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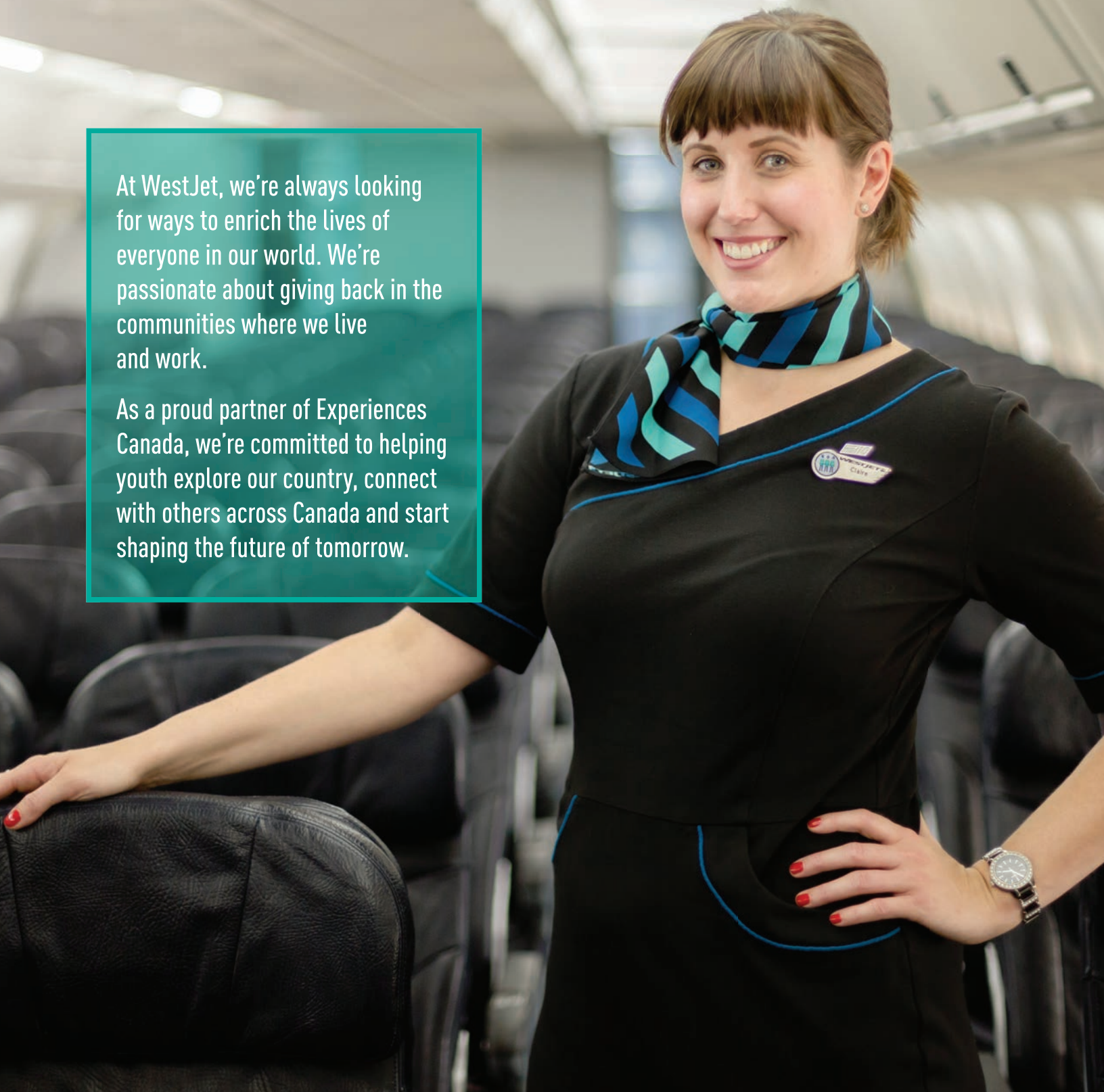
WESTJET

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We care about our community.

At WestJet, we're always looking for ways to enrich the lives of everyone in our world. We're passionate about giving back in the communities where we live and work.

As a proud partner of Experiences Canada, we're committed to helping youth explore our country, connect with others across Canada and start shaping the future of tomorrow.



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We would also like to thank our national sponsors and program partners:



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AIR CANADA



UNIGLOBE
Travel

WE BELIEVE..

..In the capabilities and potential of youth.

..Learning is an adventure.

..Young Canadians need to know their own country's diverse histories, cultures and challenges first to better understand the world.

..The most memorable experiences are shared experiences.

..Exposure to new places and ideas will enable youth to see their world differently.

..Every youth deserves the opportunity to participate.

..Every youth deserves to be respected and included.

..The safety and security of youth is paramount.

..Everyone learns differently.



Experiences Canada student exchanges and forums develop community leaders and informed citizens of tomorrow.



Experiences Canada is a national registered charity that helps young Canadians to explore their country in ways they may never have imagined through reciprocal exchanges, forums, conferences and other opportunities to travel and connect with one another.

Every year, participating schools and youth organizations send 10-30 youth (ages 12- 17) on exchange somewhere in Canada. On average, 4,500 youth and their chaperones per year are chosen, representing just under 200 groups. That's hundreds of thousands of young Canadians who have benefited from a student exchange experience since we began over 80 years ago.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF EXPERIENCES CANADA



As another program year comes to an end, and we have this opportunity to travel our country through the photos and stories of our youth participants, I am reminded of the first time I went on a trip without my family. I was 16 and joined the militia as a summer job and headed to Camp Aldershot in Annapolis Valley NS a couple of hours from my home. I lived in a compound with 30 people I had never met before, females and males, immersed in an extremely intensive week-long training program assembling rifles, building lean-to's, camouflaging-trucks, radio equipment and of course ourselves, crawling fully geared on our bellies and elbows... Besides getting my tooth shot off by a spent casing during target practice, I have many other memories I've never forgotten.

