

Sheridan College

SOURCE: Sheridan Institutional Repository

Hearts + Minds

2023

10-2023

Re-Imagining the Centre: Indigenous and Black Futures in Peel

Esrah Akasha

Sheridan College, esrah.akasha@sheridancollege.ca

Shamas Berantuo

Sheridan College, shamas.berantuo@sheridancollege.ca

Alex Hansen

Sheridan College, alexandra.hansen@sheridancollege.ca

Yasmin Hashi

Sheridan College, yasmin.hashi@sheridancollege.ca

Michella Mark

Sheridan College, michella.mark@sheridancollege.ca

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: https://source.sheridancollege.ca/hearts_minds

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

SOURCE Citation

Akasha, Esrah; Berantuo, Shamas; Hansen, Alex; Hashi, Yasmin; Mark, Michella; Melander, Fallon; and Salole, Abigail, "Re-Imagining the Centre: Indigenous and Black Futures in Peel" (2023). *Hearts + Minds*. 2. https://source.sheridancollege.ca/hearts_minds/2



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). This Community Conversation Summary is brought to you for free and open access by the 2023 at SOURCE: Sheridan Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hearts + Minds by an authorized administrator of SOURCE: Sheridan Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact source@sheridancollege.ca.

Authors

Esrah Akasha, Shamas Berantuo, Alex Hansen, Yasmin Hashi, Michella Mark, Fallon Melander, and Abigail Salole

RE-IMAGINING THE CENTRE:

Indigenous and Black Futures in Peel



Community Conversation Summary

By Esrah Akasha, Shamas Berantuo, Alex Hansen, Yasmin Hashi,
Michella Mark, Fallon Melander & Abigail Salole

“This may only be a dream of mine, but I think it can be made real.”

~Ella Baker

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Introduction.....	4
Conversation Map & Guiding Questions	5
Barriers to Centering Indigenous and Black Youth in Programming	6
Seeds of Change	8
Closing: Black and Indigenous Futures	10
Appendix 1: Notes from Community Conversation	11
Appendix 2: Event Evaluation	13

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In October 2023, Hearts + Minds engaged the group Evenings and Weekends to facilitate a conversation with community organizations in Peel about supporting Indigenous and Black connections. Evening and Weekends co-designed the session with Hearts + Minds. They also facilitated the session and wrote a summary report. We are grateful to Chris Wilson and Kaydeen Bankasingh for this work. We have edited and re-designed the report before sharing it with our valued participants and collaborators.

As ever, we are grateful to our trusted co-conspirators and community partners from Volunteer MBC, Moyo Community Health Services and RESQ Youth for your stewardship, trust and commitment to Indigenous and Black young people. We are thankful to the cadre of talented community leaders from these organizations who showed up in big ways to our community conversation.

Thanks are also due to the committed leaders, service providers, educators, allies, mentors and artists in the region who contributed to a dynamic and passionate conversation. Your insights, perspectives and reflections show a steadfast, passionate commitment to create supportive environments for Indigenous and Black youth. Guests included representatives from the following organizations/groups.

Need Some KOI	Brampton Library	French Catholic School Board
Town of Caledon	Volunteer MBC	Brampton Senior Citizens Council
The Dam	RESQ Youth	
United Way	Moyo Community Health Services	

As anyone who has ever organized a community event knows, it takes time, care and significant amounts of institutional sleuthing to pull off successfully. This important coordinating work was undertaken by Wendy Wang and Agnes Yi at Sheridan College. They arranged for space, food and pre/post-event communication and registration. Wendy created the evaluation form.

Thanks are also due to Susan David from Xerox who, once again, pulled through with a spiffy and accessible design for us to share our work.

And of course, we are grateful to you, dear reader, for engaging with our work.

With Care,

Hearts + Minds

INTRODUCTION

We believe in a future where Black (African and Caribbean) and Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) lives not only matter but thrive. One of the founding principles of the Hearts + Minds project is that Indigenous and Black peoples have deep roots that are sometimes glossed over, denied, and suppressed. We believe flourishing Indigenous and Black futures are entangled and inevitable and that community organizations (sometimes called non-profit organizations and social services) can play a special role in making space for Black and Indigenous connections and solidarities.

