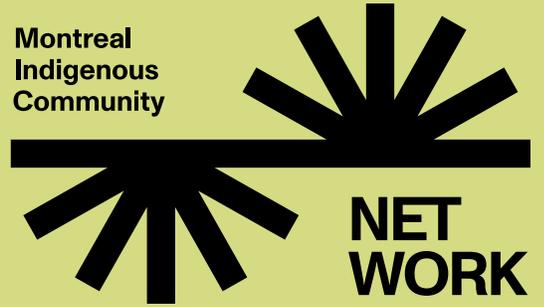
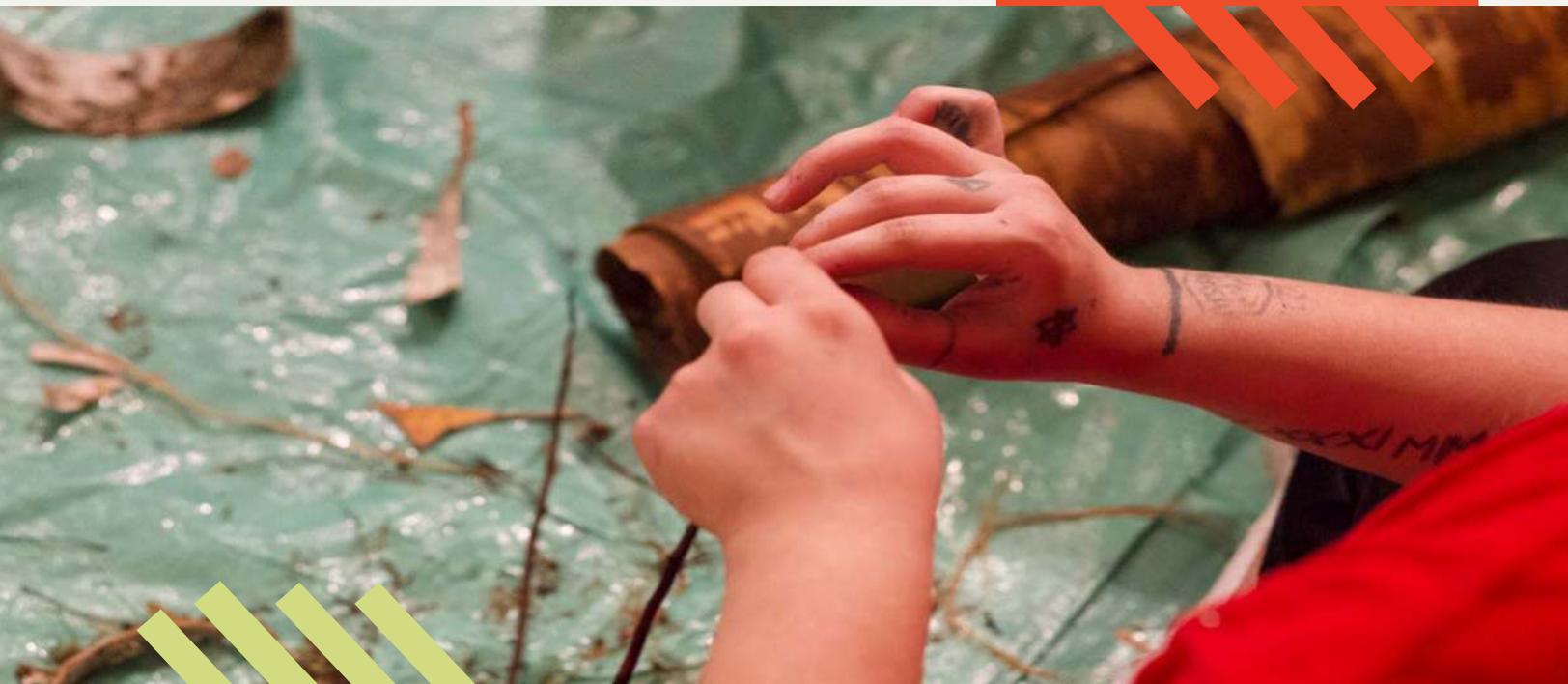


Montreal  
Indigenous  
Community



# SHARING OUR YOUTH'S FUTURE



## STRATEGY for Safety, Well-being and Belonging

Community Report

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The Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all the youth, Elders, mental health and cultural support workers, community workers and community members who have participated in our STRATEGY gatherings and shared their meaningful stories. Your voices and experiences written in this report hold the power to create change, and we look forward to continuing this collaboration of building a safer Tiohtià:ke/Montreal together.

**October 2022**

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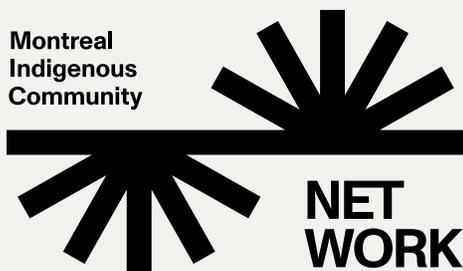
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**Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK**

**Listen - Connect - Support**

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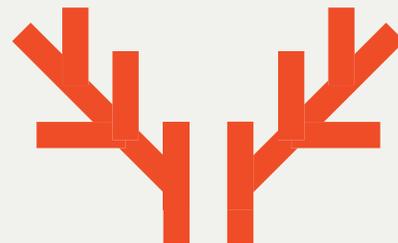
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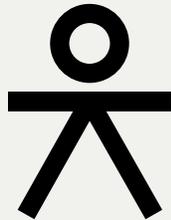
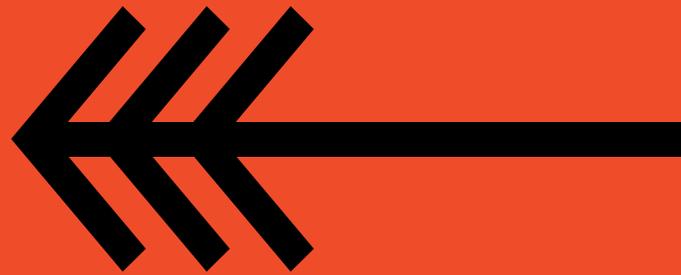
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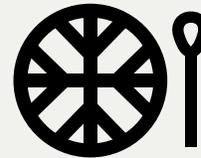
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# Report Symbols



**Person**

The human figures symbolize family and community, whether they are women, men, children, LGBTQIA+, two-spirit, qaigajuarit, angutauqatigiik, and everything in between.