This experience opened my mind to many things, including people from different cultures, experiences and backgrounds from myself. It gave me life-long friends, it gave me confidence in my abilities and those of others, it developed my interest in our military, and it helped me stretch in ways that I may never have done otherwise. Later in my career, as Deputy Minister responsible for intergovernmental, Indigenous and military relations, I

drew upon that experiential learning as it had provided me with a deeper respect and understanding for the complexities they faced.

Today, technology makes it a lot easier to build communities and cultivate connections online, but nothing can replace face-to-face contact, or as kids are fond of saying, "IRL."

My story isn't very different than those of the thousands of youth who have participated in our reciprocal exchanges this past year. While our exchanges and forums don't include loaded guns and ammunition, we nonetheless recognize our responsibility to ensure that these first time adventures are always positive ones. In addition to the safety and security measures we have in place, we also provide planning resources on our website for both parents hosting youth and teachers and group organisers leading the excursion.

This past year, we also implemented a new evaluation procedure in partnership with the Student's Commission of Canada. Not only will we be able to measure the many ways in which these experiences immediately impact our participants, but we will be encouraging parents

to give permission for the youth to opt into a multi-year survey that will benchmark that impact over time, and relative to other similar youth programs. This, in addition to the continuous feedback we get from group organizers, parents and youth via email helps us to continue serving the needs of today's youth to the best of our ability.

We deeply appreciate the support of our funding partners, including Canadian Heritage, the RBC Foundation, Canada Life, and Westjet; as well as the hundreds of volunteer group organizers who devote so much of their personal time and effort to facilitating these adventures for the youth in their schools and communities. Together we help thousands of young Canadians explore a part of their country they otherwise might never see, and in so doing, we hope, help them feel more connected to it as they take their first steps in exploring a wider world with more confidence and curiosity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith Sullivan-Corney'.

Judith Sullivan-Corney

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO



When I was in grade 5, I came home from school with a permission slip that I was certain my mother would never sign, but to my delight she agreed. With a stroke of a pen, she launched me on an amazing journey to Okazaki, Japan. I still remember every detail of that trip – the moments that I felt thrilled and worldly, and the moments that I felt homesick, exhausted, or confused. Most of all I remember the people I met, the kids my age as well as their warm and welcoming families. Back then we didn't have the advantages of today's communications, but we kept in touch for many years, right through high school until one too many moves resulted in our falling out of touch.

I know now that you don't have to travel across the world to have that experience. There is so much diversity right here in our own country, and I am proud to support youth having these first-time-alone travel experiences right here at home, be it through group exchange or individual travel opportunities.

We were pleased to bring back our Youth Leadership Forums this year, involving a group of 75 youth participants and youth leaders in a

week-long program to learn more about diversity and inclusion – a key priority identified by the youth involved in our Canada 150&Me program. This event was the first in a planned series of annual Leadership Forums that will tackle a different theme each year. In June 2020, we head to Winnipeg with a dynamic program focused on building knowledge and leadership in the area of advancing Reconciliation, and plans are already underway for a 2021 Youth Leadership Forum on the Environment.

We have also made a commitment to developing educational and planning resources to support our group organizers. The first such resource, a classroom poster detailing Canada's Treaty and Land Claims territories, was released last November. We will be supplementing our resources related to Indigenous history and Reconciliation with a series of pre-trip planning activities and classroom resources to aid those planning cultural exchanges, and launching a special group organizers' training weekend in Winnipeg next June.

While there is a steady growing interest in exploring the diversity of Canada's Indigenous cultures and

communities, still fully half of the exchanges we support are between French and English communities seeking opportunities to further their second language education. This was the founding purpose of our organization over 84 year ago, and remains a very important part of what we do. To commemorate Canada's official languages, we have published a new classroom resource map illustrating the history and cultural contributions of Canada's minority language communities. The new wall-sized map will be distributed to all group organizers involved in a linguistic exchange in the coming year, with additional copies available for purchase through our website.

Our goal every year is to offer more opportunities for more youth to travel to parts of the country they otherwise might never see. In so doing, we hope after their experience they see their own country differently – in some ways, we hope their perspective of Canada is broader, but at the same time, we also hope they see it as a little smaller than they imagined.

Deborah Morrison

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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR, AUDIT AND FINANCE COMMITTEE



On behalf of the Audit and Finance Committee of Experiences Canada I am pleased to report the financial results for the 2018-19 fiscal year. This report is derived from Experiences Canada's audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2019, which are available on our website or upon request.

Experiences Canada completed its final year of a three-year funding agreement with the Federal Government's Exchanges Canada Program. We wish to thank the Minister and staff at the Department of Canadian Heritage Exchanges Canada for their steadfast support and commitment to our program and are pleased that a new three-year agreement for the 2019-2022 period has been renewed.

In 2018-19 revenue was up by 12% at \$5.80 million compared to the previous year's revenue of \$5.18 million. Net expenditures also increased by 12% from last year, from \$5.22 million to \$5.84 million. Special measures funding of \$95,650 was provided as additional financial assistance to ensure equal access to the exchange program.

Experiences Canada's Youth Leadership Forum on Diversity and Inclusion contributed to the increase in revenues and expenses. Experiences Canada invested \$56,725 from its own reserves towards the project. Overall, Experiences Canada ended the year with a net deficit of \$38,777.

