peers (see Figure 4), First Nations, Inuit, and Métis applicants are confronted by biases, racism, and stereotyping throughout the application process. The discrimination at this crucial entry point to the workforce holds them back from achieving equal rates of sustained and gainful employment.

**Figure 3: Labour force participation rate of post-secondary graduates of Indigenous identity relative to their non-Indigenous peers**



Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0359-01; original analysis by the Deloitte Future of Canada Centre

Recruitment processes are still fundamentally rooted in colonial norms. The IYAW participants said they felt out of place throughout recruitment, including at career fairs and in interviews. This was especially true for those leaving behind their families and culture in rural or remote communities for professional opportunities in bigger cities.

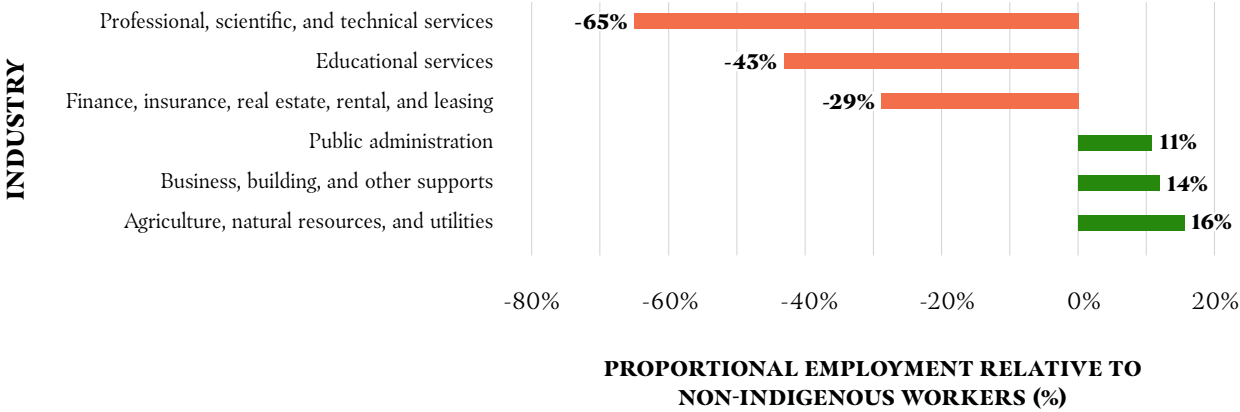


***“It feels like a career fair is just a competition between students with MBAs and a lot of them already have families that work there. Whenever I walk through career fairs, I just think: ‘I don’t see myself hanging out with anyone here.’”***

– Ahnah

Evidence suggests that many jobs are never formally advertised but instead acquired through informal networks.<sup>12</sup> Given persistent prejudice in the labour market, graduates who identify as Indigenous typically lack access to such informal networks, preventing them from reaching upper-level positions later in their career. Indigenous youth generally also have fewer examples of professional success within their communities, impairing their sense of self-efficacy and further diminishing hope that they would be valued if hired.

**Figure 4: Employment of Indigenous youth (ages 15-24) relative to non-Indigenous youth, by industry (highest and lowest proportion)**



Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0363-01; original analysis by the Deloitte Future of Canada Centre



“*When someone gets a job, it’s who you know and who your community knows. If you don’t have that network, you don’t get the job.*”

– Denis Carignan, Executive VP, Impact and Innovation/Co-Founder, PLATO

The education and experience requirements in job postings can exclude many otherwise qualified Indigenous applicants, who feel their lived experience or cultural knowledge goes unnoticed and undervalued by employers. And when interviews are secured, the youth leaders reported, expectations for roles tend to not be clearly communicated.



*“[Employers] assume that everyone has the same skills, but recruitment is hard to navigate. It’s not just about saving spots but also providing supports and skills training. Recruiting is not just coming to talk to us, but also about helping to make [us] feel not so out of place.”*

– Jesse

Furthermore, they continued, key life skills for job-hunting—such as how to create résumés, draft cover letters, network, or initiate conversations with potential employers—were not taught to them. Nor did they know where to find such advice, support, information, or mentorship.