We captured some of this thinking in our knowledge round-up. By fortifying and building connections between the many vibrant Indigenous and Black communities, we can expand community infrastructure and radical relationalities rooted in decolonial ways of knowing, being, and doing. New practices -and even new worlds -can emerge by reimagining who is at the centre of our work. In a world of hustle culture and unbridled individualism, we believe if Black and Indigenous connections are more nourished and more visible, Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation will be made more possible. We appreciate how Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation are big ideas that often don't appear in community organizations' strategic plans and that they are often strapped and stretched. We also know that big transformative ideas often get traction in community organizations because of their ability to harness human connection.

Amidst this enthusiasm for more intentional Indigenous and Black connections in community organizations, it also feels important to observe the many important benefits of separating Indigenous and Black-specific programming in non-profit spaces; we also want these necessary programs to thrive and be well-funded.

In this moment

We feel compelled to highlight a [recent report](#) from the Peel District School Board (PDSB) that provides an update on the disturbing trend for Black (African, Black and Afro-Caribbean) and Indigenous students (First Nation, Métis and Inuit) to be overrepresented in students facing suspension and expulsion. This most recent report indicated how Black and Indigenous students are two times as likely to face suspension and expulsion at the PDSB. Four years after the PDSB apologized for systemic racism, there is much more to be done to ensure that Indigenous and Black young people are treated equitably. Our research also gestures to how schools are too often not places of joy and learning for Black and Indigenous youth. We want Peel schools to do better. We also believe that it is the responsibility of everyone who cares for Indigenous and Black young people to involve them in decisions that will most impact them meaningfully.



CONVERSATION MAP & GUIDING QUESTIONS

The conversation started with a land acknowledgment from Hearts + Minds. We thanked the land that sustains us and provides the necessities of life. We named settler colonialism as a force locally and globally that aims to eliminate and erase Indigenous peoples. We are living proof that this erasure is a lie. It is important to acknowledge colonial violence and how Indigenous Peoples continue to face violence and racism today. We are committed collectively and individually to decolonizing our processes, and to support movements, people and relationships that honour the land and Indigenous Peoples.

The Hearts + Minds research team presented five elements that are foundational to community connections for Indigenous and Black young people: Land, Relationality, Solidarity, Joy, and Healing. These five elements require each other to keep the model in balance. Not all elements will always be required in equal measure. Each element works in harmony with the others; one is no more important than another.