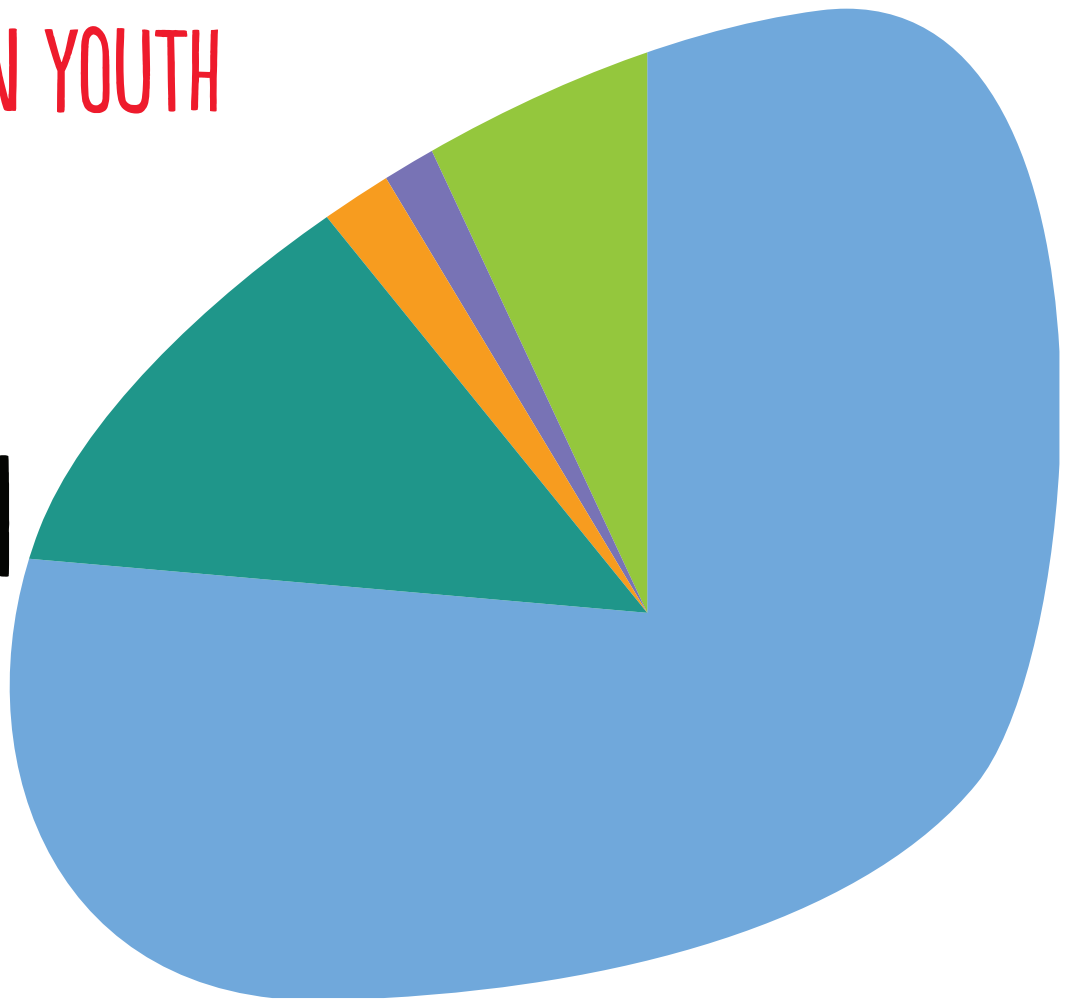
We would like to thank our individual contributors and funding partners RBC, Canada Life, Uniglobe, Westjet and Air Canada, for their generous support of this year's programs.

Denise Nawata

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DNawata".

INVESTMENT IN YOUTH EXCHANGES:

\$5,843,661
IN 2018/19



76%

Youth Travel
\$4,472,330

2%

Marketing/PR
\$124,800

7%

Corporate/Other
\$400,850

13%

Program Delivery Nat'l
Coordination
\$750,031

2%

Special Measures
\$95,650

A MESSAGE FROM SPENCER BUBIS – PRESIDENT, YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL



I'm Spencer Bubis, and I have been serving on Experiences Canada's Youth Advisory Committee for a unique and memorable three years! I have also had the honour this past year of serving as the committee's President.

I first participated in Experiences Canada's programming through the Canada 150&Me National Youth Forum. Since that first experience I had in Canada's capital, Experiences Canada has been very near and dear to my heart. The experiences provided have been able to expose me and so many others to meaningful places, people and ideas that have all played a part in who I am today, which I'm so grateful for.

In the past few years, the "YAC"'s primary goal has been to promote and enhance the life-changing experiences of national travel and cultural experiences for youth that we, as past participants, have personally benefited from. To this end, our members have worked to meet locally with exchange groups being hosted in their home communities, aimed to enhance social media presence and create promotional material, come

