



Project Report:

Renewing relationships with glocal lands: Exploration of Indigenous - Refugee Relations with the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture

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CANADIAN CENTRE
FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE

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This project and the work of CCVT has taken place in what is now known as Toronto, the traditional territories of many nations including the Mississaugas of the credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples. We offer deep gratitude and respect for Indigenous stewardship of these lands and waters.

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About Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) is a non-profit founded by a group of Toronto doctors, lawyers, and social-service professionals, many of whom are associated with Amnesty International. They had begun to see survivors of torture in their respective practices as early as 1977. Many of the survivors were in the process of claiming refugee status in Canada, and it was clear to the founders that in addition to asylum, these individuals needed specialized medical treatment, counselling, and legal assistance. CCVT was incorporated in 1983 as the Canadian Centre for The Investigation and Prevention of Torture. The name was changed in 1988 to better reflect the Centre's mandate. The Centre was the second such facility in the world, after DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture, which was founded in 1982. In 2003, CCVT was accredited by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT).

CCVT Mandate

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) aids survivors of torture, war, genocide and crimes against humanity to overcome the lasting effects of torture and war. Working with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. The CCVT gives hope after the horror.



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Executive Summary

This project, entitled *Renewing relationships with glocal¹ lands: Exploration of Indigenous - Refugee Relations with the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture*, explored Indigenous-refugee relations in Canada, particularly, the role of refugee communities in truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. In 2015, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) proposed 94 Calls to Action including the final two, #93 and #94, which address concerns related to newcomers to Canada. Item #93 calls for a more inclusive history of diverse Indigenous Peoples of Canada in settlement education and the Canadian citizenship test, including information about treaties and the history of residential schools². Meanwhile, item #94 calls for an update to the citizenship oath to include the acknowledgement of Indigenous presence regarding the existence of treaties.³ These calls to action are put forward with the key message of TRC that “[w]e are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation” (2015, p. 11). This was a unique community-engaged research project with a refugee serving organization, the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), to explore what it means for refugee communities to uphold the responsibility of reconciliation and to think about decolonizing praxis in the everyday practice of refugee resettlement and integration.

The project asked: What does refugee integration look like when local Indigenous history, presence, and knowledge are considered? We explored this question via a community action research methodology centered on land-based education from the Haudenosaunee perspective and focus groups with 8 participants from CCVT (a mix of clients, and staff members). The project was divided into three phases: the first phase was a pre-workshop focus group to examine the current understanding

¹ I use a conceptual term “glocal” (Kumsa, 2005) to signify how the global and local power intersect to produce conditions in which refugees relate to lands in Canada and their countries of origins.

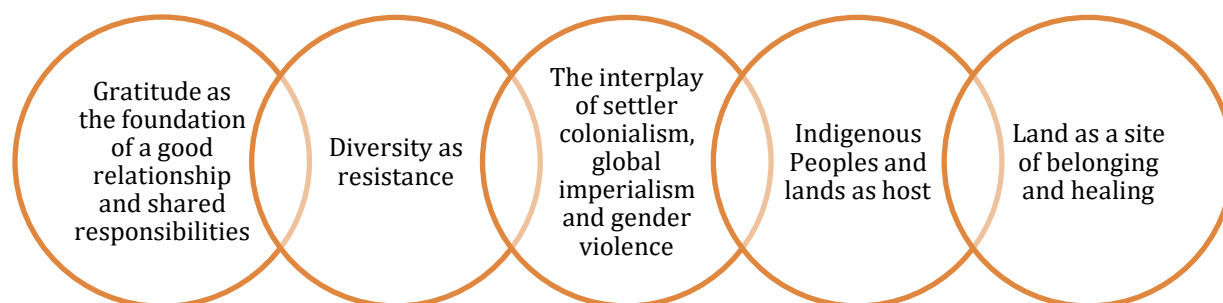
² For information on recent progress on Item #93, please refer <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524506203836/1557512859985>

³ On June 21, 2021, an *Act to amend the Citizenship Act* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action number 94) received Royal Assent. This act inserts new language into the Oath of Citizenship that refers to the Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples.

of refugee integration and Indigenous issues among the participants; the second phase of this research included six land-focused education workshops where the participants learned about local Indigenous histories, presence, and knowledge, and the final phase was a post-workshop focus group where participants discussed learnings from the workshops and their application to future service delivery of refugee integration including trauma healing and citizenship education.


Key Findings

The details of the research findings will be discussed later, but below are the key findings in summary.



Introduction

Truth and reconciliation is a process of learning about settler colonialism and involves healing and repairing relationships between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. It requires the participation and support of all Canadians, including refugee communities. CCVT is a leading refugee-serving organization in Toronto that has assisted victims of torture, war, genocide, and crimes against humanity since 1977. The organization provides treatment, tools, and support that



allow refugees to heal from trauma and become active community members. While the CCVT's key mandate is to support the wellbeing of survivors of torture and war, it has identified the immediate need to consider Indigenous histories and presence in their service delivery with refugee clients.

Refugees arriving in Canada have a unique circumstance and position in learning to take action on reconciliation with Indigenous communities. Each year, more than 20,000 refugees are resettled in Canada as part of the humanitarian migration program⁴. Many of them are displaced due to the marginalization and oppression they face in their countries of origin. Yet, as they enter Canada, they set foot on the land of Indigenous peoples who are internally displaced. The current model for refugee integration does not take this dual displacement into consideration. As a result, refugee populations do not have the opportunity to learn about local Indigenous histories, people, and culture, nor a space to reflect on their own migration experience in relation to local Indigenous communities as they resettle in Canada. The lack of consideration for Indigenous displacement in the refugee-serving sector disadvantages refugee populations in their efforts to participate in reconciliation and in establishing meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities. This project was initiated to address this gap.

The overall goal of this project was to guide the CCVT's commitment to truth and reconciliation with Indigenous communities as they continue to serve the needs of refugee clients. More specifically, the project established four interrelated objectives:

1. To provide learning opportunities about local Indigenous histories and communities for CCVT staff and clients


⁴ The number of resettled refugees fluctuates widely depending on year. For example, in 2018, prior to the Covid pandemics, Canada resettled more 30,000, though since the pandemics, the number of resettled refugees averages around just above 20,000 annually. This number reflects those who come under government assisted, private sponsored and blended visa program. In 2021, additional 39,800 individuals obtained permanent residence under the protected persons in Canada and dependents abroad category (Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2022). Furthermore, more than 45,000 individuals made asylum claims within Canada in 2021 and 2022 (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2023).