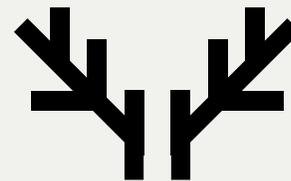
**Drum**

A drum contains all four elements necessary to sustain life; earth, water, fire and air. It also represents the collective heartbeat of the community.



**Qulliq**

A qulliq is a traditional seal-oil lamp that provides warmth and light in the Arctic environment. These lamps were such an important fixture of the nomadic Inuit household that “when the family moved, the lamp went along with it”. The qulliq represents light and warmth that comes from bringing together family and community.



**Antler**

A deer antler symbolizes power and protection. Deer are the leaders of the forest; their antlers sense the vibrations of what’s to come and warn the herd ahead of time. Haudenosaunee chiefs wear antlers in their kastò:wa (gah-sto-wa) or headdress so that they can do the same for the people.



## Pottery

Pottery symbolizes storytelling, cultural history and creative freedom.



## Feather

An eagle feather is given to people to honour their wisdom and knowledge.



# The Path of the Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK



The Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK envisions an urban setting where the well-being and growth of urban Indigenous communities throughout Tiohtià:ke/Montreal are led by Indigenous communities.



## Aspiration

The NETWORK aspires to create safe and easy access to information, services, and resources. We honour, respect and celebrate the diversity of Indigenous knowledge, cultures and innovation.

## Action

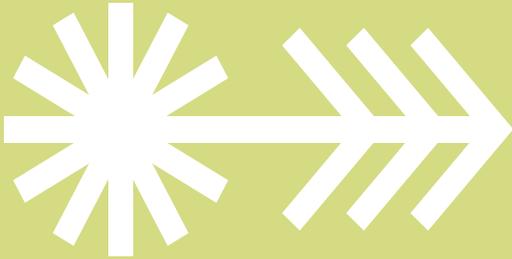
We do this by collaborating, empowering, and advocating for community needs.

## Attention

The NETWORK is attentive to:

1. **Decisions created by and for** urban Indigenous communities.
2. **Priorities and solutions identified and developed** by the community.
3. **Nurturing relationships** between the community sector and strong allies through strategic partnerships.
4. **Working together with a collective heartbeat** for the empowerment of Indigenous communities.

Since 2008, our team has grown from 4 to close to 20 where the NETWORK has launched many Working Committees to strengthen partnerships, identify priority needs for the community and develop joint projects that address gaps in services for Indigenous organizations and individuals in Montreal.



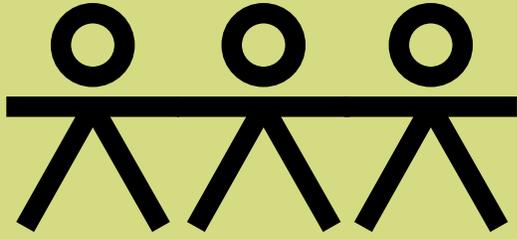


## What is the STRATEGY?

The STRATEGY for Safety, Well-being and Belonging of Indigenous People in the Greater Montreal area is a multi-year project funded by Public Safety Canada with the goal to develop a strategy that addresses the needs identified by urban Indigenous youth and to implement pilot projects. **The focus for this STRATEGY is through a lens of crime prevention and providing direct low-barrier programming for Indigenous youth.**

The priorities identified aim to be implemented over the next two to four years, with the eventual goal that Indigenous and other community organizations are able to take ownership over these pilot projects to provide sustainable and long-term support for the well-being and belonging of urban Indigenous communities in Montreal. The STRATEGY reflects a continued commitment to listen to community needs and bring together the necessary resources to create systems and services that meet these needs.





## Learning from Youth Advisors

A virtual gathering series for the NETWORK's youth advisors was created during the pandemic (2020-21) to help reduce stress and isolation as well as provide a sense of community. The youth advisors were also remunerated for their time and gifted with meals of their choice at the gatherings as a way to combat food insecurity. The gatherings were designed to align with the NETWORK's STRATEGY for the Safety, Well-being, and Belonging of urban Indigenous community members.

Inspired by Concordia University's Land As Our Teacher (LAOT) research project, the NETWORK also organized a strategy-related land-based retreat on August 13-15, 2021. This three-day gathering was in response to the need for cultural and land-based activities expressed by the NETWORK's Indigenous youth advisors in the Greater Montreal area. The event was developed and coordinated by Indigenous youth working at the NETWORK, with the support of senior staff.

The NETWORK created an itinerary of cultural activities using a collaborative process where the suggestions or requests

made by youth advisors were used to lead the events and activities. A survey was conducted asking youth about their preferences on where they wanted to go, how experienced they were with camping, and the types of traditional practices they wanted to learn from within a culturally supportive environment.

Every activity that took place during the LAOT event was suggested by our youth. The NETWORK engaged in a collaborative process and listened to the recommendations and requests from the youth to lead the event's activities. Our youth, Elders, mental health and cultural support workers engaged in cultural activities such as basket weaving, fishing, talking circles and shared meals. Alternating with the cultural activities, the NETWORK's STRATEGY team facilitated three sharing circles on the topics of youth and their (1) access to basic needs, (2) feelings of safety in the city, and (3) experience with the child welfare system in Montreal. These discussion circles helped the NETWORK team better understand the challenges and barriers youth face and to gather ideas on prevention and systemic change.