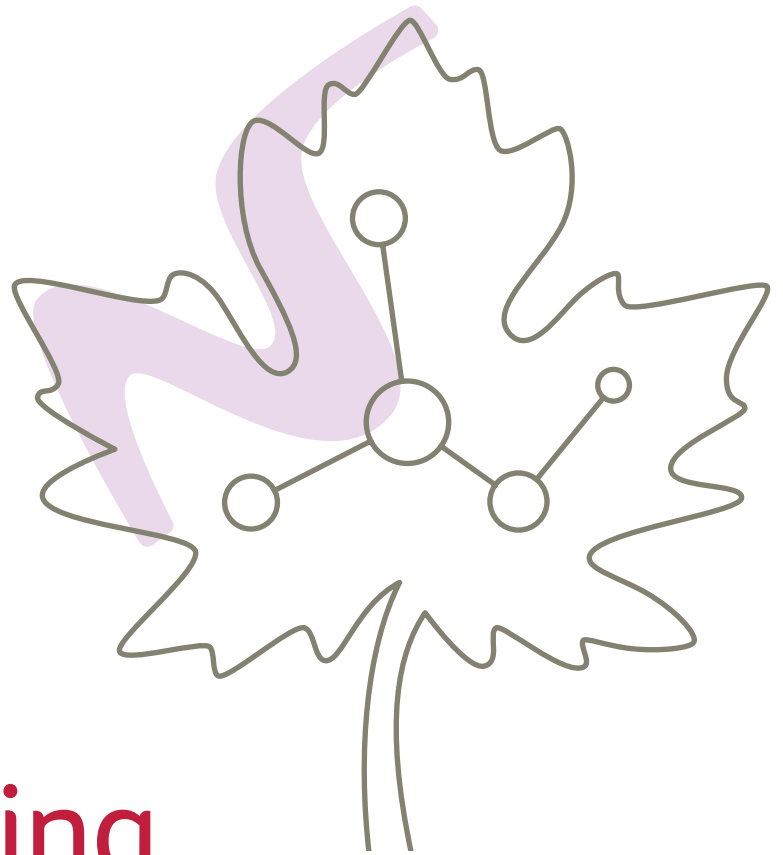
together every year at the Annual General Meeting, and continued to give input and advice for future exchanges and forums from an essential youth perspective.

It has been amazing to lead a nationally-based team of such capable, determined and compassionate youth. While communicating between our home communities spanning from coast to coast poses its challenges, we are always learning to be flexible while developing creative ways for us to collaborate on new projects.

The formative experiences that Experiences Canada offers are so important for the positive development of values in our country's next generation of contributors and leaders. Now that I have had the pleasure of speaking with so many devoted exchange group organizers and participants, I can see that truly the most important impact of this programming is the new perspectives students gain from simply meeting people of another part of our vastly diverse nation. The work of Experiences Canada has continually taught me how incredibly lucky we all

are to be Canadians.

My hope is that future YACers and exchange and forum participants reflect on how they will choose to leave their mark on Canada going forward in their lives. Experiences Canada's programming brings out a special gift in every young person, but also highlights the responsibility to then share that gift with their communities and the world. Reflecting on the thoughtful prompt the 150&Me initiative put forth to thousands of youth nearly three years ago ("What is Canada's greatest challenge or opportunity facing your generation?"), I've realized on the most fundamental level that so many of Canada's greatest challenges can be addressed, and opportunities built upon, with the mutual understanding and openness that Experiences Canada continues to promote so well.



Building bright futures through lifelong learning

Together, we can do more for
Canadians, for each other and
for the communities we love.



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THE HISTORY OF OUR YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUMS

For over 83 years Experiences Canada has organized annual reciprocal exchanges and occasional forums for youth between the ages of 12-18, to allow them an opportunity to explore another part of the country. Currently between 3500-4000 youth travel each year, in 170-190 groups drawn from all provinces and territories, representing a healthy balance of urban, rural, cultural, and socio-economic demographics. About 50% of these exchanges focus on developing second language skills; 20% foster dialogue with Indigenous communities, and the rest are a mix of thematic exchanges related to history and heritage, environmental studies and outdoor education, sports, arts, or civics and community engagement.

In 2017, Experiences Canada launched Canada 150&Me, a series of 5 national youth forums held in Surrey (Environment); Winnipeg (Human Rights); Montreal (Canada's Place in the World); Halifax (Immigration and Diversity) and Ottawa (National Youth Forum). Over 3500 youth submitted applications online telling us about the greatest challenge or opportunity facing Canada for their generation. Over 360 youth ages 14-19 were selected to travel or host youth in their own community for one of the five week-long events based on their theme of interest. A team of 10 youth leaders (ages 21-30) worked on the project for the full four-month period, supervising the groups, assisting with planning the events, leading the Forums, and mentoring the youth presentations.

During each weeklong forum, youth had the opportunity to visit and volunteer with organizations actively involved in addressing these areas, meet mentors and leaders in the field, as well as discuss and learn from each other. The alumni network established after the events remains just as strong now as it has in the past. It percolates with posts from alumni about projects they have started in their own community; shared resources about scholarships and youth conferences and opportunities; as well as a discussion group to provide advice and support to each other on their initiatives.

One of the key recommendations to Experiences Canada was that we undertake to continue with the Forums series, focusing on the issues they had identified as part of the Canada 150&Me experiences. And so we did.

This past July, Experiences Canada launched the first in a new series of Youth Leadership Forums designed to delve deeper into the key challenges they identified. The first Youth Leadership Forum on Diversity and Inclusion was held in Toronto from June 29 - July 6, 2019. We are delighted to provide a glimpse into the week that was through these pages.



WHY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?

Respecting diversity and, more importantly, fostering a more inclusive society, was the most popular thematic choice among project submissions. Youth shared their concerns about racism, discrimination, bullying and feelings of exclusion eloquently in their artwork, spoken and written words, videos and music. They didn't limit their expressions to broader issues of social justice and human rights, but also talked about how exclusion contributes to anxiety, depression and a lack of confidence and well-being.

It was no surprise to us when we announced the theme for our first Leadership Forum that the youth responded. However, many of our participants approached the issues through the lens of their own personal experiences; often they had not considered the perspectives of those with similar challenges. We believed by broadening the discussion to include multiple perspectives of diversity it would open up the opportunity for youth to see these challenges as universal, and work together to share strategies and develop creative solutions that could work for multiple communities.