2. To document and disseminate the key learnings which emerge from the workshop series as one model of refugee community-engaged work in truth and reconciliation
3. To inform and complement CCVT service deliveries regarding refugee integration including trauma healing and citizenship education through the lens of truth and reconciliation
4. To lay groundwork for future solidarity and alliance building with local Indigenous communities

Methodology

This project drew on the Community Action Research (CAR) approach. CAR integrates research and action in the community in which research itself becomes a systematic intervention to the concerned issue; it values collective knowledge production and reflection (Senge & Scharmer, 2001; Somekh, 2006). I have a long-standing relationship with CCVT and conversations concerning this project began in 2019. The project design was consulted with the CCVT management team throughout the planning process. Two presentations were made to CCVT communities in May and July 2020 for the purpose of recruiting participants. Initially, the project involved 10 participants from CCVT, including a mix of clients and staff members. As the project progressed, however, two clients left the project as they gained employment. On average, there were 7-8 participants in each circle workshop.

This project began with a preparation phase that included two focus groups, one for staff members and another for clients. The intention of the focus group was to provide an overview of this research project and ask for the group's current understanding of Indigenous histories, treaty rights, truth and reconciliation, as well as refugee integration, belonging, and Canadian citizenship. Following the preparation phase was the workshop phase. This involved a total of five virtual circle sessions between October 2020 and December 2021, and one land-based




experiential workshop in High Park in May 2022⁵. The workshops incorporated Indigenous teachings and sharing circles with the goal of relationship building across cultures and with the land. The sessions were co-facilitated by Elder Gae Ho Wako Norma Jacobs who is of the Wolf clan in the Cayuga Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Dr. Timothy Leduc who has facilitated land-based education of Indigenous-Settler relations in southern Ontario and Toronto (Leduc, 2017, 2018, Leduc & Banerjee, nd).

While the workshop teachings were focused on the Indigenous perspectives of land-related topics, a guided circle process gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their own cultural understanding of these topics and discuss how these relationships have shifted after their migration to Canada. This discussion encouraged a deeper reflection on the themes of settler colonialism, global imperialism, responsibilities for truth and reconciliation, wholistic healing, and belonging. In this context, it is important to note that the wholistic circle process and land-based dimensions of these workshops were also informed by research on the healing benefits of fostering direct land connections (e.g., Williams, 2016; Capaldi et al. 2015; Kimmerer 2013; Louv 2008; Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019) and the indigenizing of social work practice (e.g., Absolon 2011; Baskin 2011; Leduc 2018; Sinclair 2014). Though this research was not directly about the healing benefits of land-based wholistic approaches, it was part of the context of the research and were qualitatively assessed in relation to the experience of the participants.

The final stage of this project was a reflection phase. The post-workshop focus group was conducted in June 2022 to discuss their learnings from the workshops and to have participants envision how they might carry these teachings through their citizenship and ways of living on these lands.

The audio recordings and written notes from pre- and post-workshop focus groups and the circle sharing during the workshop were collected and transcribed and served as primary data. The data was analyzed using narrative methods, with multi-

⁵ This project was initially designed to be completely experiential and land-based (to be conducted outdoors); however, most of the workshops were conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



level coding which allowed for complex stories to be captured and grouped into themes. In December 2022, preliminary analysis was shared with the CCVT, and they were invited to provide feedback at that time.

I hope that this report will be used for CCVT's strategic direction, daily operations, community engagement, and education activities. This research project received ethics approval from my previous academic institution, York University.

Collaborators

Acknowledging the diversities and specificities within Indigenous Peoples with regards to their relationship to land and place (Lowan 2009), this project focused on land histories and learning in the context of Toronto where the CCVT is located, the traditional territories of Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Wendat. We were fortunate to collaborate with a Cayuga Elder from the Six Nations of the Grand River Gae Ho Hwako Norma Jacobs and a decolonizing scholar Dr. Timothy Leduc from Wilfrid Laurier University. Elder Jacobs and Dr. Leduc have collaboratively worked and taught Two Row Relations in universities and community settings. You can find more information about their work and book *Q da gaho de:s: Reflecting on Our Journeys* at <https://www.odagahodhes.com/>

Elder Gae Ho Hwako Norma Jacobs



Gae Ho Hwako Norma Jacobs is of the Wolf clan in the Cayuga Nation of the Great Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Gae Ho Hwako is her Ongwehowe name. It means ancestral females holding the canoe before me, and it positions her in an ancestral line of great women of the Wolf clan. She has been given the responsibilities in the canoe of empowering herself, family, community, Nation, and Confederacy. Her mother told her that it was important to know their cultural ways so she could help explain them to people, and it is these experiences and responsibilities that she holds as Longhouse Faith Keeper, advisor to the National Inquiry on MMIWG, and Elder who teaches in universities, colleges, and other institutions.

Dr. Timothy Leduc



Timothy B. Leduc is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier and the author/editor of four books, including *Climate, Culture, Change* (2010 University of Ottawa Press), *A Canadian Climate of Mind* (2016 MQUP), and *Q da gaho de:s: Reflecting on our Journeys* (2022 MQUP). His Two Row work is rooted in his French Canadian ancestral relations with Indigenous nations along the St. Lawrence River. To learn more about Tim's work, you can visit his website: <https://www.fallingwithheron.com/>

Snapshots From The Circle Workshop

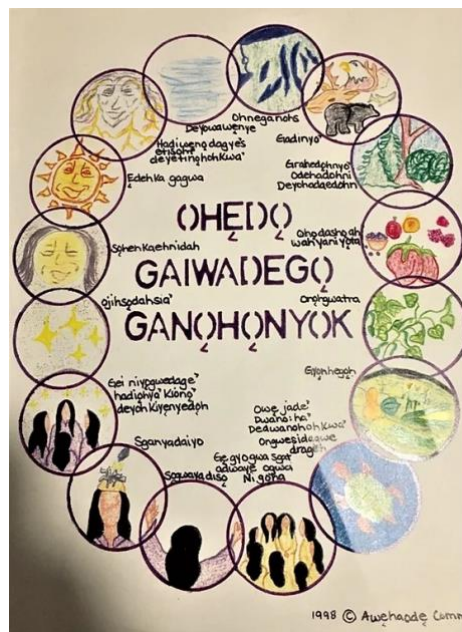
| | |
|---|---------------|
| Thanksgiving address and traditional Haudenosaunee welcoming of people from other lands | October 2020 |
| Two Row and Indigenous Toronto – Intent & colonial breaking | December 2020 |
| Colonial history, residential school, MMIWG | February 2021 |
| Plant medicine and naturalizing land relations | April 2021 |
| Setting our intentions and values | December 2021 |
| Land-based reflection at High Park | May 2022 |