## STRATEGY for Safety, Well-being and Belonging

### Principles

- Indigenous youth governance
- Holistic
- Builds on existing community strengths
- Preventative

### Youth Programming

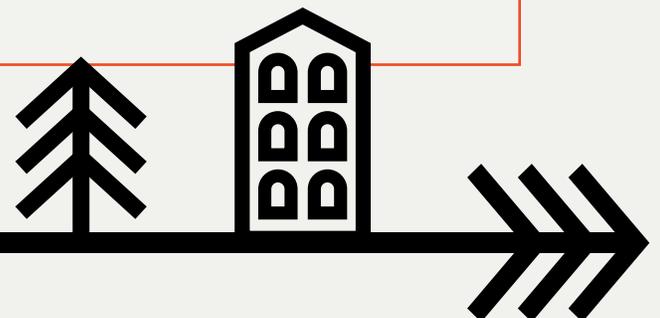
- Cultural and land-based
- Wellness and safety
- Financial supports
- Housing
- Employment

### Recognizes

- 2SLGBTQIA+ community members as needing specific services and access
- Distinct supports needed for youth and families that have had contact with youth protection services
- The unique needs of Inuit youth and for culturally-specific projects and programming
- Specific supports for youth with lived experience in communities and those with mainly urban experiences

### Policy and Advocacy

- Cultural awareness and safety training
- Increase Indigenous presence in public service sector
- Increase Indigenous governance over public sector services
- Permanent gathering spaces for Indigenous youth and families



# The Research Process

The research process was guided by Indigenous research methodologies and favoured a relational and conversational/storytelling approach that has been said to allow time and space for research to be used as part of a healing practice for Indigenous peoples.<sup>1</sup> The setting itself was chosen as youth advisors had expressed a desire and need for more opportunities to connect with the land and be away from the city. The benefits of land-based learning range from centering indigeneity and confronting settler-colonial forms of education to regenerating intergenerational teachings and increasing the spiritual and cultural well-being of participants.<sup>2</sup>

Conversations with youth were approached as consensual and meaningful consultation, with participants being remunerated for their time and feedback, and ensured of a safe space to share their thoughts and experiences if they felt comfortable enough to do so. Participants were encouraged to be honest, with support workers nearby if needed.

Youth were assured that their feedback was being recorded and transcribed so that major themes and quotes from participants could be used for community strategy development. Selected quotes taken from the transcriptions were followed-up with the event attendees to consult them on their consent with having it shared whilst keeping their names anonymous.

NETWORK staff and youth advisors also recognized that there are diverse and distinct needs for Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ urban Indigenous youth that have grown up in community and those that have grown up in urban settings, as well as those that have been disconnected from their families and communities through processes of assimilation such as the child welfare system. These needs have been supported by previous studies.<sup>3</sup>

Gathered together in a talking circle, youth, Elders, mental health support workers, and STRATEGY team members discussed three different but intersected topics: Personal safety, well-being and belonging for urban Indigenous youth in Montreal. During the **first talking circle**, questions posed to participants explored ways in which youth take care of themselves, how youth stay safe in the city, the province and the country as a whole as well as how they cultivate self confidence, pride, healing and actively support the safety of their peers. During the **second talking circle**, participants – youth, Elders, mental health support workers, and STRATEGY team members – discussed being Indigenous in the city as it relates to the process of finding housing, understanding tenant rights, financial awareness, employment, and access to food and resources in Montreal. The **third talking circle** was centered around Youth Protection in Quebec with the goal of improving the lives of Indigenous children and youth in care.

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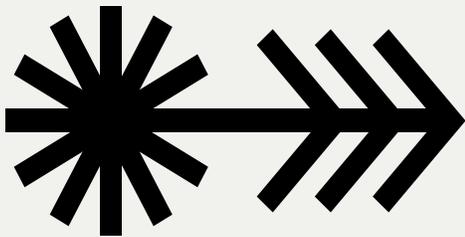
1. Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008

2. Meyer, 2008; Radu, House and Pashagumskum, 2014; Tuck, McKenzie and McCoy, 2014

3. Fast, Drouin-Gagné, Allouche, Bertrand, 2016; Hunt and Holmes, 2015

# Research Findings





## Talking Circle #1: Safety and Self-care

### Challenges and Barriers

“... A lot of people are stuck between those two worlds...

being ‘too good’ for the community but at the same time not even feeling safe in the city because you are Native.”

Many areas in the city were highlighted as places that are understood to be unsafe for Indigenous people such as **bars, metro stations, hospitals and the workplace**, essentially spanning all aspects of daily functioning. Participants expressed various degrees of danger that exist in the spaces indicated, ranging from feelings of discomfort and unfamiliarity to fear of bodily harm for being Indigenous, Black-Indigenous, racialized and/or queer/Two-Spirit/trans<sup>4</sup>. Youth spoke of personal experiences or second hand knowledge of kidnappings, being attacked verbally and physically, and historic and ongoing forced reproductive sterilizations, often related to the policing of Indigenous bodies by the child welfare system.

4. Trans\* with the asterisk refers to the spectrum of gender identities including trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming and other identities.

## “Growing up in the city, I was always ‘not Native enough’

...or ‘too white’...I was told by a lot of people up north that because I speak good English, I think I’m better than them. And it’s — that’s messed up. And I still have a hard time navigating that.”

- Youth Advisor

“That’s the question, always “How come you don’t speak French when you’re in Quebec?” and I say “I’m Inuk! You visit my land!” You know?

Why should I speak [French], how come you don’t speak my language?”

With systemic racism seen as the central barrier to safety in the city, seeking help from hospital staff or the police are not seen as viable options for many. Police are often mentioned as criminalizing urban Indigenous people, making them feel unwelcome and even disrupting Indigenous community workers as they attempt to help community members living on the streets. Hospitals were identified as particularly unsafe, “daunting” and “scary”, a place where Indigenous children disappear, with medical staff perpetuating racism towards visibly Indigenous peoples and where stereotyping community members as drug addicts or alcoholics and refusing treatment occurs. Older white hospital staff, particularly older white women, were indicated as those with the most disdain for racialized and Indigenous peoples.