Sixty-five youth between the ages of 14-18 had an opportunity to explore issues of inclusion from a variety of perspectives based on culture, socio-economic circumstance, and physical and mental abilities. Throughout the week, they visited a number of non-profit agencies for presentations, workshops, and/or volunteer opportunities, and each evening they worked in teams to produce a series of creative presentations that they presented on the final day to an audience of 120 children ages 7-12. The goal of the program was to provide every youth with the confidence, practical experience, tools and resources they need to undertake similar projects and activities when they returned home to their schools and communities.

The youth stayed at the YMCA Cedar Glen Outdoor Centre, 40 minutes North of Toronto. Although the non-air conditioned rooms made for some hot nights during the record-breaking heatwave that week, the open-air setting allowed youth plenty of space to relax and unwind after their hectic days in the city.

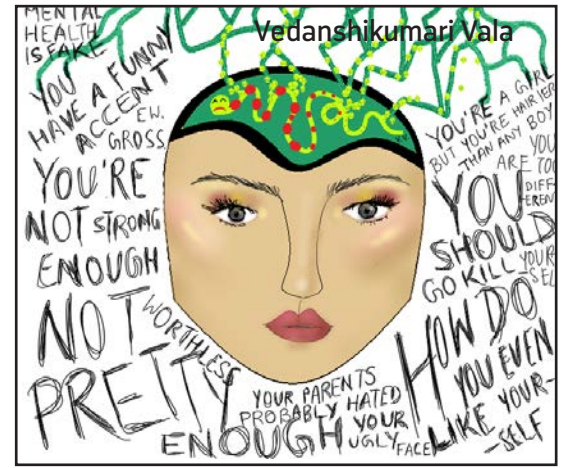


With more ideas and motivated people, we can get to a place where everyone feels included.

EMMA CONNORS, FREDERICTON, NB

Our uniqueness can drive an inclusive diversity and become a strength that can defeat intolerance, racism and hate.

CZARINA CHOY, KAMLOOPS, BC/CB



PROJECT SUBMISSIONS



Maria Khan

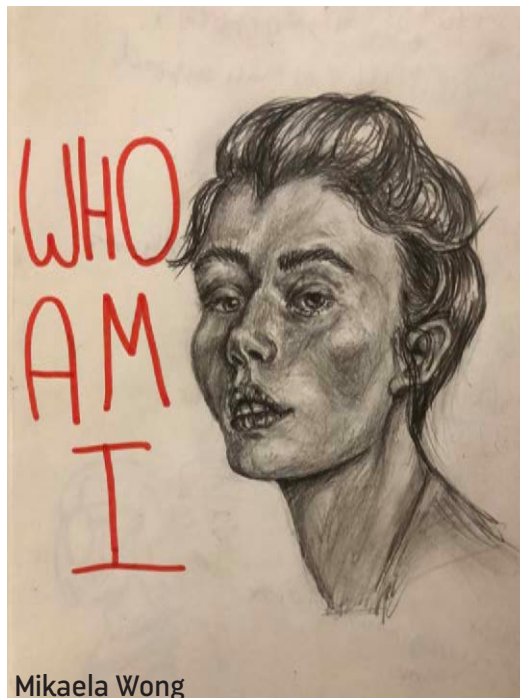


Sophia Abel-Heath

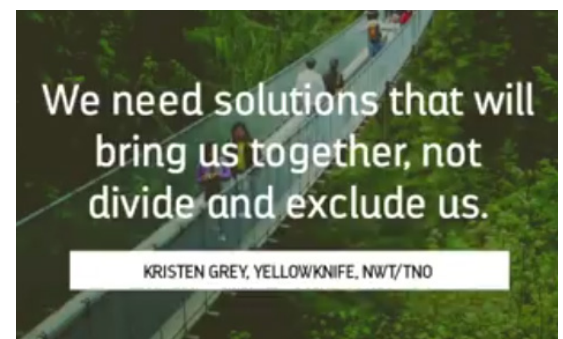
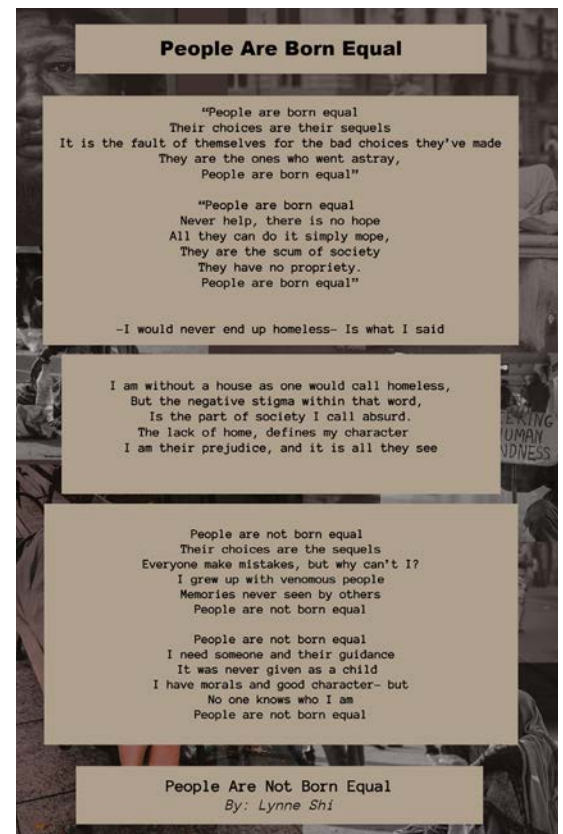
From knowledge comes understanding.
From understanding;
Love.

