

WE'RE LISTENING 2024
INDIGENOUS YOUTH VOICES MATTER IN ATLANTIC CANADA

Recommendations Of Indigenous Youth From Atlantic Canada



project overview

This is the second story telling process of the three components of We're Listening 2024: Indigenous Youth Voices Matter in Atlantic Canada, a project designed and delivered by Three Things Consulting in partnership with the Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation. The project vision was simple: create spaces for Indigenous youth to share, inform, and determine what was needed for the well-being of the diverse population of Indigenous young people living in, and from the five Atlantic Canada regions.

The first component was an online survey that generated input, ideas, and shared experiences of Indigenous youth, between 13 – 18 years old who live in, or are from, Atlantic Canada. The online survey saw participation from each region: Labrador, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Whereas some lived in First Nations and Inuit communities, others lived off reserve in rural or urban communities. Some had strong connections to their community, culture, and their home fires, others wanted more.

Yet all felt Indigenous youth in Canada demonstrate great strengths including being proud of their Indigenous identity, their capacity to use technology in school and life, and being open and able to help others. That is demonstrated by taking part in We're Listening 2024.



project overview

In the survey there were key issues identified that youth respondents felt were most serious and required further attention of leaders:

Substance Use / Abuse by Adults
Substance Use/Abuse by Youth
Mental Health and Wellness of Youth
Language Revitalization
Youth Leadership Development
Youth Voice in Community
Building Confidence of Youth

There is a full report available of the survey data that highlights the voices we heard. It was that first report that was used to determine the next steps for We're Listening 2024.

Three Things, with the support of the Foundation, promoted an opportunity for Indigenous youth, between 13 – 18 years old to apply to take part in an in person gathering that would take place on the unceded, unsurrendered Territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, (Ottawa), and we received applications from each region of Atlantic Canada. With the support of a Youth Engagement Officer at the Foundation, our team reviewed each of the applications and after individually ranking each for goodness of fit for the Gathering, as a collective, selected the 20 youth who would take part.

Upon arriving in Ottawa, and using their own lived experiences and expertise, along with quantitative and qualitative data generated from the We're Listening 2024 Survey, the youth generated a series of recommendations for adults, leaders, and systems, while ultimately, helping inform the important work of the Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation.

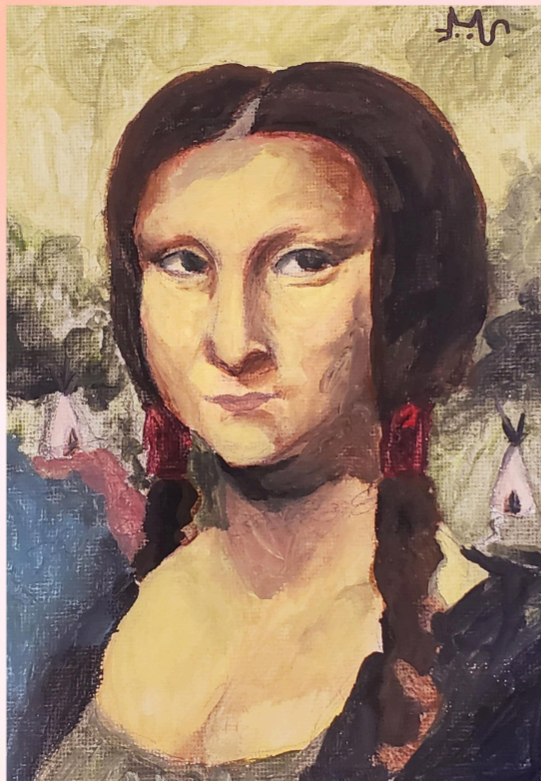
Working in two councils, the youth discussed and deliberated ideas that could strengthen young peoples path forward in life. They generated a series of recommendations. In Circle as a full group, each youth was provided the opportunity to edit, discuss further and, following that, affirm a series of final recommendations. Through a powerful collaborative process, the following, supported by their insights, are the young people's final recommendations.

project overview

For many, the results won't be a surprise in what youth are calling for, increased opportunities to learn and use their traditional language, spaces where their voices can be heard, (and acted upon), mental health resources and supports, education supports, focused on completing high school successfully and transitioning to post-secondary, and increased supports for both youth and adults regarding substance use and abuse. As we have heard these calls before, we must continue to listen, and most importantly, act.

Again, we are appreciative of the support demonstrated by the Foundation in this project, and of these young people.

We are very grateful for the courage, care, compassion, and creativity found in each of the young people who collaborated to author these recommendations and shared their gifts so freely with us all; much like this beautiful medicine, painted by Raven.



The IndigeLisa

WE'RE LISTENING 2024
INDIGENOUS YOUTH VOICES MATTER IN ATLANTIC CANADA

substance
use

adults

In our words...

“Substance abuse amongst adults in our lives creates an unsafe environment and along with that, familiarity with that insecurity. Because of adult substance abuse many children are deprived of role models in their lives. Adult influence fosters an environment where children and / or youth could learn these addictive behaviours.