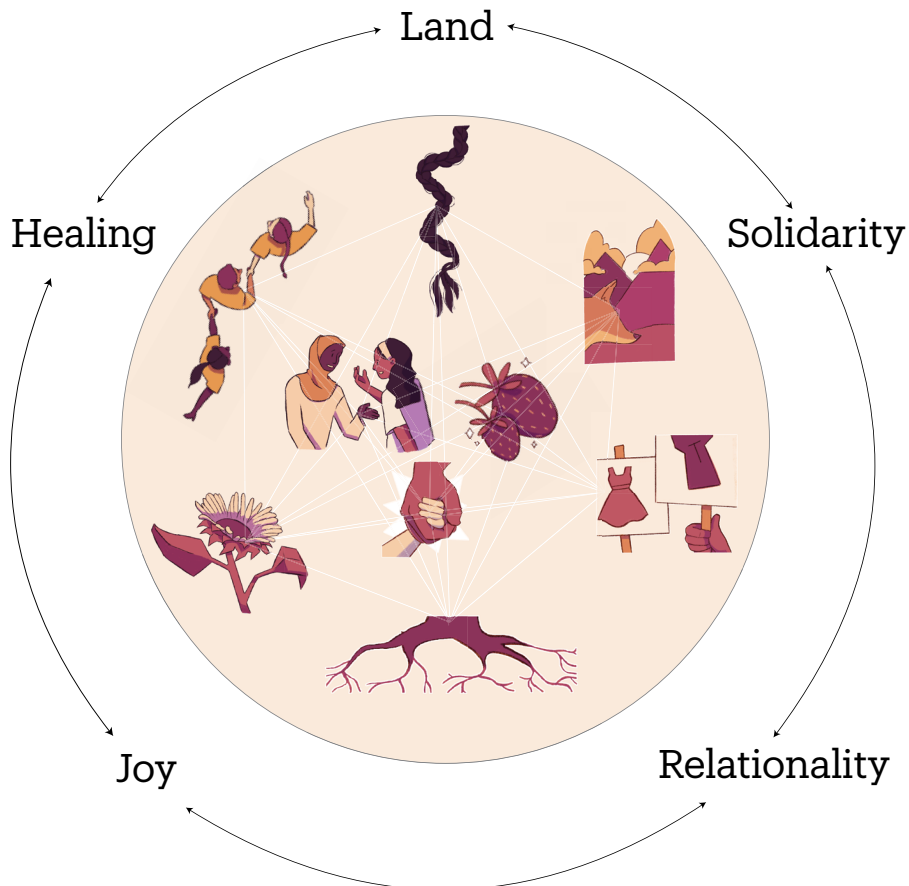


Figure 1: Hearts + Minds Model for Civic Connection for Black and Indigenous Youth

The above image is an illustration of our model. The words land, solidarity, relationality, joy and healing surround illustrations that symbolize the model.

We came into this conversation with three guiding questions:



1. What barriers exist for Black and Indigenous young people forging connections and feeling belonging in non-profit programming?
2. How might community organizations demonstrate Black and Indigenous young people are a priority?
3. How might community organizations foster connections between Indigenous and Black young people?

From here, Evening and Weekends guided the group through the 3 Horizons Framework to explore the context for service providers supporting Black and Indigenous youth, envision an improved future, and analyze the transition necessary to bridge the two. The exploration of these horizons and our guiding questions were captured in round-table conversations supported by the Hearts + Minds Research Team. In the summary below, main themes are peppered with quotes and paraphrased sentiments from participants to showcase the vitality and vibrancy of our conversations.

BARRIERS TO CENTERING INDIGENOUS AND BLACK YOUTH IN PROGRAMMING

Community organizations often don't know the demographic profile of the people they serve, which makes it hard to justify programming that centers on Indigenous and Black youth. This knowledge gap limits the quality of community-based program design and evaluation and makes other types of research challenging.

“ We don't collect self-identification data. This means we are mostly just guessing who we see, but it's important to not make assumptions. There are challenges for collecting data (privacy, legal), and so we end up collecting anecdotally. ”

Because Black and Indigenous young people are some of the most marginalized young people (e.g. school to prison pipeline, overrepresentation in child welfare system, poverty) it's very hard for them to participate in community programs. It takes more resources to outreach and include them in programming since they often require a trauma-informed approach.



It's hard for financially strapped non-profits to be who Indigenous & Black youth need them to be – they [non-profits] end up going where the numbers are..and who is easy to reach.



There are more Black-focused organizations in Peel, and there's a sensitivity to not co-opt Indigenous spaces and funding by claiming community organizations are providing services to both. We heard how those who work in non-profits need mentorship and coaching on when it is appropriate to couple Black and Indigenous young people and when it is not.



I'm not sure we [as a Black-focused organization] know how to respectfully and appropriately offer services to Indigenous youth. At the same time, in my work in the trenches of the school to prison pipeline, I see Indigenous youth and so I see the need.



Non-profit organizations and service providers are often not strongly positioned to undertake work that forges needed (new) directions. There are significant funding constraints, especially for Black and Indigenous-led organizations.



I don't think people are talking enough about how absolutely wrecked we [front-line workers] are from lockdowns, COVID and the economy. People are leaving the sector like I've never seen. It's not a good environment to innovate or respond to community needs.



