

# BUILDING SOLIDARITY *Between Communities*



*intercultural dialogues between*  
**INDIGENOUS AND REFUGEE YOUTH**

A youth-led initiative to connect across cultures, share journeys and begin healing.

# “We all have been displaced.”

## Many different journeys connect on one path of healing.

What was intended as a project to bring together refugee and Indigenous youth in Surrey for intercultural exchange, celebration, and community building grew into even more. Through a series of dialogues – two dialogue circles and a traditional longhouse ceremony with Kwantlen First Nation —youth were able to safely share their individual journeys and find common ground with respect to experiences of displacement, trauma, and colonization.

In preparation for the two dialogue circles, both groups of youth engaged in skill building and leadership development.

### Decolonization 101

Indigenous youth from the Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA) developed a cultural competency curriculum, designed for young people to learn both the history of Indigenous people in Canada as well as the current strengths and challenges they face today in urban centres like Surrey.

This curriculum formed the basis of the first dialogue circle in November 2017. The Indigenous Youth Cultural Group

hosted the Surrey Refugee Youth Team at FRAFCA. For some of the refugee youth, this was their first introduction to the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

### Tracing Our Paths

The Surrey Refugee Youth Team met weekly throughout the fall. They were joined in some sessions by trained facilitators, including Jesus Moreno (co-author of ISSofBC’s MY Circle 2.0) and Simran Sarwara (PeerNet), who worked with the youth to build their leadership capacity and develop facilitation and event coordination skills.

For the second dialogue circle, the Surrey Refugee Youth Team hosted the FRAFCA youth and brought the focus inward, as each individual was asked to contemplate their journey so far. For refugee youth this meant both before and after arriving in Canada. For FRAFCA, it was in connection with their family and history. The self-reflection and discussion brought to light how the unique and varied pasts of each of the youth could inform and impact each other.

### Ceremony as the Foundation

To move beyond dialogue and into experiential learning, a full-day retreat was organized at the end of January with approximately fifty youth.

Chief Marilyn Gabriel of Kwantlen First Nation and her family welcomed the youth into their longhouse for a day of

“It is important not just to acknowledge whose territory we are on, but also to actively support these Nations in their efforts to thrive. We are very fortunate to have a vital relationship with Kwantlen First Nation and support them as part of our efforts to decolonize.”

Jeska Slater



### Calling of Witnesses

Before contact, Nations practiced an “oral tradition.” This means that knowledge was transferred by the people who “witnessed” an event.

In June Baker’s description of the Legacy of the Longhouse, she notes that “an important part of the ritual of the longhouse is the witnessing ceremony. Whenever one is doing “work” of any consequence and a spokesperson or “floor manager” has been selected, the first order of events is to call witnesses. These people are required to take note of the work that is taking place and to speak about the work when it has been completed.”

We are told to listen with open eyes, ears and an open heart.



ceremony and ritual at the Kwantlen First Nation Cultural Building in Fort Langley.

Participants were welcomed with music—traditional drumming and singing—and with the calling of witnesses. Two youth from both the FRAFCA Indigenous Youth Cultural Group and Surrey Refugee Youth Team were called upon to witness the day.

What unfolded over the day was a collaboration between the two youth groups. Maddi and Chelsey Grier, of the FRAFCA Youth Group, led a *Women INpowerment* workshop that addressed how colonization has affected Indigenous women.

The Surrey Refugee Youth Team invited participants to engage with a large map of the world to identify their journeys. Participants were able to use different colours to show where they were born or where their families were from, and where they had lived and where they had travelled through.

To allow the young people to immerse

themselves in the history of colonization in Canada, facilitators led participants through the KAIROS Blanket Exercise. This activity was an intense, emotional experience for many.

As the day came to an end, the witnesses were called upon once more to recount their experience and recall what was for many an intense, powerful day.