KANAV MADHURA, MARKHAM, ON

As part of the selection process, all applicants were asked to answer the question "What are the barriers to and benefits of true diversity and inclusion in your community?" - delivered in any format: a written piece, an artwork, a video of a performance. Here are some examples of submission we received.



Mikaela Wong



KRISTEN GREY, YELLOWKNIFE, NWT/TNO



YOUTH LEADERS

The forum would not have been possible without the support of 12 truly dedicated and inspirational youth leaders to supervise and mentor participants throughout the week.

Rebecca Horeth, Elgin County, ON

Ryan Feener, St. John's, NL

Sarah Hanson, Pic River First Nation, ON

Jonathan Savard, Sherbrooke, QC

Hassan Farasat, Vancouver, BC / PAKISTAN

Kalynne Maracle, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory

Tyler Height, Thunder Bay, ON

Sherifa Hadi, Ottawa, ON

Lisa Russell, Toronto, ON

Nima Hashi, Waterloo, ON

Daniel V. Sadler, Calgary, AB

Jennifer Bucci, Toronto, ON



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- We specialize in group tours fully customized for student educational tours.
- We provide tours to any global destination.
- Your one stop shop for air quotes, hotel bookings, travel insurance and more.



OPENING CEREMONIES



It was an honour meeting Perry Bellegarde, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations at the Diversity and Inclusions Forum in Toronto. Perry discussed many symbolic and significant ideas with us. He talked about reconciliation and raised awareness about how we should refer to First Nations people. As well, he was keen on persuading youth to vote when they are eligible and to realize which candidates best support them and reconciliation efforts. Personally, it was great meeting another Saskatchewan resident, and I enjoyed debating that Saskatoon was better than Regina (Perry's residence).

- Maria Khan





DAY 1: SETTING THE SCENE



Following a successful first night together where Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Perry Bellegarde welcomed participants to the region and the youth met the Forum Finale teammates and facilitators from Young People's Theatre, it was time to get started with some basic history and leadership training!

In the morning, youth had two presentations. The first was from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, which gave them some basic coaching on becoming leaders and mentors for younger children. The second was a presentation from the Students Commission called #ThisIsCanada, which provided them with a tangible example of how youth can come together and create their own workshops and presentations – leading a challenging conversation about Canada's History, the stories never told, and the injustices faced by many marginalized and racialized groups.

We devoted the afternoon to a powerful presentation of The Kairos Blanket Exercise, created by Kairos, an ecumenical joint venture of the United Church of Canada in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and educators to foster greater understanding of the shared history of colonial violence which affects Indigenous peoples. The sharing circle following the activity was one of the most impactful moments in our week-long program according to the evaluation surveys of our participants.



BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF CANADA



The Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada National Office put on one of the first workshops of the Forum. Three members of the National Youth Advisory Council (NYMAC) shared their experiences in mentoring and talked about the important abilities, outlooks, and skills required by a mentor. We learned that teamwork, role modeling, and empathy are essential to connect with a mentee. This helped kick off the week: learning that anyone can be a leader and make an impact, even for a single person, and that making an impact can change a person's life. To promote diversity and inclusion means taking a leadership role, teaching others, and using mentorship as a way to shape a path forward.

- Daniel V. Sadler, Youth Leader

YOU **IGNITE** MY POWER AND POTENTIAL



Big Brothers
Big Sisters

WE'RE **BIGGER** TOGETHER

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The Students Commission

*Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement*



La commission des étudiants

*Le centre d'excellence pour
l'engagement des jeunes*

#THISISCANADA

The purpose of #ThisIsCanada is to facilitate opportunities for youth (particularly second-generation Canadians, newcomers/refugees, Indigenous, racialized and Francophone youth) to critically engage with the topics of multiculturalism, social and economic inclusion, and diversity, to help increase their attachment to Canada.

The knowledge gathered from youth, and the topics addressed — like structural racism — was presented with a non-academic approach, which coincided with The Students Commission values: that young people learn best from young people. The group members, such as myself and my other amazing co-facilitators who helped me deliver the workshop, were comprised of youth who were responsible for the development, delivery, and evaluation of this project. My co-facilitators and I had an amazing time delivering the workshop for the first time at the conference, and all the participants helped us make it a success with their amazing contributions.

- Azwa Alam



KAIROS BLANKET EXERCISE

Without context, the Kairos Blanket Exercise sounds like game fit for a slumber party: warm, comfortable and inviting. Although it seems so, this notion could not be farther from the truth.

The Kairos Blanket Exercise immerses participants within an emotionally charged retelling of the cultural demolition Indigenous people in Canada have experienced. The exercise educates the audience through physical representations of the injustices that have been committed against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

At the beginning, everyone was able to stand comfortably on a blanket. The blankets represented land, and the participants represented a group of about ten First Nations. As the exercise continued, we were told to roam around the mats, relishing in the vast expanse of land. This part of the exercise represented a golden age, however. The dynamic quickly shifted when foreign factors were introduced. The rise in external presence was met with a spike in mortality rates. Exposure to new illnesses was deadly, wiping out about half the participants. Those of us left were not safe from the effects of foreign forces either. Under this new rule, many lost land and almost everyone was forcibly relocated from larger lands to smaller blankets. As land continued to shrink, so too did individuals begin to disappear. The youth were subjected to the horrors of residential schools, where they were stripped of their culture. Those who walked out alive were not able to properly reintegrate into their community, having suffered the effects of residential schooling.

When I participated in the exercise, I ended up being one of the last people standing.