Summary of Each Circle Session

First Circle: Thanksgiving address and traditional Haudenosaunee welcoming of people from other lands

In this first circle, the participants were welcomed by a Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address delivered by Elder Norma. Elder Norma shared the visual picture of the Thanksgiving Address (see right) that demonstrates the interconnectedness of all things in the natural world. This includes People, Mother Earth, Plant medicine, Hanging Fruits, Sustenance, Forests, Game Animals, Birds, Waters, Winds, the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, our Teachers, our Spiritual Helpers, and the Creator. The participants were invited to share their reflections on Elder Norma's teaching as well as their own cultural teaching that speaks to the Thanksgiving Address.

Our participants brought various cultural perspectives including Caucasian (of Caucasus)⁶, Ethiopian, Eritrean, French-Canadian, Gambian, Indo-Guyanese, Japanese, Palestinian, and Rwandan. One of the key themes from the participants' reflections is the importance of language and history, and how a sense of gratitude is embedded in their own cultural practices similar to the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving. Elder Norma and Dr. Leduc responded to the participants' reflections by emphasizing the importance of holding onto the truth that all of us can find in our own way of life and culture because that is the groundwork for healing.



Drawing by Gae Ho Hwako (Norma Jacobs)

Taken from
<https://www.odagahodhes.com/about-thanksgiving>

⁶ Caucasian of Caucasus here refers to a diverse group of people whose ancestors have resided in a region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. This term was used by a participant whose ancestor came from the region but had resided in Turkey prior to moving to Canada. I used this term in this report to reflect the preference of the participant.

Elder Norma then gave another teaching about the Haudenosaunee welcoming people from other Lands. Her teaching highlighted the importance of acknowledging role, responsibility, and gifts as hosts and guests in Haudenosaunee culture. The participants reflected on this teaching by discussing how they desired to understand their role and responsibilities as settlers/guests on this land. Elder Norma ended the session by teaching the participants how to say “thank you” in Haudenosaunee—Niá:wen. She explained the teaching of Niá:wen in the following way:

“What we learned today, we wrapped it all up in that Niá:wen. When you leave here you carry that (your teaching) in Niá:wen. It's like the umbilical cord from your mother. You carry that into your days ahead until we meet again you think about that because that's where the action comes from. So, we're never going to see disconnected. We're all connected now. Because we were brought together. We were brought together by the Creator. It's part of the Creator's plan for us to work together and bring forward Niá:wen to all of you.”

Second Circle: Two Row and Indigenous Toronto – Intent & Colonial Breaking




A picture of Two Row Wampum belt

Taken from <https://www.odagahodhes.com/>

For this second session, Elder Norma and Dr. Leduc offered a teaching about the original intent of the Two Row Wampum treaty, and how it was violated through colonialism. The Two Row Wampum is one of the first friendship treaties that dates back to the early 1600s between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch. Later, the British and the French also came into a relationship with this treaty. The treaty

and its intent are expressed in the form of a belt (see the picture above). The belt consists of two rows of purple wampum beads on a white background. Three rows of white beads symbolizing peace, friendship, and respect separate the two purple rows. The two purple rows symbolize two paths or two vessels travelling down the



same river. One row symbolizes the Haudenosaunee people with their laws and customs, while the other row symbolizes European laws and customs. Two Row is about creating boundaries. It is about relational non-interference. As nations move together side-by-side on the River of Life, they are to avoid overlapping or interfering with one another.

Unfortunately, European settlers have broken the original intent of the Two Row Wampum. The values of peace, friendship, and respect that were set in the Two Row were violated through a series of colonial policies and practices. Dr. Leduc further discussed Elder Norma's teaching in the context of Toronto. He explained land histories of Toronto and its Indigenous roots and how the stories of land changed due to settler colonialism. He put it this way: "Renaming is a way in which colonialism happens in these places and paving over, putting grids overtop of natural features of land, these are some of the ways in which colonialism started off and the ways in which it continues to play to this day."

The participants were invited to share whatever stood out in relation to thinking about these questions of treaties and good relations and thinking about this in the context of truth and reconciliation moving forward.

Elder Norma ends the circle with a message of hope. That even though there is much disconnect, violence in our community, and disruptions of our way of life, creation still comes and does her work for us, so that we can see the beauty of where we are.

Third Circle: Colonial History

The third circle opened with a teaching from Elder Norma about the light snow. She shared a poem she wrote that morning (see right). Elder Norma used the lightness and fluffiness of the flyaway snow as a metaphor for how lighthearted, innocent, and pure we are supposed to be, but shared that this nature is often overlaid with negativity because of our experiences of colonization. Elder Norma reflected that there is a lot of work needed to be done to shed all these layers to return to the innocence of who we really are and our spiritual selves.

Following Elder Norma's teaching, Dr. Leduc checked in with the group by asking participants to share what they know about residential schools in Canada to "get a sense of where [they're] each coming from". Many of the participants shared that they had never learned about residential schools as part of their newcomer or secondary school education. Other participants shared that they had negative impressions of residential schools and colonial violence. Several of the participants related to the shared experiences of trauma, with one participant stating that they "[...] related it with what is going on in their country of origin[...]" and related this to "[...] how history sometimes repeats itself in so many ways [...]".

What a beautiful day.

The snow is so beautifully wrapped around every blade of grass, every branch of every tree. There is not one single element that isn't touched by the love of creation.

It is a blanket of comfort.

So serene, pure, gentle and amazing.

This is the beauty of an honoured relationship between two energies of love, compassion, strength, and hope, working together in harmony in a dance of intimacy.

I love it.