### Reflections

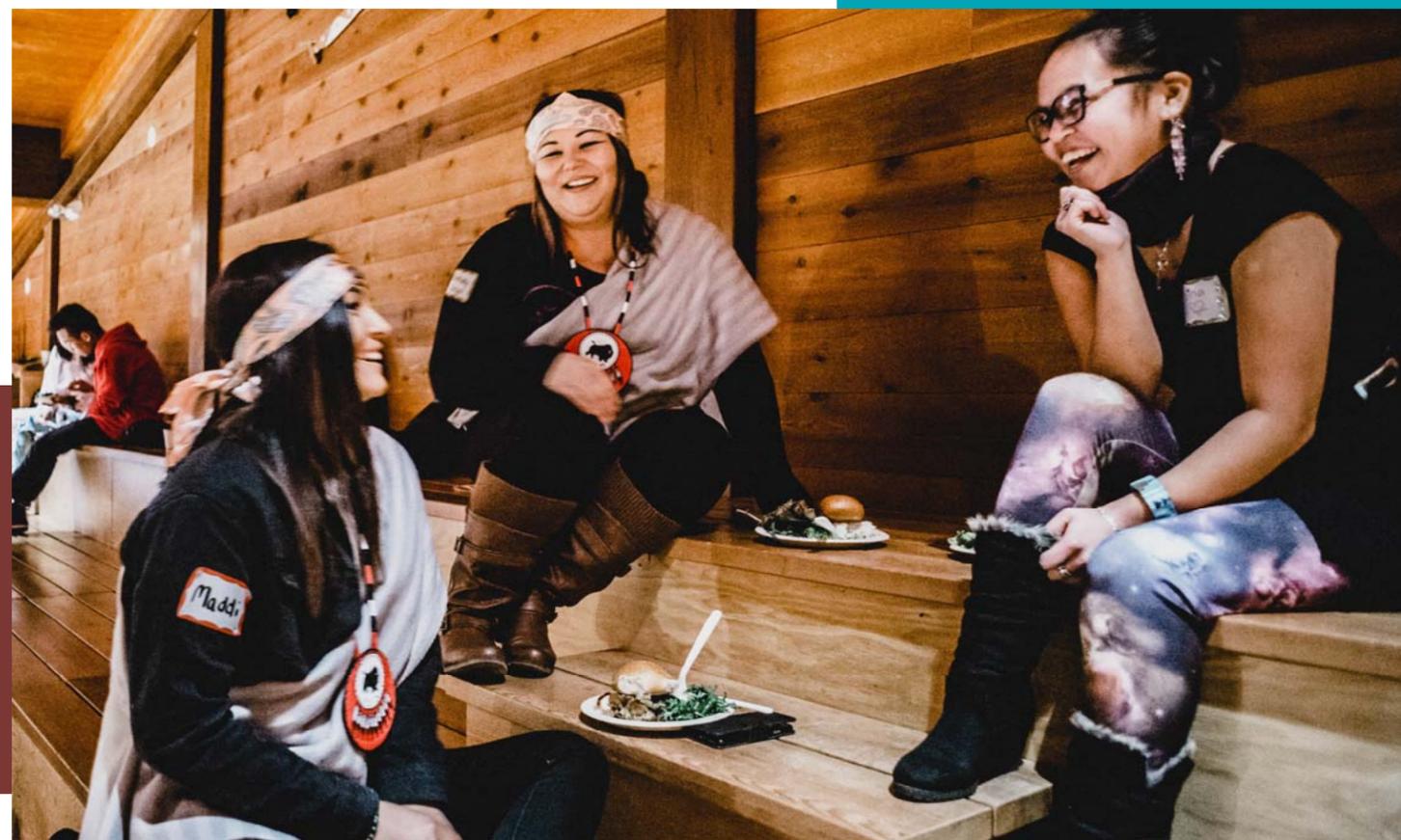
For the refugee youth, many of whom came together for the first time in October, the process of leadership development, facilitating dialogue, and engaging in a profound cultural experience led to new levels of empathy, understanding, and appreciation of the commonalities across cultures. This process gave the youth participants space to acknowledge their sometimes painful pasts and grow from them as they move forward in life. •

## KAIROS Blanket Exercise

Developed in response to the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the KAIROS Blanket Exercise covers over 500 years of history in a one and a half hour participatory workshop.

Standing on blankets that represent the land, participants take on the roles of Indigenous peoples in Canada as they walk through pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization, and resistance.

By engaging on an emotional as well as an intellectual level, the Blanket Exercise effectively educates and increases empathy. The exercise is followed by a talking circle, during which participants have the opportunity to discuss the experience as a group.





**These dialogues were a collaboration between youth from the Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association and the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership.**

This project could not have happened without the support of the Community Fund for Canada's 150th, a collaboration between Community Foundations of Canada, the McConnell Foundation, and the Government of Canada, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

FRAFCA's mission is to support the activities that promote the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal People and to promote the resurgence of resident Aboriginal culture, language and

Our deepest thanks to Kwantlen First Nation Chief Marilyn Gabriel, and Kevin Kelly, Ang Fillardeau, Dennis Leon, and Lisa Thomas.

The Surrey Refugee Youth Team was established in 2017 to contribute to the implementation of the Surrey Refugee Integration Strategy.

Others who supported the youth include Jenn Basu, June Liu, Kelsie Marchand, Jesus Moreno, Simran Sarwara, and Jeska Slater.

teachings, particularly those of local residency. FRAFCA supports a vibrant group of Indigenous youth who meet regularly as part of the FRAFCA Indigenous Youth Cultural Group.

With over 30 partners from across sectors, the Surrey LIP was founded in 2014 with the goal of building a more welcoming and inclusive Surrey. It is managed by the City of Surrey with funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

**Surrey Refugee Youth Team Members**

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- Ayat Al Karad
- Lama Almasameh
- Nargis Babrakzai
- Sachin Bhandari
- Shalini Bhandari
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- Dacious Richardson
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- Heidi Baker
- Raven Cooper
- Hector Dennis
- Chelsey Grier
- Maddi Grier
- Amanda Gugins
- Ashlee Gugins
- Valeen Jules
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- Kylee Keitlah
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