Community organizations operate within a funding and social service provision environment that doesn't (immediately or at all) address the root causes of social problems. Short-term and program-based funding means programs do not run long enough to see the impact of their work or to gain traction. While community organizations offer many programs and services that serve important functions, they are not always able to offer services in an effective way and in a way that aligns with their values. Sometimes, community organizations stop offering programs they know are needed/successful due to short-term project-based funding. This can lead to mistrust and disconnect between what matters to the community (and those who work in community organizations) and the work they are funded to do. We've summarized the gaps and priorities below.

WORK COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS ARE MANDATED/FUNDED TO DO	DESIRED WORK FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack flexibility to address unique intersections and emerging needs - Bolsters a corporate environment that feels exclusive for many marginalized communities (like Indigenous and Black youth) - Can replicate negative framing of Black and Indigenous youth - Narrow performance measurement (e.g. # of clients served, # hours spent) - Occupies the time of young people to “keep them out of trouble” - Short-term social provision work - Programs that try to change youth rather than meet them where they are at - Hierarchical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community centered work - Organic connections - Meets the mental health needs of Black and Indigenous youth - Address systemic issues affecting Black and Indigenous youth - Focuses on impact, care and relationships - Meaningfully engages youth through inspiring empowering and capacity building programs - Long term impactful community building work - More collaboration, more creativity - Letting youth enjoy life; just be able to be happy - To be spaces of joy and celebration

While many participants found these gaps troublesome, problematic and personally draining, they also understood how they could drive change to center Indigenous and Black young people in their work. The next section summarizes seeds of change that could foster a future where Indigenous and Black youth are more centered on community-based work.




SEEDS OF CHANGE

This section summarizes seeds of change or promising practices that sow new possibilities and futures for Black and Indigenous youth. These seeds of change position community practitioners as co-conspirators with Indigenous and Black young people for a more hopeful, empowered and liberatory future.

Relationship seeds are how we can relate and build relationships on an interpersonal level that build strong and respectful relationships with community practitioners and between Indigenous and Black youth.

Program seeds are more broad service delivery or engagement features that can occur in community spaces or organizations that would bolster Black and Indigenous connections and support their collective and separate flourishing.

System seeds are actions that funders, networks, or collectives can take to help build a wider ecosystem that affirms and celebrates Indigenous and Black connections.

RELATIONSHIP SEEDS	SYSTEM SEEDS	PROGRAM SEEDS
		
<p>Listening</p> <p>Trusting</p> <p>Honoring</p> <p>Caring</p> <p>Cultural competence and safety</p> <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Authenticity</p> <p>Curiosity</p> <p>Trauma-informed</p> <p>Play</p>	<p>Orientation should be data-informed and long term and towards building vibrant Black and Indigenous communities,</p> <p>Truly understanding and showcasing the fortitude and excellence of Indigenous and Black Communities.</p> <p>Sustainable funding for Indigenous and Black youth flourishing and divestment from systems and approaches that harm them.</p> <p>Meaningful learning and growing opportunities for Black and Indigenous youth to know their separate history & traditions as well as their togetherness and solidarities.</p> <p>Funding impact driven programs while nourishing relationship and program seeds identified on this table.</p>	<p>Truly trusting Indigenous and Black young people to lead change, to design programs that matter to them.</p> <p>Decolonized approaches to leadership, mentorship and learning that honors Indigenous and Black ways of knowing and doing (e.g. storytelling, art).</p> <p>Creating spaces and programs for Black and Indigenous young people through liberatory joint programs for the two groups.</p> <p>Intergenerational and ancestral connections.</p> <p>Participatory and youth centered program design and evaluation.</p> <p>Honoring the entire youth experience (not just the exceptional positive or the hard stuff. Performance-based programming can lead to feelings of not being enough).</p> <p>Recognizing the importance of material support for young Indigenous and Black youth to participate in programs (e.g. meals, transportation, fair compensation for work).</p>

These seeds of change can forge a path towards a future where Indigenous and Black youth encounter and flourish together in community spaces and beyond.