There could be an annual Atlantic Indigenous addictions conference that each community sends a diverse group of people so that all perspectives are represented. This way each community can understand what is working in other communities. It is important to celebrate healthy living and sobriety as part of that.”

We recommend encouraging sensitivity training and education on complexities of addiction, normalizing sobriety, while stopping the demonizing of substance use.

We recommend having casual safe spaces for adults to go and be sober and celebrate that sobriety, as well as community-based healing and rehab centres and spaces. This includes offering prevention and interruption such as offering / having available jobs and activities outside of gambling facilities and dispensaries.

We recommend an annual Atlantic Indigenous addictions conference with leadership from youth, elders, and adults to discuss and share what is working, to host cultural celebrations for healthy living and sobriety.

WE'RE LISTENING 2024
INDIGENOUS YOUTH VOICES MATTER IN ATLANTIC CANADA

substance
use

youth

In our words...

“Substance abuse among Indigenous youth can prevent skill development, causes health risks, and can create negative reputations from stigmatized shame. This can halt the growth of coping mechanisms, which can lead to isolation, growing the circle of shame surrounding youth who use or abuse substances.”

If youth can participate in events to distract themselves from using substances and have more access to youth centres and other recreational activities, they can have healthier choices available. We need connected wellness programs and/or youth councils so youth can collaborate, as we are more powerful together. We need substances to be more difficult for youth to access.”

We recommend the implementation of prevention and interruption of youth substance abuse in the form of Elder and teen collaboration, sharing each owns wisdom and time. Elder/teen collaboration can lead to Knowledge Keepers in training and uplifting youth voices.

We recommend substance use information sessions geared to youth, having less police presence, and instead, including more Elders, people youth identify as safe, and/or people in recovery.

We recommend funded support for an Atlantic Canada Indigenous wellness program and council to share what is working, and staff to conduct youth wellness activities.

We recommend the implementation of stronger restrictions of substances for young people.

WE'RE LISTENING 2024
INDIGENOUS YOUTH VOICES MATTER IN ATLANTIC CANADA

education

In our words...

“As youth we feel post-secondary education is an opportunity to uplift entire communities. Through education, future generations will be able to learn new skills to combat every form of oppression. Some students need more motivation and incentive to attend and complete high school and head to post-secondary.

Indigenous youth in Atlantic Canada need more guidance and support on post-secondary education including sharing different bursaries and scholarships, how to apply for them, and easier accessibility to funding.

Some Indigenous youth will also need more transitional support into post-secondary, as many must travel away to go to school and learn how to be a young Indigenous adult away from your home and community.”

We recommend making educational resources and opportunities more accessible to youth, including those living in a First Nation, in an Inuit community, off reserve and / or away from their homeland.

We recommend the implementation of more after school-based tutoring and land-based opportunities which are crucial towards helping our generation reach beyond high school. Furthermore, more support and information when it comes to making these life-changing decisions will help to set us up for success for the rest of our lives, as well as allowing us to feel more secure with our choices.

We recommend post-secondary transition support and financial literacy, awareness of access to resources and bursaries in a centralized network for Atlantic Indigenous students and providing support and incentives to complete secondary and post-secondary education.

WE'RE LISTENING 2024
INDIGENOUS YOUTH VOICES MATTER IN ATLANTIC CANADA

**mental
health &
wellness**

In our words...

“Mental health challenges can present itself in many ways. First, we must acknowledge our struggles internally then try to find resources that are reliable and confidential. Yet not everyone is informed of the resources available. Providing access to, and more information regarding the resources available to us is a crucial step in guiding us to a healthier understanding of our own mental health and wellness.”

We're Listening 2024

THIS IS WHAT THE FUTURE LOOKS LIKE. HOPE, STRENGTH, AND COMMITMENT.



Indigenous Brilliance



We recommend more support and resources for mental health in Indigenous communities; we require consistent mental health professionals who have a strong understanding of cultural relevancy in the communities they serve.

We recommend these professionals go into our schools and communities and present the truth to us in a digestible way, not to scare us, but to help us become more informed about the ways which these challenges and disorders can come and go and effect our everyday lives.

We recommend increased / starting peer-to-peer support mental health support with training for the peer helpers.

We recommend a focus on the mental health and wellness of young men in our communities.

WE'RE LISTENING 2024
INDIGENOUS YOUTH VOICES MATTER IN ATLANTIC CANADA

youth
voice

In our words...