Gae Ho Hwako

" [...] We've come in here from a diverse set of experiences and we have diverse ways of actually coming into relationship with the Indigenous canoe and doing that truth and being really aware of our diversity, of how we come into relationship is really part of the strength [...]"
Dr. Leduc

Dr. Leduc began his presentation by explaining that the first residential school in Canada was located in Brantford, Ontario and it neighbours the Six Nations community and is right along the Grand River. He then referred to the Two Row Wampum that was discussed during the previous two sessions and explained that the residential school system broke the original agreement to not interfere with one another.

His presentation emphasized how the intergenerational trauma that happens in Indigenous communities today can be traced back to residential schools and the Indian Act which intentionally caused Indigenous children, women, and families to be disconnected from their community, culture, and supports. This disconnection has made Indigenous women, children, and community members more vulnerable, which is evidenced by the disproportionate number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, overrepresentation in the child welfare and prison systems, and issues of substance abuse.

Following Dr. Leduc's presentation, Elder Norma shared her reflections and questioned how people do not see how Indigenous communities have been and continue to be negatively impacted by policies that inform the treatment of the land and services.

Despite this dark history, Elder Norma's teaching emphasized the resilience of Indigenous communities and the resurgence of Indigenous culture as a means of resistance, validation, and cultural healing. Through reclaiming traditional knowledge, ceremonies, medicines, and practices, Indigenous community members are able to reconnect with and reclaim their identity and autonomy.

The circle ended with Dr. Leduc lifting the heaviness by asking the group members to share their reflections and how they connected with Elder Norma's teachings. Many of their reflections focused on the lack of education about Canada's colonial history, the strength of Indigenous communities despite the violence that they have

experienced, the importance of connection, and the resurgence of Indigenous cultures as a path towards collective healing.

Fourth Circle: Land and Medicine

The fourth circle began with a check-in where we shared the hopes for the session and the meaning of our names. Elder Norma shares that the names are part of our foundation just like the creation stories. Elder Norma explains that all of us, every nation, has creation stories that teach us important lessons about how we came to be, and this becomes part of our identity. For Elder Norma, the story of Sky Women and how Sky Women were supported by many different beings such as birds, water, turtles, and other animals in her journey is foundational to the Haudenosaunee worldview. She states: "Everything in creation is always working with us. It's always trying to enhance our life, and to help us to think more clearly about our journeys".

Elder Norma then moved on to teachings on different plants including wild ginger, partridgeberry, sassafras, speckled bush wild black cherry, honey, princess pine, cattails, Jerusalem artichoke, wild strawberries, white corn, mullein plant etc. She discussed how these plants are considered as medicine and gifts in her culture. She also discussed how the settlers have taken this plant knowledge without acknowledging its Indigenous roots. Elder Norma said there are lots we can learn about Indigenous-settler relations by observing how native and non-native species relate to each other on land. Dr. Leduc extended Elder Norma's teaching by giving the example of plantains and garlic mustards. He explained that although both plantains and garlic mustards are non-native plants, they relate to native species differently; while plantains offer medicinal properties and are able to coexist with native species, the garlic mustards take over spaces and undermine the native species. Drawing on this teaching, we discussed how we may relate to local lands -

"You know, we can have people come from other countries and when we have a conversation and we understand and we build a relationship, they're beneficial to our life. And that's how plants are too. They can migrate here for whatever reason...and it finds a place that it feels comfortable and it can grow and it connect with other - like they're building a relationship. So they can be an enhancement to each other"
Elder Norma



try to be like plantains (being able to coexist and useful) as opposed to garlic mustards (being invasive).

Participants then shared what they took from Elder Norma and Dr. Leduc's teachings. Many have shared their own traditional knowledge about natural medicine. One participant mentioned that what she has previously conceptualized as "medicine" has been blown apart. She was particularly drawn to Elder Norma's teaching that medicine is all around us and how she wished to bring that idea back to her work with clients. Elder Norma responded to this reflection saying that such desire to extend her teaching, in itself, is also a form of medicine.

Fifth Circle: Setting Up Our Values

The final virtual session focused on the reflection of learnings from the previous sessions and how to move forward with the learnings we gained during this project. Dr. Leduc invited us to share key teachings that stood out from Elder Norma over the past year. As we went around the circle, some of the key learnings shared by the participants included: Importance of gratitude; Land as central to the feeling of belongingness; Land as teacher and healer; Honouring our diversity; and Awareness of environmental destruction. During the sharing, one of the participants discussed how when coming to Canada as a newcomer, she wished to have an opportunity to be welcomed by Indigenous Peoples. This remark led to a broader conversation about the importance of involving Indigenous communities in newcomer welcoming and integration. Elder Norma explained how a welcoming ceremony in the Haudenosaunee tradition is very different from the way it is currently done by the Immigration and Settlement system. The Haudenosaunee welcoming ceremony involves a process of genuine relationship building, which is facilitated by sharing and understanding each other's traditions and culture as well as intentions and hopes. This invitation of coming into relationship is not just with people but all creations. Through relationship building, we become aware of the gifts that each of us brings to life.

Elder Norma also talked about the importance of continued reflection. She shared that reflecting on what may seem mundane or simple is particularly important because there is always a deeper learning that comes out of it. She emphasized

that such continued reflection requires support and encouragement from each other. With that, she invited us to share a message of encouragement that each of us can carry with us as we engage in the work of truth and reconciliation. Some of the encouragement messages shared among the participants included:

You belong here.

We are connected.

This is just what you are going through, not who you are.

Respect for diversity and thanksgiving.

Land is bigger than violence.

Live with dignity.

Humanity first.

Remember our blessings.

As we shared the words of encouragement, what became clear was the desire among the participants to mobilize their learning into tangible action. On that collective reflection, Dr. Leduc responded with suggestions that such action requires both inner work (such as establishing an Indigenous-centered Welcoming Centre for newcomers) and outer work (such as supporting the Indigenous-led movement). Elder Norma closed the circle with a message of hope, kindness, and gratitude for our continuing relationships.

Sixth Circle/Reflection Circle: Naturalizing Our Values and Ways



The last circle was held in person at High Park. Three additional participants joined from the CCVT. We began with sharing our meal, enjoying each other's company. From there, we set up an outdoor circle and sat together to begin learning.