CLOSING: BLACK AND INDIGENOUS FUTURES

Conversation participants imagined a future where Black and Indigenous youth thrive and flourish together and separately. In this imagined future, they come together in a safe, accessible, and liberatory space where they are respected, valued, and celebrated by community leaders who are trusted co-conspirators. Community programs in non-profit organizations show their deep respect for Indigenous and Black lives by meaningfully engaging them in the design and creation of programs. Community spaces empower Black and Indigenous youth – this is a space where they feel deep kinship, care, belonging and joy.

They know their language, traditional knowledge and the wisdom of elders and ancestors. They are free from the lie that their worth, beauty and brilliance are things to be proven. They know, marvel, and learn from the land. Indigenous and Black youth have a strong sense of self, and they feel like they are enough because no one is trying to change them – people who care about Black and Indigenous youth are just helping them to grow into themselves.

APPENDIX 1: NOTES FROM COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Horizon 1	Horizon 2	Horizon 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not really knowing who we are serving - how do you measure joy - intersections of identity - walking the talk - knowing where change happens is difficult - no anecdotal data to show funders - don't know what is impactful over the long term - proper evaluation program; trouble with data over the long term - it's worth it, when seeing the youth show up - creating opportunities for co-creating - how do people realistically show up? - need particular metrics to understand the climate - knowing when to group Black and Indigenous people and when not to - getting testimonials - knowledge is power, sharing wisdom - engaging at their comfort level - how to access resources and their difficulties in accessibility - supporting the leaders who are being brought through difficult times - the youth need to create the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leaders bend to those who have the power - need people in non-profits to be co-conspirators; Fear stops our transition - Decision makers need to be ones disrupting- they need to take the risk - the school to prison pipeline needs to be disrupted - mental enslavement - Lack of equity - Schools are not accessible to community partners - Youth are forced to take classes without their input and without enough choice - misinformation - Lack of resources - What does caring look like? - ongoing colonization stops people from knowing themselves - All levels of the government need to be disrupted - Environment is a big limitation; culturally diverse but systems are not changing - What's the purpose of trying? - Youth led projects - Network of resistance in all facets - We need to disrupt how we show up - You are disruptive just by being who you are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - creating a sense of community - none of the programs are working but community is working - anchoring who you are and where you're from - Different forms of expression that are tied to who we are - Considering having a human approach - seeds of the future have existed in the past - A shared history is a part of everyday - Having access to Black and Indigenous role models - Financial resources that help drive programming - mediators to navigate the system - rephrasing right and wrong - successful projects from the past go away - no duplicate of services - not talking at, letting the youth decide their future - social connections being made - diverse ways of thinking and knowing; showing youth their voices matter - Being able to navigate though shame - Youth hubs that are safe and accessible - Bringing Back Shuttle Buses

Horizon 1	Horizon 2	Horizon 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use your voice to drive impact at funder levels - understanding the culture of the youth and the people - There are barriers to making real impact - Creating a place to represent your identity - building time to listen to others - need for more time to build relationships - need to support at-risk population - an intimate organization for your needs - Training of facilitators and program leaders with culturally sensitive and informed care training. Need to equip them with the tools before they interact and provide services/supports to youth - too many acronyms - Erasure of Indigenous and Black youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collective rights - Collective disruption - Collaboration to create one strong force - Non-profits are disconnected between organization gains and what's needed - Funding sustainability- if funding stops there should be other ways to move forward e.g implementing a placeholder system to ensure essential programs continue even if funding is cut. For instance, Food related programs could have supplemental or severance aid - Making space for specific programs for Black + Indigenous identities - Abolition of censorship - Building trust and understanding and considering how long it takes - It is the responsibility of the service providers to build the trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No barriers to accessing programs - Everyone is responsible for their future - Self-advocacy skills - Inclusion - using the present for their future - Intergenerational storytelling that doesn't need to be positive only; that is honest - Access to the knowledge of the past - re-engaging with social environments - being given tools to navigate what you don't know - Just being able to be happy- Joy is the Future - letting youth enjoy life - Tapping into the elders - Being able to address concerns - Shifting the power imbalances; removal of gatekeepers