More broadly, the province of Quebec is seen by urban Indigenous youth as systemically racist, with participants

having experienced prejudice, anti-Blackness, racism from other People of Colour, and homophobia. Francophone Québécois people were described as ignorant, indulging in stereotypes when interacting with Indigenous people, and being discriminatory when not spoken to in the French language. These experiences have led to an overall fear of being Indigenous in Quebec.

Participants also shared stories around personal safety in the context of lateral violence<sup>5</sup> experienced within the Indigenous community itself. Being urban and Indigenous was sometimes perceived by those who grew up on a reserve or traditional territory as “not Native enough” and yet, the city has proven to be an unsafe place for these urban Indigenous participants. The experience of living between these two worlds has led to struggles of belonging and feelings of isolation.

5. Lateral violence (sometimes called horizontal violence) happens when groups of people that have experienced oppression turn against one another.

## SAFETY AND SELF-CARE: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS (CONTINUED)

**Fitting in, belonging, being comfortable in one's identity and feeling safe as urban Indigenous people** are fundamental issues that span the Indigenous community, city, province and country-wide. Issues around Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and the RCMP were mentioned. Feelings of being hated, dispensable, objectified, stereotyped and confusion around the state of reconciliation erode one's self worth.

Self-care, community care and self empowerment are important for urban Indigenous people who face the pressures of living under the many facets of oppression. During the pandemic specifically, participants felt that finding moments to care for oneself was a struggle. Some mentioned having difficulty with personal hygiene, taking care of one's appearance, and finding it challenging to be social. Additionally, the increased use of social media turned into an addiction for some, affecting their physical and mental health. Participants felt they could also recognize these challenges in others manifesting as irritability, discontentment, anger, a strong energy and body odour.



“I mean... I’ve seen a little bit of a change, after the bodies were found in residential schools. I’m the child of a survivor. I think it woke up Canada a little bit... I think people have been more, maybe fake compassionate like for the moment. “Wow that’s really, really sad.” “I can’t believe that.”

**But who knows what’s going to happen next year... where is that reconciliation?”**





## | Solutions

Although the pandemic posed several challenges for some participants, being online via video conferencing, using social media and gaming provided opportunities to stay connected with community, to continue working, to hire new staff, to hold workshops and gatherings, and to ease into public speaking. Participants find personal safety being with peers and in groups. Wearing indicators of one's culture is a way of taking back space and showing pride. Although some participants were fearful at first to be themselves and to outwardly express their Indigenous identity, they came to the conclusion that their safety would be compromised whether they wore cultural symbols or not and that living with pride is a better option.

Existing as Indigenous in the city proves challenging, as does responding to the barriers of racism and oppression. But participants did express hope, coping strategies and positive experiences.

Safety is found in personal spaces with locked doors and closed windows. Strategies are employed around leaving one's home at night, like leaving the TV on, or carrying a weapon. Safety is found in the woods, in the snow, in some parts of the city where they are more understood by the population. Participants expressed creativity of all kinds as a way to heal, care for one's self, lift the spirit, fill an "emptiness", including Pow Wow dancing, drawing, painting, music and drumming. **Community, as a whole, is seen as central to everything.**



**"...We are strong!  
We have to empower ourselves.  
We cannot be always put down.**

**We can kill them with kindness, I love killing them with kindness. I don't use hurtful words anymore, I just kill them with kindness. Just be very nice, and answer them, but very strong. And that way they hear, and they see, and they go "whoa!" "**

# Talking Circle #2: Priorities and Basic Needs

## | Challenges and Barriers

Housing and access to housing are distinct challenges for urban Indigenous people in Montreal. A clear barrier that many participants touched on during the talking circle is that they lack financial awareness leading to low credit scores, which limits their ability to find an apartment on their own. Ageism toward youth and low credit scores push participants toward accepting lower quality and unsafe housing, with illegal demands from landlords who fail to offer proper building maintenance or repair. Participants shared that drug dealers, lack of fire safety, poor ventilation and pests have been challenges.

**“Too many rules,  
too many eyes,  
too many people  
putting their nose  
in [your] business.**

**Maintenance people will often  
be watching and blabber to the  
housing organization, blabbing  
to the landlord, turning you  
into welfare”**

**“— It’s  
really hard. I  
wasn’t able  
to get my  
own place**

**because you need  
good credit and  
when you’re young  
you don’t really  
know about credit,  
you’re not taught  
about credit.”**





“...We had to compromise safety. Like my building, it has sometimes pest issues and sometimes — well all the time — it has drug dealer issues...

there’s a lot of drug dealers in there. There’s a lot of drug users too, each floor usually would have one.”

Without the proper credentials, participants are **forced to live in unsafe situations and are often targeted** in this type of housing. Although Native housing, co-ops and affordable housing are possibilities in theory, access to them can take years, and tenants are routinely over-surveilled while facing an abundance of rules and regulations. Low-cost housing units are usually selected by outreach/support workers and not the tenants themselves, leaving them to feel they have no freedom, resulting in a desire to move. One outreach worker shared that racism and sexism are continuous barriers to finding safe housing for a broad range of the population, not just Indigenous people.

Other barriers include,

- finding housing while living with mental health issues;
- gentrification;
- the rising cost of living;
- a lack of knowledge around tenants rights;
- leaving community in the north due to a lack of medical services or to pursue post-secondary education, and;
- being forced to live far from the city centre to access affordable housing in areas such as Rosemont, St Michel and Parc Extension.

## PRIORITIES AND BASIC NEEDS: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS (CONTINUED)

Access to food and resources posed separate challenges for participants, which compounded the already **daunting task of finding safe, clean, and affordable housing**. Organizations that offer support to Indigenous people were not necessarily known to participants because they were from other areas or they were simply unaware. Food banks were described as being paternalistic and controlling in their method of food distribution, with little choice and no labels on cans.