The feeling was surreal as I watched the sudden expansion of empty floor due to the disappearance of my friends. The longer I stood, the smaller I felt, as we grew fewer and fewer in number. I was given a quote to read from a person who had suffered this injustice.

As I shared her words, I thought of how I could never truly understand how it felt to live through this history. Thinking about this made me realize that despite my lack of experience, we can still help by putting in the effort to learn and listen. By doing so, we can promote the healing of communities.

The Kairos Blanket Exercise illuminated Canada's dark past using a powerful narrative. I would recommend that if one gets the chance, they should definitely check it out. What began as a roomful of blankets and civilians was quickly reduced to an empty floor, barely covered by scattered mats. My words alone cannot capture the essence of the exercise. I implore the readers of my essay to please try participating if one gets the chance. It is an enlightening experience, crafted elegantly from the darkest corners of Canada's history.

- By Mikaela Wong



The Kairos Blanket Exercise is a great workshop which engages people in so many different ways. Spending time with everyone and building friendships with the leaders and youth makes the experience so much more real and it allows you to connect with other participants in an emotional way. I truly believe that anyone who has the opportunity to participate in a workshop should absolutely do it.

-Trinity Lattie-Thibault



DAY 2: CANADA DAY



Everyone was up early on Canada Day to head to Fort York National Historic Site, where our participants were divided into teams to help animate the site for public visitors throughout the day: handing out flags, facilitating sports and games (including an epic Tug of War!), and hosting a colouring station. In the late afternoon youth had a chance to stroll around downtown to check out the CN Tower and do a bit of shopping at the Eaton's Centre before heading to Ashbridges Bay for a warm summer night under the stars and spectacular display of Fireworks.





During my experience, I got to spend Canada Day in Toronto. The first stop of the day was Fort York National Historic Site. At Fort York, we volunteered to run the Canada Day activities for all the families coming to the site. I spent the morning drawing with children, throwing frisbees around, playing tug-of-war and lounging in the grass with all my new friends. I also watched a ceremony where they raised the Canadian flag and shot rifles and a cannon, which made Canada Day memorable. From there, I went on a tour of downtown Toronto and got to see the CN Tower and dip my feet in Lake Ontario at the waterfront. The day had already been unbelievable, but that was only beginning. After a packed day of volunteering and touring, I went to the Eaton Centre mall to eat dinner and fuel up for an exciting Canada Day evening. I soon found myself at a beach with people celebrating and dancing. It was an incredible atmosphere, and my friends and I joined in on the fun by playing some recreational volleyball on the beach for a couple of hours. Once it got dark out, we all came together to watch the fireworks. As I watched one of the best fireworks shows I had ever seen, I realized that I was celebrating my amazing country on Canada Day with other passionate Canadian youth. All of this made it hands down the best Canada Day I have ever experienced.

– Lauren Cogan



DAY 3: DISPELLING MYTHS

Community Living, a not-for-profit organization that provides supports to people and families living with physical and mental disabilities, spent the morning at Cedar Glen training our participants on how to facilitate their award-winning abilities awareness tool “Spinclusion” with younger children and youth in their communities. After lunch, we boarded the buses for another highlight of the week, a visit to the ISNA Canada Mosque in Mississauga where youth met with the Imam and participated in workshops about Muslim culture and Islamophobia.





Spinclusion was an activity hosted by Community Living. It consisted of two representatives from the organization hosting a game in which there were 7 or so groups. During each turn, someone from a certain group would spin a wheel. Each segment on the wheel had a question relating to topics such as bullying, disabilities, and discrimination. Once a topic was selected, each group would get a chance to share what they thought about the topic, and answer the associated question. Because of the many people from different lifestyles and cultures in each group, we had diverse and impassioned responses. The best part, however, was that at the end of the activity, the Community Living representatives offered each and every one of us a Spinclusion board of our own to play with our own communities! I am planning to use it in my local elementary school later this year. Overall, Spinclusion was a great experience.

- Kanah Madhura

SPINCLUSION

is an interactive game that encourages welcoming and inclusive approaches. This game helps children and youth to recognize and celebrate peoples differences.

For more information please visit spinclusion.ca or contact Tracey O'Regan at toregan@cltoronto.ca or 416-371-3162.



During the Diversity and Inclusion Forum, I had the unique opportunity to visit a mosque for the first time.

During our time at the mosque, we were able to take a full tour of the facility (including the prayer space), ask the Imam any questions we had on our minds, listen to the Islam opening prayer, and participate in a workshop on combatting Islamophobia.

The experience was incredibly educational and interesting, and it helped me understand more about Islam in an open, fun, and engaging way. As someone who comes from a fairly homogenous community, I had not had a great deal of exposure to Islam in a personal setting. Being able to have those conversations and see what living as a Muslim looks like outside of my school textbook provided me with a new perspective.

Something personal that I took away from the experience was what it felt like to wear a hijab. While we were at the mosque, I was invited to try wearing a hijab for the first time. While the hijab was being tied on my head by one of the youth leaders, I felt an immediate connection and a deeper sense of understanding than I had ever had before about the reasons why hijabs are worn and what it feels like to wear one.

While at the mosque, we each made a pledge as to how we would take what we learned home to combat Islamophobia. My pledge was to write about what I learned.

Other youth should visit a mosque if they have the chance, because the experience of seeing the prayer space, having our questions answered in an open dialogue, and hearing the opening prayer gave me the richest perspective on Islam I have ever experienced.

I have taken multiple world religion courses, but by visiting the mosque I formed a deeper understanding about Islam in a few hours than I did by taking those courses over many months. By visiting a mosque, youth who may not otherwise be exposed to Islam would have the chance to see that Muslims are just ordinary people with their own set of religious beliefs. They are also mothers, friends, fathers, daughters, sons, artists, lawyers, doctors, and more. This is incredibly important in combatting the attitudes of hate that Muslims face every day in society.