Considering these challenges, the specialists we interviewed felt that although employers had committed to improving their recruitment and application practices, substantive efforts are still needed to make the process more welcoming during in this pivotal transitional period.

## 4. Support Indigenous-focused career readiness

*Provide more supports to help Indigenous youth prepare for the job market and application process. Schools, communities, and prospective employers can help with this by working together to improve the availability and accessibility of practical skills training, coaching, and personalized support.*

Promising practices for employers and schools include jointly sponsoring Indigenous student groups, hosting culturally inclusive recruitment events, and providing opportunities targeted specifically to Indigenous youth for regular one-on-one conversations with potential employers, the youth leaders said. Our specialist interviewees suggested such measures would help reduce uncertainty, provide vital safety nets during the stressful application period, build confidence, and make organizations more accessible to Indigenous students.

Institutions and organizations should also collaborate more closely to address skills mismatches: employers can highlight the skills they need of Indigenous applicants, and schools can tailor curricula to include workplace skills development.<sup>15</sup>

Employers should also consider working more closely with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to gain first-hand understanding of the obstacles their members face in launching and establishing careers. A recent survey of over 500 mid-sized and large Canadian companies found that only one in four employers had a strategy in place to engage Indigenous communities.<sup>14</sup> The youth and specialists we interviewed discussed how these connections are key to enabling organizations to market open positions to a more diverse talent pool, build lasting relationships, and create opportunities for youth to ask questions or seek mentorship.



## 5. Strive to create more welcoming recruitment experiences

*Employers can make recruitment more inclusive, safe, and welcoming to Indigenous applicants by reconsidering their job application processes and requirements.*

Indigenous applicants have a more positive experience when efforts are made to have more inclusive processes and to create safer spaces during interviews, the specialists told us. Applying a more personal touch and having informal discussions are ways to make Indigenous job candidates more comfortable, IYAW participants suggested.

Furthermore, research has shown that job postings that focus on skills rather than on minimum education requirements are more accessible and attract more applicants from underrepresented groups.<sup>15</sup> Employers that are serious about making changes should also ensure their job postings highlight their initiatives regarding Indigenous Peoples, and expressly welcome and encourage Indigenous candidates to apply.

Recently, policymakers around the world have begun considering pay transparency regulations that would require organizations to publish salary information on job postings. Policies of this nature have shown an increase of trust in organizations by typically underpaid groups, such as Indigenous Peoples, and can help reduce wage gaps.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Offer placements tailored to Indigenous students

*More Indigenous-centred and paid experiential learning opportunities—including internships, job-shadowing programs, and co-ops—should be made available. During placements, young people want to be mentored, and they want a say in what skills and learning they will acquire.*

Research confirms it's crucial that these types of positions be tailored to the unique needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. Employers should also help build up the students' competencies and provide them with opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the organization's work—only then will placements lead to improved outcomes and encourage Indigenous Peoples along their career journey.<sup>17</sup> Employers should also work with schools and communities to make sure these opportunities are well publicized and marketed.







*Pursuing a career journey*

Artwork: *Raven* by Atheana Picha, 2022

## INSIGHTS

Upon joining the workplace, Indigenous youth continue to face barriers. Colonial legacies prevent them from fully feeling safe, valued, or respected, which reduces their chances of success or of meaningful social progress. While employers have taken many strides to create more inclusive workplaces, much remains to be done to minimize systemic barriers.

The IYAW participants we interviewed felt, and our research concurred, that there's an ongoing pull of rural communities and reserves on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples to maintain connections to family and culture.<sup>18</sup> Policies such as fixed working hours or mandated in-person hours often make it difficult for them to return to their home communities, which may preclude them from attending important cultural events, supporting their families in emergencies, or sustaining important relationships. This community pull poses a dilemma for some Indigenous workers, who may feel torn between their culture/family relations and their professional success. Insufficient supports may also lead to employees feeling they have to resign in order to meet their family or cultural commitments.

In the workplace, the IYAW participants said they've been the subject of intentional and unintentional racism, bias, and tokenization in many ways: microaggressions, stereotyping, not being assigned to favourable projects, and having their ideas ignored, for example. They also said that navigating these experiences can be emotionally taxing. According to a survey from Statistics Canada, the number of Indigenous people who felt discrimination at work jumped 10% between 2014 and 2019.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the reality that they often lack ethnically similar peers, especially at senior levels, this discrimination means that Indigenous employees frequently feel out of place, isolated, and culturally unsafe.