Some participants felt that resources for students were often forgotten or neglected by organizations serving the urban Indigenous community. Others indicated that the funding from reserves is out of sync with the cost of living in various cities where Indigenous students move in order to study at the post-secondary level, and that band councils prevent students from working more than 10 to 15 hours per week. Over and above this, reserves fail to provide information to students on available resources in host cities. Younger students indicated particular struggles related to lack of knowledge around finances, and how to spend and save money.

“There’s a disconnect between the funding that the reserve gives to you and the way that the students — especially those that are living alone — the way that they’re spending the money... My reserve doesn’t say “here’s a list of resources in Montreal” where you are to go to for housing, for counselling, for food, security....

**there’s a big disconnect between, [home communities] and living in Montreal.”**

Those who serve the community as outreach and support workers:

1. Often face burn out and difficulties related to repeated trauma exposure, and;
2. Reflect on how best to support youth doing the same kind of work and provide that necessary peer support to others.

It is evident that more outreach and support workers are needed, as well as adequate support for them.

“As a queer and non-binary person... friends and chosen family is a huge, huge resource for me. [It’s] the most important thing of my life...there’s just things that my family just doesn’t understand about me and will not understand – doesn’t want to understand. So I had to find that connection, that feeling of family with my friends... With the people that I chose to be my family...”

## Solutions

Gathered together, participants were able to pool their knowledge, provide peer support and bring forward various ideas related to food resources, financial awareness and housing, particularly ways to lessen the risks surrounding finding a safe and secure place to live.

Family, friends, peers and the wider community provide support and valuable information on difficult landlords and housing to avoid, as well as on available apartments and real estate agents who could help to find suitable housing. Facebook groups dedicated to specific neighbourhoods post up-to-date, tailored information on housing and resources. Family and friends were there for participants when emergency housing was needed, and to offer advice on school, paying bills and saving money.

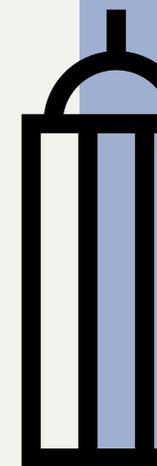
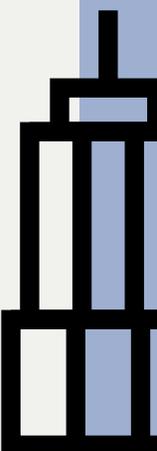
When Indigenous people are travelling to the city for things like education and medical care, home communities and band offices need to provide better care and support regarding communication, access to funding, counselling around funding, and overall safety and well-being. On a broader and long-term scale, participants indicated that more preventive measures are required, especially the need for an urban Indigenous centre in Montreal as a hub of holistic services and resources and as a place to gather.

Indigenous youth in the city specify that they need:

- Gift cards for food and other basic needs
- Free STM passes
- Easy-to-carry list of available resources/community orgs

When looking for housing, participants advise:

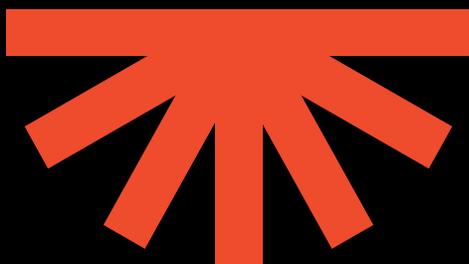
- **Know the rights and responsibilities** of the lessee and lessor as outlined by the La Régie du logement;
- **Inspect each room thoroughly** and have any needed repairs stipulated in the lease agreement;
- **Have a witness when signing a lease** or verbally agreeing on any issue with a landlord;
- **Avoid paying cash deposits** and have your own receipt book on hand;
- **Send registered letters** if a landlord fails to address issues related to the apartment;
- **Vet prospective roommates thoroughly** to avoid unsafe situations.



**“...When I was put into a group home and I wasn’t allowed to go [to the Inuit feast] anymore, it affected me a lot.**

**I wasn’t permitted to go, cause they didn’t want to take me and I couldn’t be taken by my family because I wasn’t allowed to be with them... Like ever since that, it’s been hard for me to go in general, even though I’m an adult, and I can choose to now.**

**Cause I guess... there’s shame involved with it because I wasn’t allowed to.”**



**“...I noticed how uneducated the social workers are on the realities of Indigenous people from the history, to practices, to traditional practices. I remember one time going to a visit to one of the homes [of my client]... there was a smudge bowl on the kitchen table... there was ashes, and there was matches. The social worker was just so uncomfortable sitting there, she kept like looking at it... She thought it was drugs, she thought they were smoking drugs...**

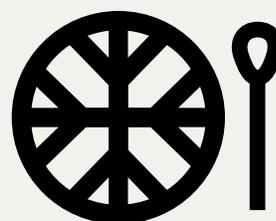
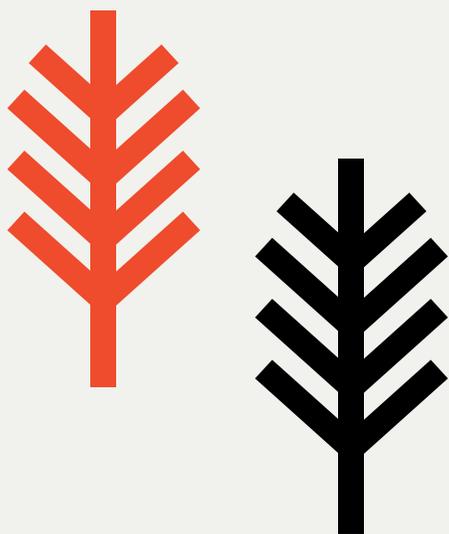
**There’s a lack of training.”**

# Talking Circle #3: Youth Protection and Systemic Change

The third discussion with participants was centred around Youth Protection in Quebec, with the goal of improving the lives of Indigenous children and youth in care. New laws that have come into effect as of 2007, and subsequently in 2019, around culturally appropriate services and the rights of Indigenous children and their families set the tone for conversation. Themes such as advocacy and accompaniment came up often, particularly escorting clients to social or health services to help bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, as well as advocate on their behalf, if needed.<sup>6</sup>

Questions focused on:

1. **Awareness** of laws and rights;
2. **Personal experience** with youth protection, and;
3. **Parental needs** going forward.