Elder Norma began with an Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. It was a wonderful opportunity to receive her Thanksgiving Address, as her teaching was amplified by the fact that it was conducted in an outdoor

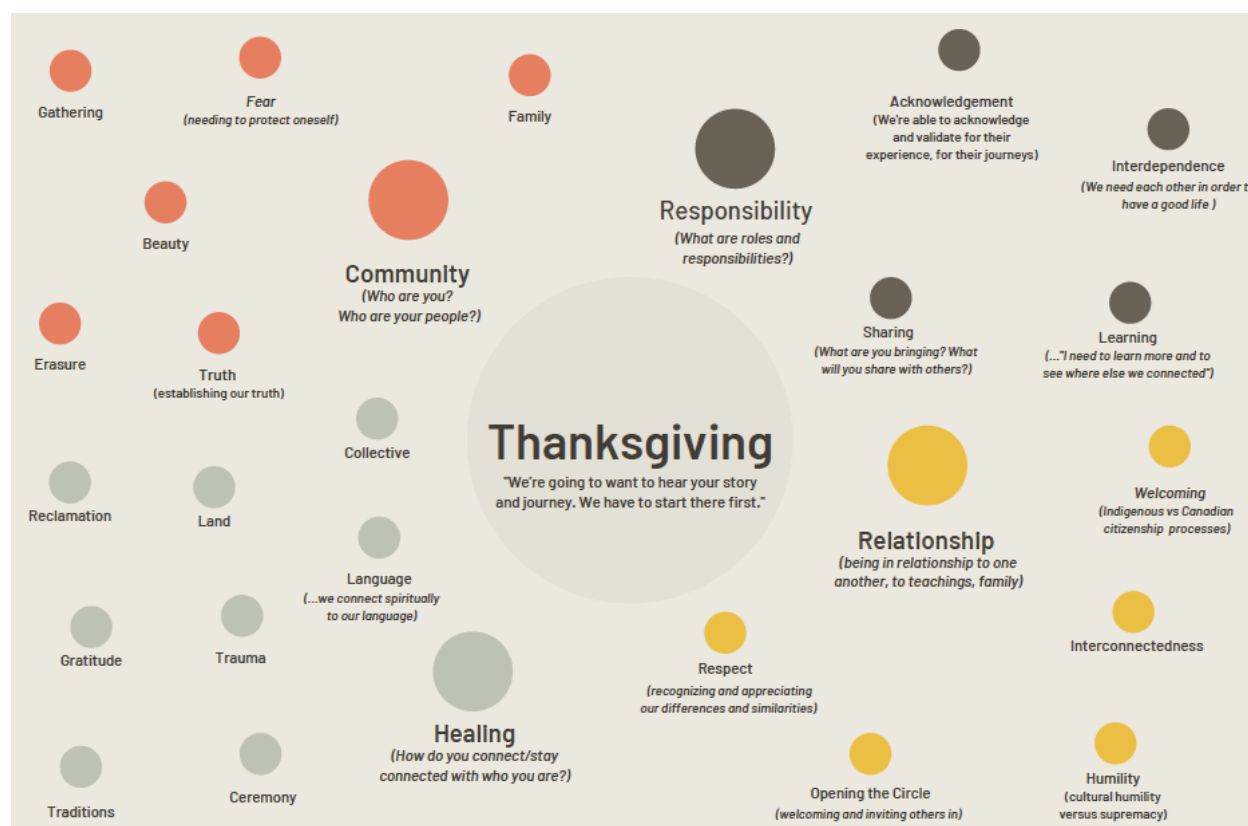
setting. She took us through the interrelationships that our lives are dependent on, and how every element offers different gifts to maintain the balance and wellbeing of each other. We were asked to take time to reflect deeply on the teachings carried out in these words and how they are fostered in the approach to our relations. It was a cold day, and as we experienced the dampness in the air and wind on our skin, we engaged with the embodied sensations and built relationships with different environmental elements. We were then invited to share what particularly stood out from her teachings and what values we want to carry forward. The participants shared values such as gratitude, humility, attentive listening, courage, interdependence, peace and friendship. Dr. Leduc then asked us what colour we would assign to these values (e.g. gratitude - green, humility - brown). He then explained the wholistic wampum activity (see the right). He explained that this activity helps us set intentions and values as we work further on truth and reconciliation efforts.



After this teaching, Dr. Leduc took us around High Park. He guided us into the ravine and toward the pond/creek and gave a teaching about the ecological and cultural history of the buried Laurentian Channel/River. He talked about glaciation in Toronto, the melting of glaciers, and its relation to Lake Ontario's changing water levels. We then stopped at the bridge where the outflow pipe for the Laurentian River drains into the creek. We saw orange/rust stains on rocks related to iron


content. He invited us to imagine what we thought the source of the orange stain was and what could cause these ravines. Receiving these teachings allowed the participants an opportunity to reflect on local land (hi)stories and changing climates. We also found different types of plants such as plantain and garlic mustards that we talked about in the previous circle. We ended our session with white pine tea to thank the land, Elder Norma, Dr. Leduc, and all the participants for our shared learning.

Discussion



The conceptual map above was created by Tyheriah Philbert who acted as a research assistant for the report writing. This map reflects the key learnings from the first circle session but also speaks to broader themes that came out from the overall project. Drawing on this conceptual map as well as participants' reflections, I summarize the key learnings and reflections that emerged from this project.

Gratitude as the foundation of a good relationship and shared responsibilities




As you can see from the conceptual map above, the teaching of the Thanksgiving Address was central to this project. Rooted in Haudenosaunee tradition, Elder Norma opened the project with Ganq̄honyq̄hk - Thanksgiving Address (or Words before All Else). The Thanksgiving Address symbolizes the web of relationships (not just among humans but also with Mother Earth, plants, birds, trees, moon, sun, etc.) that surround our lives. In her 2021 book with Dr. Leduc, Elder Norma summarizes the spirit of Thanksgiving Address this way:

When I look around, I see the many gifts that surround and nurture us – all of life in its many forms, from plants and medicines to trees and animals. This great abundance of energy and love that is this great Turtle Island, North America, came from E tinoha ongwesidage'dra gwe' (our Mother Earth).