While some Indigenous employees find resilience when facing challenges to their success, others feel they have little choice but to leave. They either return to their communities or seek more flexible work opportunities elsewhere, including with employers that don't fairly compensate or recognize Indigenous talent.

“*My résumé is strong, but people still ask me if I'm a diversity hire.*”

– IYAW participant



## 7. Foster Indigenous-friendly workplaces

*Bolster efforts to make workplaces more welcoming and inclusive for Indigenous Peoples. This means increasing Indigenous representation among staff, requiring all staff to take cultural sensitivity training, working more closely with Indigenous communities, and implementing placemaking to create unique spaces that honour Indigenous nations and culture in the territory.*



***“Employers didn’t tell me what they were doing. I’m skilled in relationships, but I didn’t see them valuing me for me.”***

– Jesse

These recommendations from youth are also echoed in the research, which supports regular training for all staff on cultural sensitivity, intergenerational trauma, and anti-racism that meaningfully includes Indigenous ways of knowing and learning<sup>20</sup>. Physical spaces such as boardrooms and reception areas can also be updated to better acknowledge different cultural approaches to work and acknowledge the Indigenous territory on which employer activities are taking place. This could entail designated rooms for smudging or similar traditional Indigenous practices. Other supports that would improve trust and create a sense of community include employee resource groups, mentorship, counselling, and/or peer supports, such as an onboarding buddy.

Since the pandemic proved not all work has to be in-person, many organizations have shifted to a remote or hybrid work model, where less emphasis is given to rigid work hours. This offers more flexibility for Indigenous employees, allowing them to return to their home communities, participate in cultural activities when needed, or better take care of personal challenges that may arise. Employers could also consider providing additional leaves or paid time off for these reasons, such as cultural leave.



***“So many Indigenous staff feel out of place; we need to be able to access Indigenous employee groups.”***

– Ahmah

Participating in or sponsoring reconciliation activities for and led by Indigenous youth to foster respectful relations at an organizational level is another practice showing promise. The IYAW participants advise that this could help bring Indigenous cultures into the workplace, ameliorating feelings of isolation and improving a sense of belonging and personal empowerment.

## 8. Create more responsive onboarding programs

*Organizations should consider enhanced skills-based training and offer regular connections to an Indigenous or Indigenous-allied coach to ensure the unique needs of Indigenous recruits are met during onboarding.*

The first few days at a new place of work are critical for building a sense of belonging and inclusion. Research shows that strong onboarding programs don't treat new recruits as short-term resources, but rather as long-term assets who bring unique value to the organization. This is particularly important with Indigenous recruits, who have faced systemic discrimination and have typically been undervalued in the workforce.

At this early stage, employers play an important role in stimulating positive workforce relationships by helping new hires build meaningful networks in the workplace. This helps create a sense of inclusion, improves workforce satisfaction, and provides Indigenous staff with a group to turn to when faced with work or career challenges.<sup>21</sup>

Employers could also help them refine their workplace skills to help bolster their confidence and improve their early work experiences. Research suggests Indigenous employees have historically not been provided equal training relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts in areas such as digital literacy and competencies useful for senior-level positions, such as strategic thinking and decision-making.<sup>22</sup> This helps set up Indigenous hires for success and provides them with the tangible technical skillsets they need to thrive in their roles for years to come.



## 9. Offer meaningful professional development

*Employers can create relevant professional development opportunities for their new Indigenous employees by offering mentorship and work assignments that will contribute to retention and advancement.*

