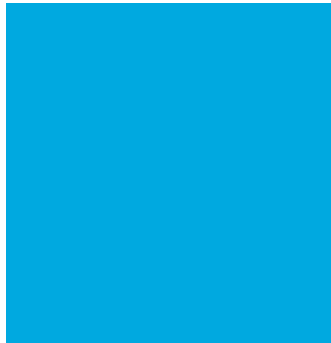


Pathways to Education



THUNDER BAY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APRIL 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pathways to Education exists to break the cycle of poverty through education. It is a bold vision that we are committed to for the long-term, responding to the deeply rooted complexities related to poverty. Over the past few years, we have focused on building our awareness about Truth and Reconciliation and growing our Indigenous cultural confidence in order to cultivate meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities. Across the country, we serve more than 550 youth who self-identify as Indigenous, and we know that we could reach more.

In this past year, we reinitiated our efforts to engage the community of Thunder Bay, in order to understand whether or not the Pathways Program could be of benefit to their community. We are grateful to the leadership of many organizations, and specifically that of Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario, in particular their award winning program the Regional Multicultural Youth Council, in supporting this effort in Thunder Bay. We acknowledge that this work took place on the traditional territory of the Anishnaabe Peoples of Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850.

One of Pathways Canada's key values is: strength and potential are starting points. Young people have the talent and the desire to apply learning to real-world problems and make change happen. Perhaps more importantly, they know what is needed to make change happen and they understand it as a fundamental human right. This, we found, is particularly true of the youth in Thunder Bay who experience racism and the impact of colonization on a daily basis.

Over the years, young people have been sharing their knowledge and wisdom, as is evident in the multiple inquiries, reports, and

recommendations that have been published. From *Horizons of Hope*, published in 1996, to *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan*, published in 2012, it is clear that young people understand the complexity related to creating safer and healthier communities.

We made a decision to shift our community engagement approach to one that is youth led. This decision was key to success as we accomplished what we intended to and more, although not always according to the original plan. In the ideas and recommendations from the youth who participated, we have the voice of more First Nations than we originally anticipated being able to reach. The process allowed for youth from all six high schools in Thunder Bay to come together to learn and share their experiences—an event that is critical to community-building. Moreover, the learning experiences provided to young people as they planned and organized the February Youth Gathering fostered a sense of belonging, agency, leadership, and civic engagement. It also increased awareness of Indigenous peoples and their history.

Pathways to Education creates lasting impact by promoting the potential and promise of youth living in low-income communities. Time and again, young people demonstrate the power of being provided with opportunities to succeed and a network of support. As a learning organization Pathways has over the past fifteen years learned to adapt to many diverse communities across Canada. We believe the Pathways Program can become an integral partner to the youth and the many organizations in Thunder Bay working to make change happen.



BACKGROUND

Pathways to Education is a national, charitable organization breaking the cycle of poverty through education. Its award-winning program is creating positive social change by supporting youth living in low-income communities to overcome barriers to education, graduate from high school, and build the foundation for a successful future. Through the collective power of partnerships, Pathways to Education's innovative program is preparing youth for tomorrow.

The Pathways Program operates in eight different communities in Ontario, serves close to 4,000 youth each year and have more than 5,000 alumni. Our four-year graduation rate in 2016-17 across all of these communities is 73%, with an average of 81% increase from the pre-Pathways grad rates.

We first engaged in Thunder Bay in 2016-2017 to explore the need and interest for a Pathways to Education Program. At that time the readiness level for the Pathways Program was not there given the multiple competing priorities in the community and changes in leadership within the organizations involved. We subsequently refocused our attention on other Indigenous communities in Canada, and monitored for an opportunity to re-engage in Thunder Bay.

We partnered with two different organizations: Three Things Consulting (Three Things), and the Students Commission of Canada (SCC) to facilitate the process with the community.

Three Things is an Indigenous owned consulting organization that Pathways to Education has partnered with since 2014 to increase our capacity in supporting Indigenous youth. SCC is a charitable organization that purposefully works with others to ensure that young people are valued, heard and their ideas for improving themselves, the lives of their peers and communities are put into action.