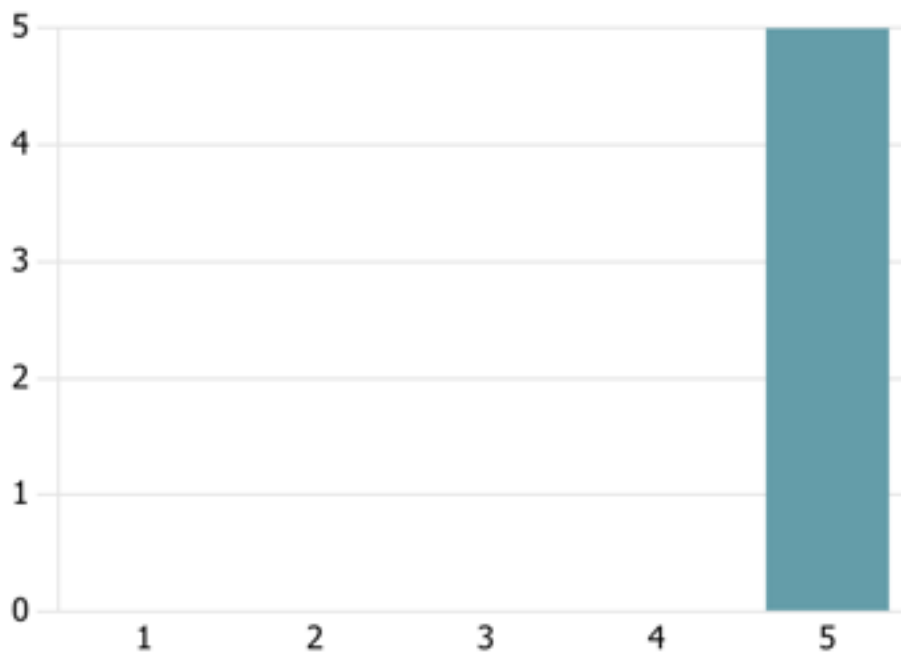
APPENDIX 2: EVENT EVALUATION

We felt positive about the day in the Hearts + Minds post-event debrief. Participants seemed to value the conversation, and we heard how the topic of centering Black and Indigenous young people was necessary, fresh and on point. For us, it felt validating to hear how these conversations are relevant to your everyday work. We enjoyed being able to facilitate and record those round table conversations. We learned so much. If we could change anything about the day, we would have scheduled a longer session.

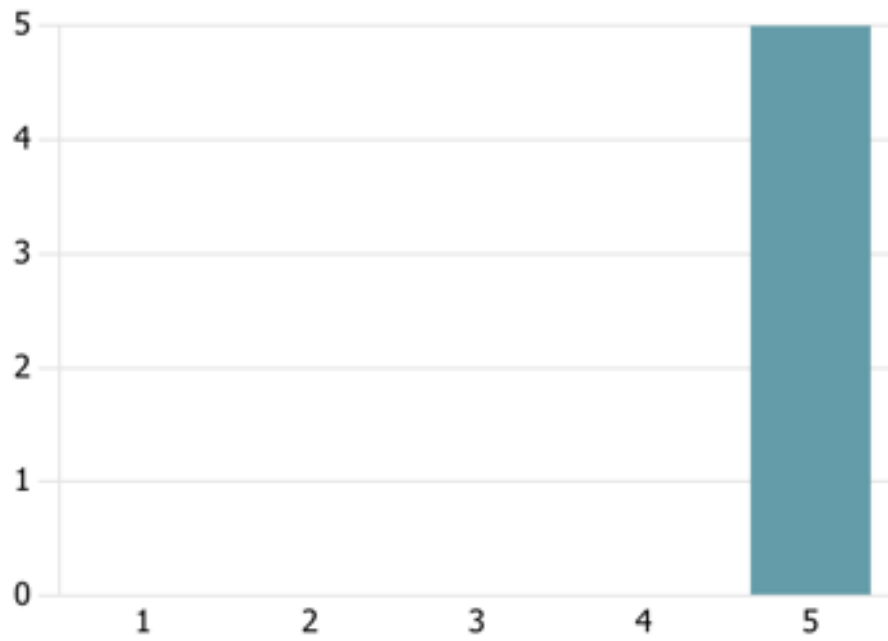
In our post-event communication with participants, we included a survey to gather feedback from participants. We also queried whether participants wanted to have their contact information shared with others. We received 5 responses (from 24 participants) to the evaluation. We are not taking the low response rate personally. We know participants are stretched for time, and we are thinking about other ways to evaluate our community engagement activities besides surveys. Until we figure that out, please know we always welcome the opportunity to chat with you to learn more about ways we could improve.