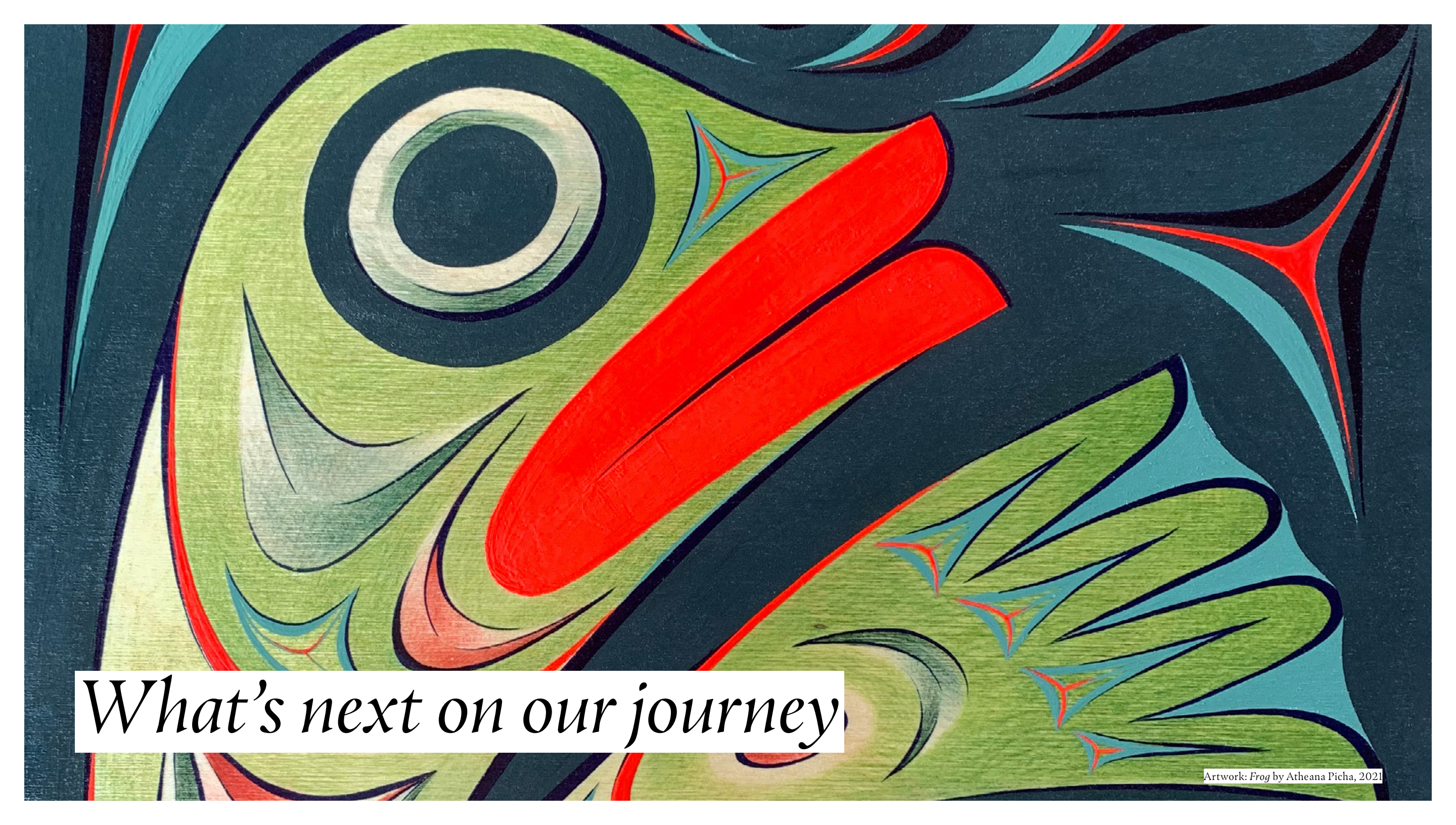
Over time, employers should strive to amplify Indigenous voices at every level of the organization. This could entail making sure that organizational policies, onboarding practices, and key performance indicators used for promotion decisions accommodate cultural differences and Indigenous experiences. They must make every effort to demonstrate the value that Indigenous individuals bring to the table with their unique lived experiences. By extension, training and professional development opportunities should include funding for Indigenous-centred learning and accommodate these more thoughtful indicators of performance.