Beginning in the summer of 2018—most aptly on National Indigenous Peoples Day—Three Things, Pathways, and Indigenous Pathways alumni from Winnipeg and Kingston supported the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) and volunteered on Anemki Wajiw (Mount McKay) on Fort William First Nation at their annual celebration. We began to build a relationship with RMYC's youth volunteers and connected or reconnected with the many organizations represented that day. It was an important first step in building relationships as we revitalized our engagement process.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – A YOUTH LED APPROACH

As we re-engaged, we met with Pathways National Indigenous Advisory Circle to seek their input. The guidance we received was to focus on a youth-engagement process in order to determine—first and foremost—if Indigenous students were looking for the supports that the Pathways model offers. That approach would still allow us to continue to engage with the local organizations, First Nations leadership, and school boards for the purpose of demonstrating to these adult allies who Pathways was and what we could offer.

As a result, in the fall of 2018, we shifted to a youth-led approach to community engagement. In the end, this resulted in capturing the input from a greater number of First Nations communities than our original plan included, and effectively engaging the adult allies through the youth.

Team, working in collaboration with a leading voice in youth leadership in Thunder Bay, Moffat Makuto and youth members from the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC). RMYC became a critical partner for us given their existing presence, credibility and relationships in Thunder Bay. The RMYC offers daily programming at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School (DFC), one of two high schools operated by Northern Nishnawbe Education Council.



THE YOUTH PLANNING TEAM

In the conversations with young people at RMYC, it became clear that the most effective way to capture the ideas of a broad range of youth would be to convene a gathering that was designed by and for youth. As a result, a Youth Planning Team was established, beginning with members from the RMYC.

The Youth Planning Team met throughout the fall and winter, each Friday evening and for three full-day sessions. Smaller working groups were formed and met to plan out key components of the gathering. For example, one working group focused on developing and implementing the communications plan that included a Facebook channel and a poster for the event.

As the meetings progressed the team grew to 15 and, by the time the gathering was convened in February, the majority of youth on the planning team were Indigenous and represented each of the three school boards. This was a powerful outcome of the youth-led approach.

We attribute this increased level of engagement to the strategic decision to host the majority of the planning meetings at DFC, thereby making the process visible to a larger group of Indigenous youth. As word spread, more Indigenous youth engaged, from all high schools.



THE PROCESS

In the fall of 2018, the Youth Planning Team decided on a theme for the gathering: *The Past, Present, and Future*. They wanted to ensure youth participating had the opportunity to reflect on the past and the role education has played in Indigenous families and communities since contact in a safe space. The goals established were as follows:

- Ground learning in ceremony and Indigenous knowledges
- Build community and reinforce the connection Indigenous and non Indigenous youth have
- Build common and shared understanding of their lived experience
- Create experiential learning opportunities to address the opportunities and challenges

The planning team sought and obtained the space and the support from the leadership and staff at DFC. They also sought consensus from the remaining schools to provide youth the time and the transportation to DFC to participate during a school day.

As the team built upon their own knowledge and experiences, they designed and shaped key components of the program and activities.

Ceremony grounded the two days – we opened in ceremony, infused ceremony throughout the two days, ensured a safe space with the presence of an Elder and a Knowledge Keeper and ended with a feast for both the youth and their families. We honored the youth for their participation and the courage to speak.

Our community facilitator introduced Indigenous games as a way of helping participants see what they share in common and reinforce the connection they have as youth, both Indigenous and non Indigenous.

Key activities and resources helped to frame context and key messages for all participants. This included:

- A presentation from acclaimed Indigenous author and trainer, Sandi Boucher
- A presentation of *The Stranger*, the first track from Gord Downie's album, *The Secret Path*
- An activity designed to communicate their experiences as it relates to the experience of Chanie Wenjack; the child for whom *The Secret Path* was authored



THE PROCESS

The team also used a creative approach to design a series of Pathways ‘graduation stations’—experiential spaces where they could engage students in exploring their future, as well as the supports and resources that matter to them. The objective and content of each station matched possible future careers.