## Challenges and Barriers

Lack of transparency by the youth protection system as well as failure to communicate with clients on their rights, including infringing on those rights, are historic and ongoing challenges rooted in racism, discrimination and stereotyping by uneducated staff. **This has led to distrust of the system by Indigenous youth and their families, and the fear that the child welfare legacy will continue, with more children getting lost in the system.**

The intergenerational legacy of families in care means continued disconnection from culture and territory. That intergenerational disruption is supported by Youth Protection's process of opening files for families and once in the system, the threat of continued apprehension of siblings and other relations becomes that much higher. While in care, participants expressed the deliberate actions taken by staff to prevent children from connecting with their biological families.

6. Bouchard, 2019



“I have a lot, a lot of experience with [Director of Youth Protection] as I grew up in the system and also I am dealing with the system with my son. And I can tell you that the rights are still today not protected and not respected.... I was telling my social worker about what was going on, because we were like very mistreated... and being really, really disconnect[ed] from who I was like I was asking questions like “Why am I brown?” Like why am I looking the way I am looking?”

**And they wouldn't tell me really that I was native and I only find out when I was 9, that I was... Anishinaabe.”**

“One time I was interpreting for this woman, here in Montreal, and I suggested that, I think it would be a good idea that these children will be sent home. The social worker said... that they will get culture shock. I was shocked that they would say that they get culture shock, from their own culture.”

“They're still going to the hospitals, and still questioning the moms... One little thing can be wrong and “Oh! Gotta take the kids!” you know? One of [my clients] her fridge broke. Her fridge broke and they didn't take them for 30 days, they took them for 90 days.”

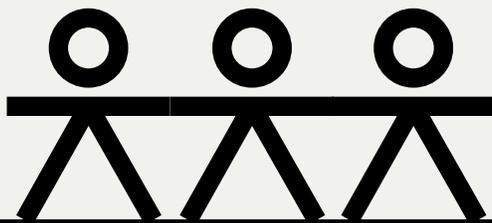


“...I moved to Montreal when I was 21, I ran away with my two daughters and then I lost my daughters a few years later, and there was no help then. I was so lost... It took me many years to get my kids back but I was not going to give up. But they made me feel so small, they made me feel so bad like I was not a good mother but I knew I was doing the best that I can as a mother. I thank Parents Helping Parents for helping me, they got me a lawyer, **but the system is made to be a failure for us. It doesn't help us. It's for the social workers to win our children. To take our children and to give them away to be adopted.”**

## YOUTH PROTECTION AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS (CONTINUED)

Participants shared that the system was designed for Indigenous people to fail:

- Youth in care feel that those employed by the system **lack empathy** even when aware of unsafe living conditions;
- Parents who struggle with addictions and domestic violence **receive little support from the system** and are instead blamed and have their children removed;
- **Siblings are adopted out** to different homes and potentially only find each other later in life;
- At 18, youth who grew up in care age out of the system and **are left without support from Youth Protection** with few skills, no money and no place to go.



“When I started connecting [with my culture]... I felt more myself, and happier... I don’t want my child to go over what I went through like I want him to grow up knowing who he is... and so forsure I’m super scared every time that the D.Y.P call me to catch up on my situation...”



## | Solutions

With the immediate intention being to improve the living conditions that Indigenous children experience in the system, by directly targeting the youth protection system, participants indicated the necessity of access to:

1. **Knowledge around laws and policies** that affect Indigenous children and families;
2. **Effective representation and accompaniment** when interacting with the judicial system, and;
3. **Comprehensive holistic community resources** that touch on parenting, healthcare, advocacy, reintegration, and access to cultural teachings.

Some of these actions are being undertaken by community organizations, however more support is needed, perhaps through a centralized service. Ultimately, Indigenous-led urban and in-community child, youth and family care spaces and networks are necessary going forward.

Participants expressed that the Indigenous community, in particular families in and affected by the youth protection system, need access to cultural activities that make them feel empowered.



**“...That’s something that I’m really advocating for,**

**is to have our own youth protection system without having to deal with the D.Y.P. because, as we all know, it’s unsafe for children.”**

In an effort to see reform of the existing system and have access to culturally-appropriate services, participants indicate the need to:

- **Remove control** from Youth Protection;
- **Engage with** Elders and community;
- **Have more** Indigenous staff and foster families available;
- **Have access to accompaniment** when needed for interactions with colonial institutions;
- **Reintegrate youth back into home and community** through parenting programs;
- **Place children with relations or families** from the same cultural background.

# **Moving ahead with the NETWORK's STRATEGY**





## The STRATEGY

The STRATEGY aims to move towards greater community direction and prevention that centers the needs of Indigenous youth and their families. It is for this reason that the recommended pilot projects aim to provide holistic support for Indigenous youth and community members. *As the NETWORK is known for its history of supporting the initial growth of new services and working with community partners to find long-term sustainable homes for programming, the STRATEGY will similarly recommend this model of action.*

As this is a STRATEGY focused on Safety, Well-being and Belonging, it is important to note that many of the youths' experiences and challenges have centered around the impacts of being targets of child welfare systems that have served to further disrupt the cultural and social fabrics of Indigenous families. This

pattern of intervention began with the colonial projects of assimilation, including but not limited to residential schools.<sup>7</sup> The intergenerational effects of colonialism – poverty, cultural alienation, trauma, mental health challenges and addictions – continue to make Indigenous families targets of child welfare services.<sup>8</sup> A large proportion of the Indigenous homeless and precariously housed have experienced removal from their families and their communities as children. Indigenous youth have expressed the great need for supportive and preventative services that will mitigate these intergenerational effects of colonialism.<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that many provinces have changed their legislation to prohibit child removal that is directly related to poverty, Indigenous children and families continue to fall through the cracks with inadequate support and prevention services.<sup>10</sup>