***“[For Indigenous employees], advancing into their next job or higher position in leadership is more difficult. I know of someone who was hired with 20 years’ experience, but she could never break that glass ceiling above. You can’t break that barrier. Maybe it’s cultural, maybe [the lack of a] network, there seems like there is a challenge to rise above a certain point.”***

– Keith McIntosh, CEO, PLATO





An abstract painting of a frog, titled 'Frog' by Atheana Picha, 2021. The artwork features a large, stylized frog head in profile, facing right. The frog's body is a vibrant green, with a large, circular eye that has a dark blue center and a white ring. The frog's mouth is a bright red, elongated shape. The background is a dark, textured blue. The painting uses bold, expressive brushstrokes and a limited color palette of green, red, blue, and white. The overall style is modern and graphic.

*What's next on our journey*

Artwork: *Frog* by Atheana Picha, 2021





Photo by Damien Bouchard

## CONCLUSION

**T**he progress under way across Canada to improve the education-to-career journey for Indigenous youth deserves continued, dedicated time and energy from post-secondary institutions, policymakers, and employers.

Supporting their success will have a meaningful impact on the collective efforts to reconcile settler relations with Indigenous Peoples. After all, the well-being and prosperity of young people today will affect future generations in Canada.

Youth leaders are optimistic about this moment of opportunity and have been working hard for their futures, but they are looking for reciprocal action.

***Let's take it.***

# *Appendix*

# Summary of recommendations

## *Navigating the post-secondary education path*

### **1. Take reconciliation to the institutional level**

Post-secondary institutions can create a safer and more welcoming learning environment by making a more concerted reconciliation effort. This means including more Indigenous voices in decision-making, hiring more Indigenous Peoples for all areas and levels, using trauma-informed approaches, and accounting for the realities and cultural needs of Indigenous learners by engaging relevant First Nations, Inuit, and Métis nations in reconciliation agendas.

### **2. Make learning environments more inclusive**

Institutions can strive to create a more positive learning experience by bringing in more Indigenous knowledge and ways of learning into the classroom and by inviting Elders to teach specific course content. Incorporating Indigenous history and perspectives into all disciplines would also be welcoming.

### **3. Enhance student supports and make them more accessible**

To increase student success, offer more services and financial supports to help cover the costs of living, and offer them to Indigenous students of all ages. The institutions should also better promote awareness of this assistance and make it easier for students to access.

## *Transitioning from education to career*

### **4. Support Indigenous-focused career readiness**

Provide more supports to help Indigenous youth prepare for the job. Schools, communities, and prospective employers can help with this by working together to improve the availability and accessibility of practical skills training, coaching, and personalized support.

### **5. Strive to create more welcoming recruitment experiences**

Employers can make recruitment more inclusive, safe, and welcoming to Indigenous applicants by reconsidering their job application processes and requirements.

### **6. Offer placements tailored to Indigenous students**

More Indigenous-centred and paid experiential learning opportunities—including internships, job-shadowing programs, and co-ops—should be made available. During placements, young people want to be mentored, and they want a say in what skills and learning they will acquire.

## *Pursuing a career journey*

### **7. Foster Indigenous-friendly workplaces**

Bolster efforts to make workplaces more welcoming and inclusive for Indigenous Peoples. This means increasing Indigenous representation among staff, requiring all staff to take cultural sensitivity training, working more closely with Indigenous communities, and implementing placemaking to create unique spaces that honour Indigenous nations and culture in the territory.

### **8. Create more responsive onboarding programs**

Organizations should consider enhanced skills-based training and offer regular connections to an Indigenous or Indigenous-allied coach to ensure the unique needs of Indigenous recruits are met during onboarding.

### **9. Offer meaningful professional development**

Youth call upon employers to create targeted and meaningful professional development opportunities by offering mentorship and work assignments that will contribute to their retention and advancement.



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### **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Atheana Picha, Nash'mene'ta'naht, is a Coast Salish artist from the Kwantlen First Nation, and her grandmother was from Tsartlip. She is an interdisciplinary artist, working mostly in two-dimensional media such as printmaking and drawing. Atheana has been doing two apprenticeships, learning Salish wool weaving with Musqueam weaver Debra Sparrow since 2019, and silver engraving, wood carving, and tool making with Squamish artist and educator Aaron Nelson-Moody since 2018. Atheana's practice is grounded in learning more about Salish design through studying the old pieces, observing nature, and learning from her elders and teachers.



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