Below are participant responses to the feedback survey.

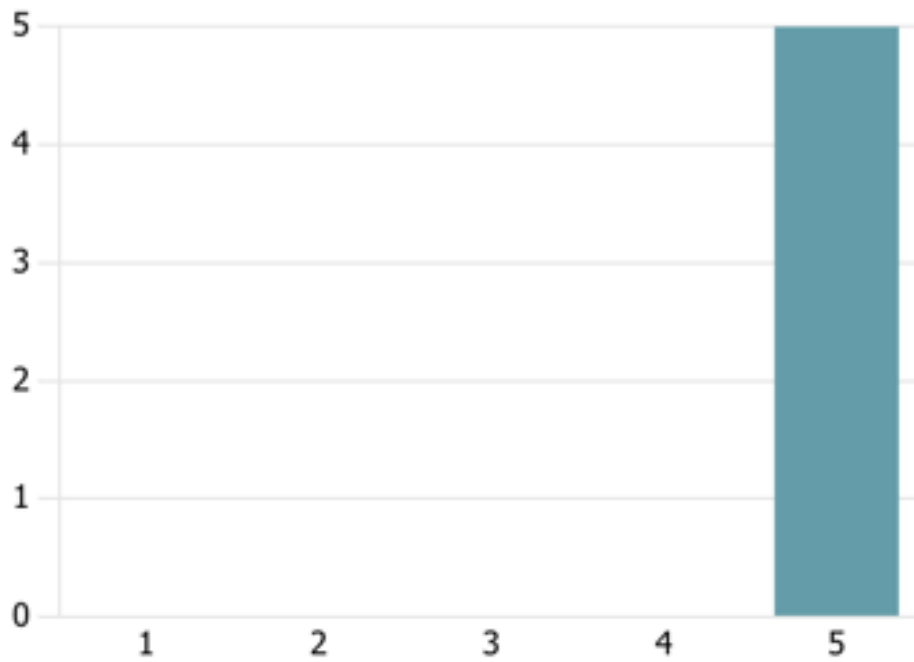
1. How satisfied were you with the overall experience of the community conversation?
(1 star- Not Satisfied, 5 stars- Very Satisfied)



2. How relevant did you find the content discussed in relation to your interests or needs?
(1 star- Not at all relevant, 5 stars- Very relevant)



3. To what extent did you feel engaged and actively involved in the discussions?
(1 star- Not at all, 5 stars- Very)



4. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience at the community conversation (e.g. likes/dislikes)? Your answer to this big, baggy question will inform Hearts + Minds future work. We pinky swear to read every response.

Very powerful session. Appreciate the space and conversation(s).

I appreciated the diversity of the group. Well done!

This was a great, importance and engaging discussion. Great job!

We need more time. I can see a whole conference with various presenters and rich discussions happening, and I would love to see this work evolve into projects that involve various truth and reconciliation stakeholders.

More events like these please. This was thought-provoking, necessary and brave. We need more of this.

Hearts + Minds response:

We are heartened by your enthusiasm and positivity. Thank you for taking the time to respond to our survey. We agree, we would like to see more conversations like this in the future. Thanks for your confidence in us.



Sheridan

Website: Hearts + Minds

E-mail: heartsandmindsproject@sheridancollege.ca



VOLUNTEER MBC
MISSISSAUGA • BRAMPTON • CALEDON
care • community • connection



moyo

Health & Community Services