This teaching of Thanksgiving was fundamental to the participants' learning. As the project progressed, the spirit of Thanksgiving was shared, passed on, and embodied. The beauty and intelligence of the Haudenosaunee worldview were acknowledged by the participants. As one of the participants put it: "Thanksgiving Address... is so, so, refreshing. You know in our capitalistic society, we always [want] more and more, and don't take time to appreciate things. But it is so true. The gifts are everywhere".

The spirit of the Thanksgiving Address also facilitated a sense of reciprocity between human and non-human communities as well as between Indigenous Peoples and migrants. As Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmer (2013) argues, the sense of reciprocity allows us to realize that we are all interconnected and responsible for each other. Indeed, as the participants opened up and built meaningful relationships with each other through circle sharing, they developed a deeper understanding of colonial histories and land dispossession in Canada as well as critical reflection on their own role as settlers and guests on this land. This finding is significant in terms of how we may pursue the work of truth and reconciliation. While it is essential that newcomer-serving communities engage in ongoing critical reflection of our complicity and implication as settlers, it is also important to consider *how* we engage in that critical reflection. I propose that engaging in critical reflection from a place of gratitude opens up cognitive and



emotional space for deeper reflections (thus actions) that are more hopeful, meaningful, and sustainable.

Diversity as resistance

Along with the spirit of the Thanksgiving Address, what has been emphasized throughout the teachings from Elder Norma and Dr. Leduc was to honour the diverse cultural and ancestral knowledge we each bring. Elder Norma exemplified respect and love for her own Haudenosaunee culture in her teaching and invited the participants to ground their reflections in our own experiences and cultural and ancestral teachings. This invitation was important in two ways.

Firstly, it allowed participants to open up a gateway to explore their cultural and ancestral connections meaningfully. This was meaningful for many participants because the current newcomer integration framework does not encourage migrants to honour their cultural or ancestral knowledge and ways of being beyond the superficial and apolitical engagement with multiculturalism.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it carried the spirit of Two Row Wampum in that it reminded us to remember our own laws and customs in order to foster peace, friendship, and respect. Settler colonialism continues because we forget the original intent of the Two Row and appropriate and interfere with Indigenous cultures. This way, grounding our reflections in our own cultural and ancestral teachings, acts as resistance to settler colonialism. As the project progressed, the participants articulated their learnings about settler colonialism as well as the Haudenosaunee worldview in relation to their own migration experiences and their cultural and ancestral teachings. The diverse experiences and perspectives among the participants facilitated deeper engagement with each other and led to the realization that each of us is positioned to address settler colonialism in our own unique way.

The interplay of settler colonialism, global imperialism, and gender violence:

As the participants shared their stories, they articulated that the experiences of migration and injustice they have faced were facilitated by the interplay of settler colonialism and global imperialism, as well as patriarchy. One participant stated:

“Colonialism here and colonialism back home, they are not separate. I came here because of colonialism but I see colonialism here too. I find myself stuck with colonization. All our misery started from colonization, right?”

Another participant made connections between gender-based violence she witnessed in her own communities and the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. She asked: “How did women become like the battleground? Or you know, at the end of receiving violence? Where did all the violence come from? How do [sic] this learned violence become transferred from one generation to another generation in a vicious cycle? And now we are stuck in this situation that Indigenous women and all other women are victims of violence?”


Further reference was made by a few other participants as to how different forms of gender-based violence are connected with colonialism as well as environmental issues, both of which are shaped by a patriarchal system. There was a desire to enact Indigenous women’s knowledge to build solidarity and resist colonialism and gender-based violence.

Indigenous Peoples and lands as Host

The findings from this project reframe who and what is the host in newcomer integration. It also suggests an urgent need to center Indigenous content in newcomer integration. Many participants talked about how they wished the topics of settler colonialism and Indigenous histories and stories were shared during their own settlement and integration process. During one of the sessions, one of the participants posed a question to Elder Norma: “Elder Norma, [When I came to Canada], There was no Indigenous person who welcomed me, but I was hoping there was one. Because I didn't know. I didn't know...” To this comment, Elder Norma responded with “I did not know that you were coming!”

Listening to this dialogue, another participant made a thoughtful reflection:

“Can you imagine? And that's so true. Both of you are really true, you know? Because the Indigenous community are not aware of the immigrants, or refugees, or newcomers coming to their land. They didn't get a chance, an opportunity. They don't have space there to welcome newcomers. Who is the Host really? If there is a welcoming section for the Indigenous community I would have been welcomed in



different ways. And that would be the first impression actually, right? Always, we say first impression matters. But Indigenous communities were not notified about who's coming, right? So that really brought tears to my eyes”.

Indeed, the disconnection between Indigenous and Newcomer communities that is discussed here is not accidental—it is one manifestation of settler colonialism. The current newcomer integration is designed to produce what Potawatomi-Lenapé scholar Susan Dion (2007) would call, “perfect stranger[s]”(p. 330), a migrant-subject position is trained to distance oneself from Indigenous issues through one’s own settlement and integration processes. However, the participants’ reflections from this project point to resistance to such a subject formation of “perfect strangers”; instead there was a keen interest in building good and respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples as fundamental to newcomer integration.


Land as a site of belonging and healing

Findings from this study suggest that developing relationships with Indigenous communities and local lands have the rich potential to facilitate a deeper sense of belonging among the newcomer communities in general, and refugee communities specifically. One of the participants put it this way:

“I now embrace nature. I embrace the trees. Because I know the trees may have a meaning. I am very appreciative of the land now. You know it means something to me. You know, I go around, I see the trees. I see the plants. I see, you know, the snow. Everything, and it has a meaning. You know I find myself thoroughly involved with it. So, I'm part of the land. And then I ask myself how can we preserve this beautiful land? And how have we been taking the Indigenous people who have actually tried to preserve this land? And keep the meaning of it. And what is our relationship with them? What else can we learn? How can we make this meaningful?”

Another participant also noted the importance of land in newcomer integration, particularly for youth to feel a sense of belonging.

“That connection with the land is really needed, especially the youth. To have knowledge or have confidence and say I belong here. And I know this land. And I know this story. They [newcomer youth] have to be informed and connected with



the Indigenous community. With the land. With the story of each and every part of the area that they live in. For them to feel at home.”