STATION #1: RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Using a selection of media, photo journaling, and painting, participants described the supports that currently exist within their educational community, as well as those that are missing or absent.

STATION #2: CREATIVE DESIGN

Using tactile materials, such as fabric and interior design samples, participants created a model of what their ideal learning and student support space would look like, by answering questions such as, *What does the space look like?*, *What materials and colours are used?*, *What does the furniture look like?*, *What sort of technology is available?*, and *What does the space feel like?*

STATION #3: HUMAN RESOURCES

Tracing an outline of a student on a large piece of paper, participants identified what a guide or mentor looks like, how they think, what they feel, and how they move through the community. Using a backpack, they also identified the tools their ideal guide or mentor would carry with them.

STATION #4: EDUCATOR TRAINING

Using the same model as in Station #3, participants created their ideal coach or tutor, answering questions such as, *What do they look like?*, *How do they think?*, *What do they feel?*, and *How do they move and behave in their community?* Using a backpack, they also identified the tools their ideal coach or tutor would carry with them.



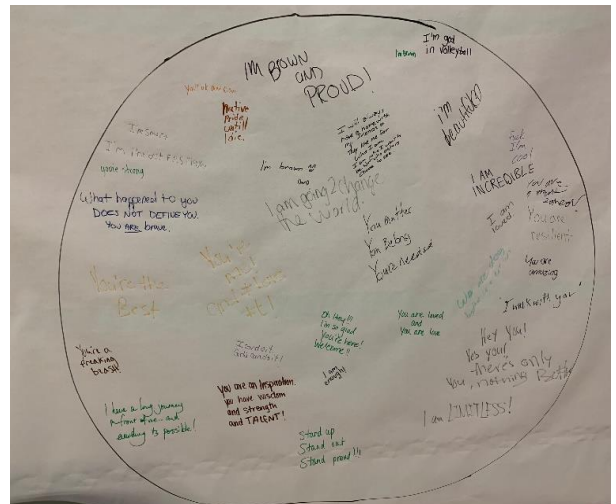
WHAT WE HEARD

“We have to rely on our strength and resilience throughout our schooling experience.”

Current Lived Experience: The hosts of the gathering—Arianna Roberts, an RMYC Executive, and Caleb Mishenene, Student Chief of DFC—facilitated an interactive activity to gain insight into experiences with the school systems. The output from this activity included strong, affirmative statements about identity and belonging—statements that assertively countered the racist stereotypes youth face daily.

Cultural Support: “[I] don’t have the freedom to express myself [as Indigenous] at the school...only one native guidance councillor, no cultural clubs, outdoor opportunities, or land-based learning.” “[It would help to] establish creative clubs or develop connections with media-forward people to help young people learn how to produce creativity [because], whether it is writing, music, art, videography... Thunder Bay is lacking—ESPECIALLY for Indigenous expression.”

Academic Support: “[There are] too many students in one class to get help from a teacher. I’m in a really difficulty calculus class with 35 other students.” “[We need] help from tutors both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, more mainstream use of student tutors and homework-help programs”.



“As a whole, native teens aren’t used to having a voice of much meaning.”



WHAT WE HEARD

“I am not really doing good emotionally. It is hard being away from home.”

Transition Support: *“Classes such as psychology, creative writing, political science...would be helpful but are not available...there is a lack of creative mentors like music teachers, writers and artists.”*

“Understanding politics and bias is something young people are left to do by themselves and aren’t taught how to interpret political media in ways that best prepare them to enter voting systems and having a sense of civic responsibility. “Many high school students are graduating feeling unprepared for post-secondary options (either professional or academic)...[and that we] need to start teaching career-based curriculums earlier on in schooling, as well as developing outside-of-school programs that support this transition.”