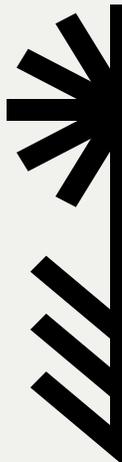
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7. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015

8. Fast and Collin Vezina, 2019; Fast, Nakuset, Phillips, Lefebvre, Boldo, Miler and Lamore, 2019

9. Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2008; Bouchard, 2019

10. Sinha et al., 2011





## “...More opportunities... more community support from the Elders,

from the grandmothers, the grandmothers to give our families... more sense of security and safety, with helping them feel safe...we have an organization in my community called Family First that focuses on keeping the family together instead of separating them.”



The STRATEGY for the NETWORK seeks to draw attention to the fact that early intervention may help to prevent youth from becoming targets of the system which they have aged out of. There are currently several organizations that offer some support to youth that have been involved with child welfare services, but studies in several parts of the country, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit Peoples’ Report and work done in Quebec’s Viens Commission Report, as well as the Montreal report, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back have all cited **the need for greater “wrap-around” support for Indigenous youth that have been involved with child welfare services.**<sup>11</sup> Emergency funds, access to safe and affordable housing, land-based and cultural support, financial

management assistance and low-barrier employment and education programs have all been cited as key elements to healing and prevention.<sup>12</sup>

Holistic services include cultural, spiritual, physical and emotional supports for Indigenous youth and with attention to the diverse needs of Inuit youth, youth that have had experiences with the child welfare system, Two-Spirit youth, and youth that have grown up with different lived experiences related to their cultures (i.e. on reserve/in community or in urban areas/outside the community). The following STRATEGY recommendations are not exhaustive, but speak to the major themes gathered through the research process with youth advisors.

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11. Bouchard, 2019; Fast et al., 2019; Government of Canada, 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015  
12. Bouchard, 2019; Government of Canada, 2019

# STRATEGY

## Recommendations

### for Tiohtià:ke / Montreal



#### General Recommendations

1. Indigenous **youth-led solutions**
2. **Building on existing programming and strengths** in the community that are present in Indigenous-serving and youth-serving organizations



#### Two-Spirit Specific Support

3. **Access** to 2SLGBTQ+ medical service, 2SLGBTQ+-friendly therapists, trauma-informed healthcare practitioners
4. **Information** on 2SLGBTQ+ community leaders, youth leaders, and content
5. **Increase access to 2SLGBTQ+ ceremony, teachings and spaces**
6. **Education** for Indigenous community members on 2SLGBTQIA+ realities

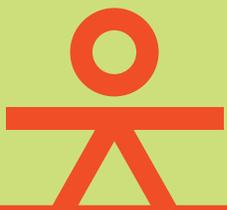


## Youth and Families in Contact with Youth Protection

- 7. Access to culturally relevant supports** for families, children and youth in and affected by Youth Protection (i.e. land-based activities, Elders, powwows, art spaces and sharing circles)
- 8. Cultural revitalization and services** tailored to from-reserve/ community and urban youth and Inuit-specific supports
- 9. Provide assistance in communication** between home community and urban organizations
- 10. Robust preparation and supports for youth** before they leave care
- 11. Accompaniments** when interacting with government and public sector services
- 12. Support around connecting and reconnecting** with biological family
- 13. Education for youth and child welfare workers** on laws and rights pertaining to child and youth care

## Financial Support

- 14. Low barrier access to emergency funds** and other funding opportunities
- 15. Supports to increase financial literacy**, including information on and help with taxes
- 16. Access to free public transit passes**
- 17. Access to gift cards for food and resources**



## Employment Support

- 18. Employment options and supports for Indigenous youth**, including entrepreneurs, artists and small businesses
- 19. Professional development:** writing resumes, public speaking, interview skills
- 20. Supports in dealing with workplace stress**



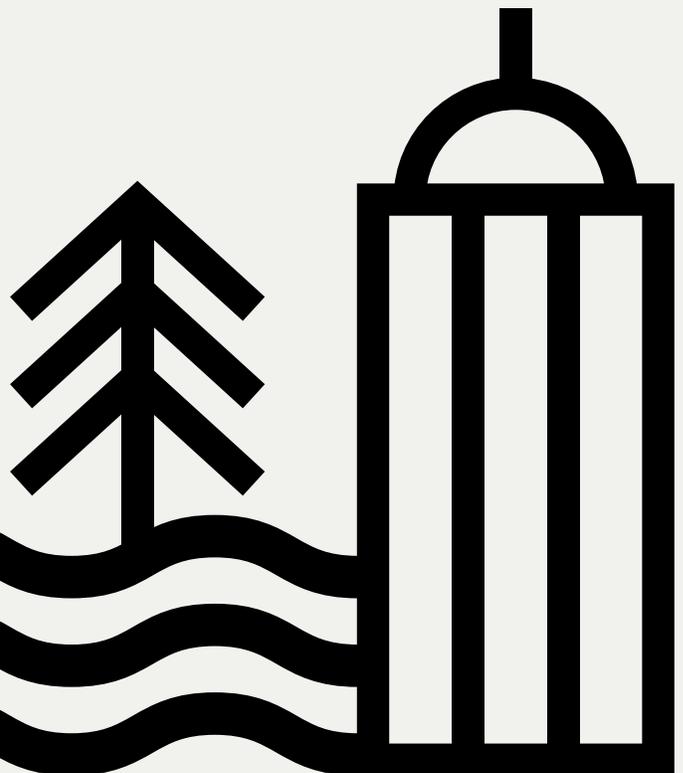
## Policy changes and long-term solutions