These quotes suggest that connecting with the land is instrumental in instilling a sense of belonging and responsibility for Indigenous communities and local lands. Further, the healing aspect of land relations was frequently identified. Throughout the project, the participants shared that they were spending more time outside as they received the earth-centered teaching from Elder Norma and Dr. Leduc. With that, they reported an immense sense of healing as they became more aware of the gifts that Mother Earth offers. Several participants discussed the possibilities of incorporating earth-based healing into their practice as counsellors. This is an area worth further investigation. Given that refugee experience is primarily shaped by the displacement from their original land, an earth-centered modality that facilitates a meaningful connection with their new land may have great potential for trauma healing.

Recommendations and Limitations

This study points to the importance of developing a better relationship between Indigenous and refugee communities. It also identifies the possible ways in which meaningful relationships can be built among two marginalized communities that are often talked about separately in the current scholarship and social policy. Throughout the project, the participants were equipped with a better understanding of settler colonial histories and presence, as well as an Indigenous worldview (Haudenosaunee). With that understanding, the participants renewed their commitment to work towards truth and reconciliation individually and collectively. Several recommendations for CCVT and the newcomer serving organizations broadly are identified as follows:

Sectoral level

The newcomer-serving sector is encouraged to engage in collective critical reflection about the meaning and practice of newcomer integration and settlement. How does the current newcomer integration and settlement framework dismiss the



Indigenous histories and histories of the land? What does it mean to welcome newcomers to stolen land? At the same time, they are encouraged to think about questions such as: Who is the “Host”? What may shift if we center Indigenous histories and stories of the lands in thinking about newcomer integration and settlement? How can we nurture the original intent of treaties such as Two Row Wampum? These critical reflections may lay an important foundation for collective advocacy for structural changes such as sustainable funding and program reframing to implement TRC action as a part of newcomer integration and settlement.

Organizational level


At the organizational level, the findings from this project suggest strategic directions in which CCVT can further work towards truth and reconciliation. This includes but is not limited to: 1) Building meaningful relationships with local Indigenous organizations; 2) Actively including Indigenous content in professional development, newcomer education, and social events; 3) Continuously engaging in reflection about settler colonialism, and 4) Showing support for Indigenous led-movements. To engage in these actions meaningfully, the CCVT may look into hiring a specific position (preferably a person with lived Indigenous knowledge and an Indigenous background) to facilitate the strategic direction.

Practice level

CCVT can incorporate Indigenous issues in ESL classes and citizenship test preparation classes. This may involve inviting local Indigenous Elders, knowledge holders, and groups to classrooms, as well as learning and reflecting on our own as settlers/guests of this land. What may be important is to normalize that Indigenous teachings and worldviews are part of newcomer education and integration programming. There is also the possibility of thinking about how to incorporate land/earth-based practice into newcomer integration and trauma healing.

Individual level

Truth and reconciliation work needs to be done both at macro and micro levels. Each staff and board member are encouraged to think about their own relations to



local Indigenous communities. They are encouraged to learn about settler colonialism of and in Canada, different Indigenous traditions and worldviews, as well as truth and reconciliations efforts. They may also engage in critical reflection on their role in settler colonialism as well as the possibilities for truth and reconciliation. Some resources are available at the end of this report.

Limitations of this project

While this study provided rich information about Indigenous and refugee relations, a limitation of the study is its small scale and scope. As such, these findings are not presented as generalizable. Rather, they highlight the possibilities of Indigenous and refugee relationship building. More studies are needed to explore the complexities, nuances as well as opportunities for further relationship-building within the context of the newcomer-serving sector. A larger scale study as well as the studies in different local contexts are also needed given the specificities in different land and Indigenous histories and relations within Canada. With more studies that are grounded in the local experiences of Indigenous and refugee communities, it is possible to advocate for public support in the forms of sustainable funding structures and practice frameworks that recognize the importance of truth and reconciliation within newcomer-serving communities.

Knowledge Mobilization

Since the end of this project in May 2022, the CCVT has already engaged in several knowledge mobilization activities to share the learnings from this project as well as to engage in follow-up actions to move forward with their TRC commitment. I would like to highlight a couple of them.

Ongoing professional development/land acknowledgement

CCVT continues to facilitate the professional development that engages in further learning about Indigenous histories and issues. As an example, a virtual tour of the former residential school, Mohawk Institute Residential School, in Brantford was arranged through the Woodland Cultural Centre. CCVT has also actively included Indigenous content in their social events and group work. In addition, CCVT has

carefully revised their land acknowledgement, with the intention to show solidarity with Indigenous communities.

Newcomer Youth for Truth and Reconciliation Committee


CCVT has initiated a new project called the Newcomer Youth for Truth and Reconciliation. The project incorporates both education and action. The newcomer youth participate in a series of experiential workshops such as a tour of the Indigenous art graffiti wall in Christie Pits and an art workshop at Todmorden Mills. More activities are planned for newcomer youth to engage in the learning of Indigenous histories and land stories.

The creation of Collective/Working groups among newcomer service organizations across Canada

CCVT is taking a leadership role in the creation and facilitation of a Collective/Working group to reflect on the role of newcomer communities. Recognizing that there are many small and localized acts of Indigenous and Migration relationship building being done by newcomer-serving organizations across Canada, the Collective/Working group holds space to share the discomfort, struggle, and success of doing truth and reconciliation work as an individual, organization and ally. As of July 2023, the Collective has met twice already, and has served as a meaningful place for newcomer-serving organizations to gather. As an action item, the Collective is planning on creating a resource guide for TRC specifically for newcomer-serving organizations.

Conference presentations/Publication

The findings and learnings from the project have been presented and shared through conference presentations and publications. The initial reflection on the Indigenous-Refugee relationship in the context of the newcomer-serving sector (Nobe-Ghelani & Lumor, 2022) was published in *Refuge*. The findings and reflections of the overall project have been shared at the forum such as *North American Refugee Health Conference* (September 2021), *Other Empire Workshop* (June 2022), *We are All Treaty Peoples workshop* (October 2022), *Congress/CASWE* (May 2023), and



Centre for Refugee Studies Summer School (June 2023). CCVT management team as well as the participants of the project have been active in knowledge dissemination.