Wellness: *“I made the painting because I didn’t respect my body enough and I didn’t realize it until I got out of my last relationship. So, I felt like ripping off my body. ‘Niimikwe’ means dancing woman—it’s my name.”*

Physical Health: *“Physical health is only mandatory in Grad 9 and additional sexual health courses are limited.” “There are a lot of teen mothers in our culture and it’s hard to provide for the kids when the mother hasn’t finished school or has to work full-time to make money. Sex-ed, I think, could be more talked about in Native ways at school to help with this.”*

Food Security: *“There are no plant-based foods in school cafeteria and so, as a vegan it is challenging to eat well. “There is a healthy school initiative, the health and nutrition classes are optional and they still serve bad food.”*





YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth clearly articulated their aspirations to succeed in high school and in life, recognizing that success in one will lead to success in the other. Moreover, they want to ensure that the generation that follows them have what they need to succeed.

From the Voices of Youth 2019 gathering, Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay are calling for:

1. Increase in after-school supports including, tutoring and mentoring
2. Increase in school-based supports, including Indigenous staff (e.g., teachers, guidance counsellors)
3. Cultural activities and resources that are representative of all populations and that facilitate both learning and connection
4. Greater diversity of learning opportunities that assist in making important life decisions (e.g., healthy relationships, sexual health, money management, transitioning to life after high school).



EVALUATION

BACKGROUND

SCC, the Indigenous Education lead from Three Things and the Youth Planning Team developed an evaluation tool that:

- Would be adapted to be culturally relevant
- We could later use to measure progress.

The goals of the evaluation were twofold: to examine the outcomes of the Voices of Youth 2019 gathering and to gain a greater understanding of Indigenous youth's school experience. The survey used a rating scale to identify strengths based on responses.

Two survey modules supported those goals:

- *The Head, Heart, Feet, and Spirit* tool examines the cognitive, affective, and behavioural impact of the forum.
- *The Indigenous Youth Outcomes* tool was developed specifically for this event, to explore their current school experience.

In addition, Three Things tracked specific metrics related to the planning process for the purpose of capturing the level of engagement and understanding the effectiveness of that engagement. This included:

- Number of volunteer hours contributed by the youth
- Participation in the Youth Planning Team and at Voices of Youth 2019
 - Number of youth
 - Diversity of participation
- Engagement of adult allies.



RESULTS

THE GATHERING

Overall, young people who participated in the forum reported gaining new knowledge, increasing their awareness of inequity, engaging with a diversity of people and perspectives, and having a positive experience over the two days.

Sixty young people completed surveys, which represents a strong response rate of 55 per cent.

EXPERIENCE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The results reflect the overall spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental well-being of the youth, the impact of their involvement in school, and their recommendations on creating a more culturally-inclusive learning environment.

Participants rated highly the impact their involvement in school had on their:

- Plans for later in life and how they feel about themselves
- Overall spiritual, emotional, physical, mental health

- Ability to recognize difference between Indigenous worldview, values, and ideas and those of others
- Ability to listen and hear other voices when they offer you feedback

However, youth were less likely to highly rate the impact their involvement in school had on:

- Feeling a part of their community
- Use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol
- Ability to deal with conflicts, disagreements, stressful situations in a culturally relevant way
- Ability to have their voice heard in offering feedback

Refer to the Work Plan, Youth Engagement for process metrics.



SUPPORTS AND BARRIERS TO WELLNESS

Participants were asked to reflect upon specific supports and barriers to maintaining the four different types of wellness – spiritual, emotional, physical and mental.

Participants suggested a variety of Indigenous-specific supports that would improve their learning environment. This included connection to family, community, and ceremony, suggesting that there is a role for high schools and after school programs to play in facilitating greater access to culturally-specific programs, resources and staff.

	Spiritual	Emotional	Physical	Mental
Supports to Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family (e.g., having a child) Participating in ceremony (e.g., smudging, drumming, dance) Connected to cultural (e.g., receiving their spirit name) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling connected to others Family guidance Doing well in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playing sports Being active Being connected to nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling connected to friends, family Guidance Time to oneself Attending therapy
Barriers to Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colonization Homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toxic people Childhood trauma Emotional disorder Being away from home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety Transportation – need more bus tickets / other ways of moving around the city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overthinking Negative thought patterns



LEARNING: PATHWAYS' PERSPECTIVE

As adult allies from Pathways Canada, it was a privilege to be present with all of the young people. The diversity and thoughtfulness of ideas, as well as the aspirations and the leadership that each young person brought to the table was impressive.