21. Engage in advocacy for youth protection services to be **more accountable to the Indigenous community** - and develop a standard action plan related to lack of accountability/harm
22. **More Indigenous workers in the youth care system** funded by the government but not necessarily working at Batshaw or under the CIUSSS directly; so as to protect Indigenous employees or to push for a cluster hire; including an Indigenous supervisor at Batshaw
23. Long-term goal of having **Indigenous governance and input** for urban child welfare /child protection services
24. **Gathering place including community kitchen and freezer** with frequent gatherings and spaces for children and families
25. Support efforts towards establishing **more robust medical and education services in the north**
26. Provide additional opportunities to **address policing and surveillance concerns** identified by youth



## Increasing Cultural Awareness and Safety

27. **Training for child and youth care workers** who are in university as well as those already working in Youth Protection
28. **Better supports for outreach workers collaborating with youth** to access services
29. **Education for volunteers and community workers** on serving Indigenous clientele, i.e. at food banks
30. **Cultural training for healthcare workers**





## Housing Support

- 31. Creation of **low-barrier housing**
- 32. Assist youth in **understanding/ accessing finances**
- 33. **Workshops** around tenants and landlords rights and responsibilities, tips on finding quality housing, safe areas with accessible housing in the city, vetting roommates and living alone for the first time

**“It’s crazy cause before the pandemic I didn’t know or see or realize that there was organizations that can help Indigenous people. But like the pandemic changed everything. So there’s a lot of help that came out of that, like: Gift cards for food... delivery, there was lots of things that were adapted and I think that’s good, but before, there wasn’t any of that. There was a wake up, a call for more help. I hope it stays.**

## Wellness and Safety

- 34. **Accompaniments and/or a witness for accessing services** when attending court, health appointments and other situations identified by youth as needing support
- 35. **Workshops and tangible tools** (pocket-sized list) on how to **navigate and stay safe in the city**
- 36. **24hr hotline** for Indigenous community members
- 37. Establish **harm reduction and sex worker support and prevention**, including meeting youth at points of arrival in the city
- 38. Access to and/or a **comprehensive list of Indigenous gathering spaces**
- 39. Ongoing online and in-person info **sessions on staying safe and self-care in the city** including navigating racism in healthcare and when interacting with police
- 40. A **comprehensive list of Indigenous-friendly trauma-informed** health services, addictions counselling, therapists, orgs, hotlines, shelters, drop-in centres and resources/research
- 41. **Youth mental health groups**
- 42. **Regular youth sharing circles and gatherings**, including land-based gatherings
- 43. Increasing **access to land-based teachings**, activities and gatherings
- 44. **Opportunities to participate in sober activities**

# STRATEGY

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



### What are the roles and responsibilities of a Youth Advisor? Will I be paid for my participation?

Youth Advisors help to guide the NETWORK in creating pilot projects that are focused on the needs of youth like you. You will be asked to participate in meetings, trainings, consultation sessions, gatherings, plannings, etc. approximately once every month, and paid \$20/hour for your time. Occasionally, you may be asked to attend additional meetings or review documents. Typically, Youth Advisors will be paid on the day of a meeting or event. However, Youth Advisors who participate in the project over 10 hours per month must submit an invoice at the end of each month and will be paid by direct deposit.

### Can anyone become a Youth Advisor?

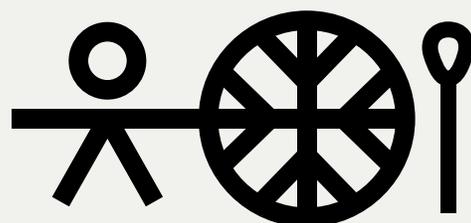
To qualify as a Youth Advisor with the NETWORK you need to be an Indigenous person currently residing in the Greater Montreal Area and be between 12-35 years old. Youth Advisors are paid \$20/hour for meetings, trainings and consultation sessions.

### Would I be considered as an employee?

No. Youth Advisors are not considered employees of The NETWORK nor are Youth Advisors representatives of the organization. You will be remunerated and **paid as a consultant of this project**. For consultants, The NETWORK does not pay into unemployment, retirement, disability, or any other benefits. The NETWORK can however provide a reference in your future employment search.

### What is in it for me?

This is an opportunity to get involved and grow with other like minded youth. The NETWORK provides various paid trainings and workshops specifically for Youth Advisors to learn new skills. Invest in your professional, personal, and spiritual development by helping us on social media, assisting with event planning, partaking in facilitation training, and more!





### **How do I become a Youth Advisor? If I have a friend who is interested, what can they do?**

If you or someone you know are interested in becoming a youth advisor please contact:

**[strategy@reseautlnetwork.com](mailto:strategy@reseautlnetwork.com)**

### **I have a project idea that supports Indigenous youth. Who can I talk to about it?**

You can get in touch with the NETWORK and we can set up a meeting to discuss your youth project in more depth. You can send an email to:

**[strategy@reseautlnetwork.com](mailto:strategy@reseautlnetwork.com)**

### **I have funding/contacts/training/equipment/event space/ etc. to contribute towards the STRATEGY, how can I get involved?**

We welcome diverse ways of contributing to the STRATEGY. Please contact us to set up a meeting:

**[strategy@reseautlnetwork.com](mailto:strategy@reseautlnetwork.com)**

### **Do you offer emergency services or funding?**

The NETWORK does not provide emergency services or funding. One of the STRATEGY recommendations for the future is to develop emergency funds/services offered by a collaborating organization. For emergency services, contact :

**Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay**  
(WIICHIHIIWAAUWIN Mental health line)  
1-833-632-HELP (4357)

**Iskweu**  
Anonymous information line  
(MMIWG2S+)  
1-855-547-5938

**National Inquiry MMIWG**  
An independent, national, toll-free support line  
1-844-413-6649

**Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Helpline**  
Telephone counseling for northerners in crisis. Toll-free number outside of Iqaluit.  
1-800-265-3333

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