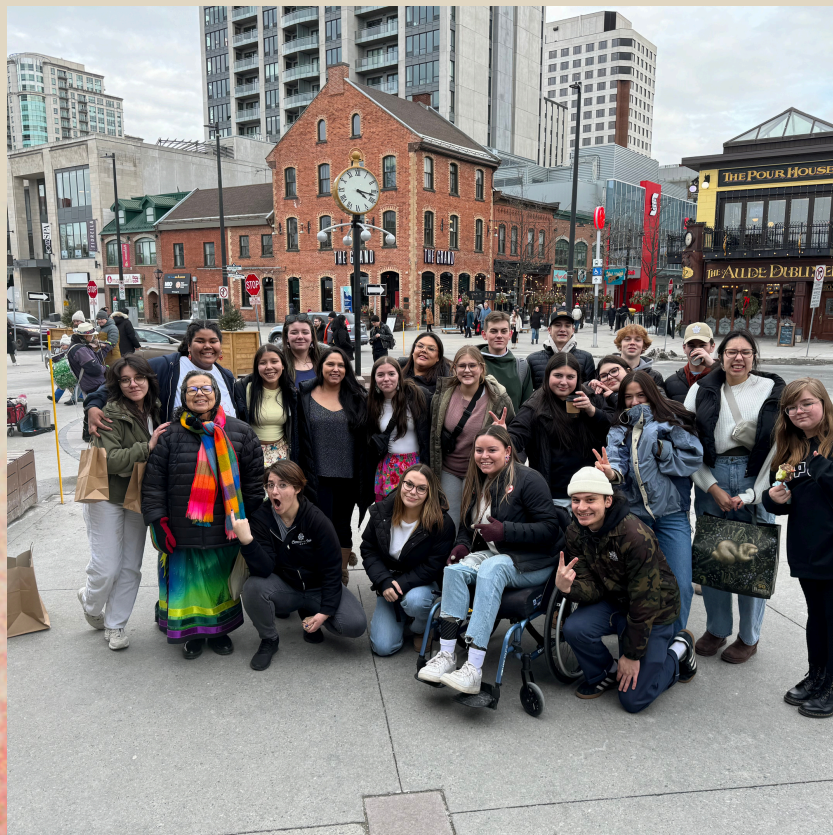


“Youth are the experts of our generation. Youth are needed to be included in decisions made by communities or Indigenous organizations. We should know the power our words carry, and how it will shape the next generation.

We think that we need more youth councils (with financial support for them), so youth can share and compare ideas on what is needed. With more events, run by youth for youth, adults can hear the voices of many others.”

We recommend financial support for youth councils in each Atlantic region made up of teenagers, to include youth leadership in all levels of Indigenous governance, with funding for youth-led events and activities.

We recommend a safe space for youth to come together and collaborate with their peers and share ideas on pressing issues within our communities. This can be done with providing a youth centre to amplify their voices and their role in the community.



WE'RE LISTENING 2024
INDIGENOUS YOUTH VOICES MATTER IN ATLANTIC CANADA

language revitalization

In our words...

“We need access to language resources because not all Indigenous youth know their traditional language or how to communicate in it, which can lead to not feeling as connected to our culture or our peers who do. If we learn more about our language and learn to speak it, it has the potential to be a strong healing moment, can lead to creating a sense of connection and community, and would let us share that knowledge with those who may need help learning too.

So, if we had access to language resources like having a dedicated class for traditional language, or if we had access to learn from an Elder, it would greatly benefit us as we would be more connected to our culture.”

We recommend promoting the existing resources for language revitalization to youth.

We recommend further promoting basic language use daily for youth, where we are exposed in places like home, the community, and at school.

We recommend each school board, provincial or First Nation led, work towards providing Indigenous language learning in the school as a course credit.

We recommend out of school language learning, where there is a dedicated space for youth and language speakers to share knowledge and practice speaking and listening.

We recommend language organizations working with Duolingo, (or other applications), to beta test Indigenous languages from Atlantic Canada on their learning app.

in our words...

final thoughts from three things

This isn't the first time Three Things Consulting had been engaged in creating spaces and places where young people can be heard. We appreciate many readers themselves will have been to spaces where they heard, or later read about, or seen similar youth recommendations prior to these stemming from We're Listening 2024.

The question we ask, first of ourselves, and to other adult readers of this report, is how is it that we continue to hear similar messages from young people, (and for us, some of these calls to action, we first heard more than 25 years ago), and why haven't these recommendations been acted on in a way that young people can see change in their families, communities and space and places they spend their time. When we answer that, it will allow us a greater opportunity to support the implementation of these recommendations in our own spaces and places.

The youth who have taken part in We're Listening 2024, either via the survey process or in crafting these data driven recommendations, shared with us all something very sacred. Their experiences and hopes for the future. These aspirations go beyond themselves and really are for their younger siblings, cousins, friends and other Indigenous young people in Atlantic Canada. The bravery, truth telling, love, respect, humility, honesty and wisdom they both demonstrated and offered are the heart and spirit of that sacred bundle they provided to us all via these recommendations.

It is our time, as adults, leaders and people with influence in systems, spaces, and governments to continue to collaborate and act collectively, to create a stronger path forward for Indigenous youth from throughout Atlantic Canada. They have given us a roadmap to do just that.

In reading this report, it is accepting responsibility for now helping carry this bundle forward. The young people have taken on the heavy lifting, and now, we have the privilege to lift these voices up. Let's do just that.