As a learning organization, we continually strive to create a collaborative learning culture with all our stakeholders, and to embrace a lifelong learning mindset that continuously questions and learns from the past while considering the future. To be able to innovate and thrive in a rapidly changing context, Pathways keeps young people actively engaged in a continuous feedback loop.

From this engagement process we confirmed that:

- Youth have many strengths, are resilient, and very aware of systemic issues and the impact of.
- Youth want to be part of a process to develop, design and deliver programs, and not simply be recipients of.
- These types of processes and activities matter to youth, as do the relationships they develop with adults.
- Youth led engagement processes are effective mentoring activities that help to build competencies. In this process youth leaders honed skills—including event planning, creation of their marketing and communications tools, development of evaluation tools, and decision-making in a team setting.
- Youth who come in to Thunder Bay from remote communities for school are looking for spaces where they can learn, share, and create together.
- Genuine youth-led means as adults, organizations, or systems, we respond to their schedule and learning process—we simply create space for them, provide supports, and allow them to create.
- Having youth as decision makers means ensuring they have all the information to make informed decisions.
- Introducing cultural activities to Indigenous youth who have not had those teachings needs to be done in a respectful way that honours their own beliefs and values.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR THUNDER BAY

Community engagement is a complex process requiring multiple stakeholders and systems to drive a strategy for the community as a whole. As a result, the process evolves within a community in different ways over time.

Our experience over the past 15 years of scaling the Pathways Program across Canada has taught us that it can take anywhere from one to six years for a community to launch a Pathways Program location.

Multiple factors are considered in the decision-making process and at a high level, include:

- **Need:** This includes understanding the current socioeconomic and educational attainment levels.
- **Opportunity:** This includes understanding the existing assets (e.g., programs and/or services), as well as partnerships/collective initiatives that prioritize education.
- **Fit:** This includes understanding whether or not the program can be adapted to and complement the specific community context.
- **Readiness:** This includes understanding whether or not high school graduation is the

priority for the community and that there is a credible community organization with the capacity to implement and grow the program.

- **Sustainability:** This includes a) an assessment of financial requirements and funding environment to ensure that every young person enrolled can be supported throughout their high school journey, and b). an assessment of the community organization's capacity to manage and respond to changes within the local context. A long-term perspective is taken i.e. 5 – 10 years.

It is first and foremost a decision that a community must make and take ownership of in order for the Pathways Program to be embraced by youth, their families and the community as a whole.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR THUNDER BAY

The context in Thunder Bay is well documented, as evidenced by the multiple inquiries and reports which clearly identify systemic issues caused by colonialism and racism, as well as the needed solutions as articulated by Indigenous communities and organizations, and supported by non-Indigenous organizations.

In this process, we also considered the recommendations from the Seven First Nations Youth Inquest 2016–2026 (June 28, 2018).

Ontario’s response to the jury recommendations identified three outstanding recommendations related to supporting students.

- 78. In order to assist First Nations students who move to Thunder Bay to attend secondary school, the Ontario Ministries of Education, Children and Youth, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Health and Long-Term Care and Community and Social Services should work with Canada, the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board, the City of Thunder Bay and Indigenous communities and organizations to support a well-coordinated suite of housing, income, recreation and health services and supports to assist students in accessing supports and services.

- 79. In order to provide First Nations students with additional supports to achieve academic success and to have a positive experience while living in Thunder Bay, continue to provide funding to qualified organizations to deliver the After School Program at DFCHS and work with MLC and KO to explore providing funding to qualified organizations to deliver After School Programs for students from the Matawa* and KO* communities attending school in Thunder Bay.
- 80. Work with agencies funded under the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy (AHWS) to explore creating more employment opportunities for youth (e.g. peer mentors).

We believe that Pathways to Education can contribute to the efforts of the community in addressing each of these recommendations, and positively impact the health and well-being of young people through education.

*MLC refers to Matawa Learning Centre; KO is Keewaytinook Okimakanak Secondary School Services