Conclusions

This study was a pilot project which looked into the potential for Indigenous-Refugee relations in regard to truth and reconciliation. The question of “land” was central as the project brought together two groups who experienced land dispossession—Indigenous Peoples and Refugees—who are often separated within the current immigration and newcomer integration system. While limited in scale, the findings from this project suggest a genuine interest on the part of refugee communities in building relationships with Indigenous Peoples of Canada. The project also found that developing a meaningful relationship with Indigenous communities and local lands facilitates a sense of belonging and healing. This way, the project also makes it clear that Truth and Reconciliation does not have to be a separate entity from the work of newcomer and refugee integration; in fact, it should be a central piece.

Truth and Reconciliation is an ongoing journey of reflections about settler colonialism and relationship building with Indigenous Peoples. As this pilot project officially ends, many seeds for future Truth and Reconciliation work were planted. CCVT joins the collective efforts being made by multiple levels of government and community organizations across Canada. In the past few years, there have been a growing number of initiatives to build better relationships between Indigenous and migrant communities at various levels⁷. Structural changes as well as systemic support are needed to support Truth and Reconciliation efforts within the newcomer-serving sector. It is also important to note that centering Indigenous knowledge and experience is critical in such efforts. Let us carry forward teachings such as the Thanksgiving Address and Two Row as a reminder of principles and values (e.g. interconnection, humility, attentive listening, relational non-interference) that are critical to meaningful relationship building with Indigenous communities and local lands.

⁷ Most relevant to the work of CCVT, the City of Toronto recently launched a Newcomer Guide for Indigenous Toronto.

Readings and Resources for Action

The following is a noncomprehensive list of resources. A more extensive list of resources will be prepared by the TRC Newcomer Collective/Working group.

Truth and Reconciliation

[Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#)

A must read to begin the journey of TRC. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established in 2008 to investigate the history and legacy of residential schools in Canada. Their final report, released in 2015, contains 94 Calls to Action aimed at promoting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. More reports by TRC can be found here:

<https://nctr.ca/records/reports/#trc-reports>

The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy by Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson and Arthur Manuel

Written by grassroots Indigenous rights activists Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson and Arthur Manuel, this book walks through government legislative practices dating back to Confederation and unpacks how Indigenous peoples have been systematically oppressed for hundreds of years, leading to the position Canada finds itself in today.


Land acknowledgement

[Transformative Land Acknowledgement Guide](#)

Prepared by [Len Pierre Consulting](#), this guide is designed to help professionals understand the history and purpose of territory acknowledgements and enhance their acknowledgements to go beyond the status quo.

[Land Acknowledgements: From Recitation, to Real](#)

Prepared by [Raven](#), the purpose of this guide is to provide guidance for speakers, business leaders, community organizers, teachers, and facilitators who want to thoughtfully recognize the Indigenous Nations upon whose territory they are working or holding events. This step-by-step guide outlines key considerations and



provides examples to take the territorial acknowledgement from a rote recitation to an in-the-moment, sincere, and heartfelt moment of reflection and commitment.

[Native Land Digital](#)

This is a great website that helps map Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages when thinking about land acknowledgements. Native Land Digital strives to create and foster conversations about the history of colonialism, Indigenous ways of knowing, and settler-Indigenous relations through educational resources such as a map and Territory Acknowledgement Guide.

Toronto history

[The First Story Toronto](#)

This website has a wealth of resources that are available for research and general learning. First Story's website is associated with its aim to bring forward the Indigenous histories of Toronto in an accessible way.

[Land acknowledgements: uncovering an oral history of Tkaronto](#)

Created by Selena Mills & Sara Roque, and illustrations by Chief Lady Bird, this video narrates the land histories and stories of Tkaronto. It is a powerful and compelling example of meaningful land acknowledgements. The accompanying article and video can be found here: <https://www.unitedwaygt.org/issues/land-acknowledgements-uncovering-an-oral-history-of-tkaronto/>

Indigenous Toronto: Stories That Carry This Place. Edited by Denise Bolduc, Mnawaate Gordon-Corbiere, Rebeka Tabobondung, Brian Wright-McLeod

This book is a unique anthology that brings together contributions by Indigenous Elders, scholars, journalists, artists, and historians to explore the Indigenous histories of this region, and the vibrant cultures and Indigenous presence that thrive in this city today. These are stories about the past, present, and future of Indigenous Toronto.

[Indigenous Peoples in Toronto: An Introduction to Newcomers, City of Toronto](#)

Published by the City of Toronto in 2023, this is a resource that introduces newcomers to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis history, cultures, and perspectives. The guide is intended to 1) Encourage learning and sharing to build meaningful relationships between Indigenous Peoples and newcomers; and 2) Provide settlement service providers, ESL instructors, and staff who work with and for newcomers with tools to support this learning through an accompanying facilitator's guide.

[Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation](#)


This website contains a community profile of Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The city of Toronto where CCVT is located, is covered by the Toronto Purpose (Treaty 13), which was negotiated between Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the British Crown in 1805.

Indigenous-Settler/Two Row relations

***O da gaho de:s: Reflecting on Our Journeys* by Gae Ho Hwako (Norma Jacobs) and the Circles of O da gaho de:s. Edited by Timothy B. Leduc**

O da ga ho de:s highlights the Indigenous values that brought us to the sacred meeting place in the original treaties of Turtle Island, particularly the Two Row Wampum, and the sharing process that was meant to foster good relations from the beginning of the colonial era. The book follows a series of Indigenous sharing circles, relaying teachings by Gae Ho Hwako and the responses of participants such as scholars, authors, and community activists who bring their diverse experiences and knowledge into reflective relation with the teachings. Through this practice, the book itself resembles a teaching circle and illustrates the important ways tradition and culture are passed down by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. The aim of this process is to bring clarity to the challenges of truth and reconciliation. Each circle ends by inviting the reader into this sacred space of Odagahodhes to reflect on personal experiences, stories, knowledge, gifts, and responsibilities. The complementary website can be found here: <https://www.odagahodhes.com/>

Earth to Table Legacies: <https://earthtotables.org/>



The Earth to Tables Legacies project was created by a small group of food activists across big differences—youth/elders, rural/urban, Indigenous/settler, Canadian/Mexican—for an exchange around food justice and food sovereignty.

The diverse topics and conversations that ensued are covered in the form of short documentary videos and photo essays. The project features a multimedia educational package that includes facilitator’s guides, additional resources, and commentaries by activists and academics. The project allows teachers and community activists to create programs on themes such as Indigenous-settler relations, agroecology and food sovereignty, and antiracism in the food movement.

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