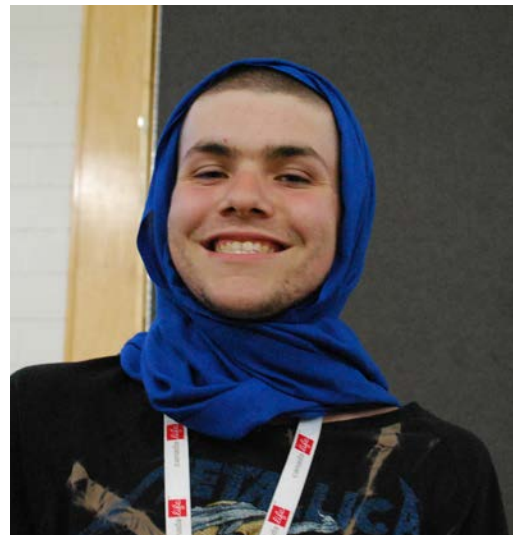
- Alexis Holmgren



The most important thing that I took away from this experience was that it is so important to advocate for people of all races, religions, and genders, no matter what. I was able to learn so much about Islam from the friends that I made during the forum, and we still have those conversations to this day. I completely encourage everybody to look deeper into Islam, and learn more about it to benefit themselves and the people around them.

- Chevon Cadigan





Muslim Association
of Canada

DEFINING & CELEBRATING A CANADIAN MUSLIM IDENTITY



MAC Youth aims to create a positive environment for youth that can meet their complex needs of belonging, autonomy, sense of purpose, and achievement. Through grounding youth in their faith, helping them connect to their community and roots, and presenting them with opportunities to help others, MAC delivers programs to help youth achieve their full potential.

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Youth

DAY 4: STRENGTHENING EMPATHY AND AWARENESS



Our morning began with a visit to the heart of downtown Toronto to visit Covenant House, the largest agency in Canada serving youth who are homeless, trafficked or at risk. Powerful presentations about the circumstances and risks that lead to youth homelessness and the realities of life for those living in this situation sparked strong responses among youth participants who were already talking about action they could take when they got back on the buses to our next venue.

In keeping with the focus on inclusion from youth perspectives, the afternoon session at TNO (The Neighborhood Organization) offered insights into what life is like for newcomer youth in Toronto. The workshops took place in Toronto's Thorncliffe Park neighborhood, one of the most densely populated immigrant communities housing over 30,000 people in a square block of apartment towers.





COVENANT HOUSE

Going to Covenant House was the most eye-opening experience for me because it allowed me to see that homelessness is an issue all over Canada and that it affects youth just as much as adults. Seeing the statistics of how many youth were homeless in Toronto alone, as well as hearing the circumstances that cause young people to be homeless and live without basic human needs were shocking. I can't imagine having to live on the streets as a 15-year-old or younger, but for many youth across Canada, that is their reality. The privilege walk activity that we did at Covenant House also showed me that the new friends that I had made at the forum came from all different walks of life. That activity reinforced how important it is to treat people kindly, because you have no idea what they've gone through or what they're currently going through in their lives. The privilege walk activity and the information I learned about youth homelessness in Canada are definitely things that I will be sharing with my community.

-Charlie Strelczik



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD ORGANIZATION

The Neighbourhood Organization workshop was one of the many sessions held at the Diversity and Inclusion Forum that I found both interesting and informing. We visited the Thornhill neighbourhood and talked to the TNO team to learn about the immigrant population in this area, and the programs and services that are available. We also visited the local youth centre under the guide of TNO, and learned about how they help the youth there to grow and have fun, and the challenges newcomers face because of assumptions and racial discrimination. I loved the TNO workshop because of the friendly staff at the TNO office, and the chance to have an immersive experience in the Thornhill neighbourhood.

-Heran Zhao



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Daily Bread Food Bank thrives because of the support of thousands of volunteers who are committed to helping our communities.



LAST YEAR
11,863
VOLUNTEERS

DONATED
29,658
HOURS OF SERVICE



GET INVOLVED AT dailybread.ca/volunteer



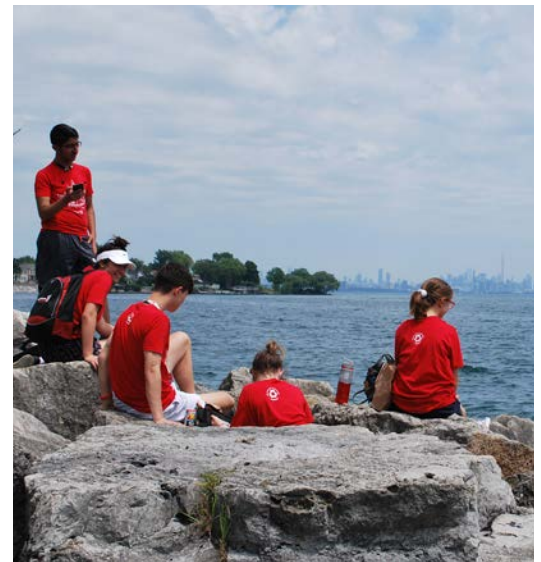
Daily Bread
Food Bank

DAY 5: TAKING ACTION



Once again our group was called into community action, visiting the Daily Bread Food Bank that not only operates a service centre for the neighborhood residents in need but is the central warehouse to service other food banks throughout the GTA. Over the course of the morning, the youth sorted 12,848 pounds of food! That's 174 pounds per volunteer!

The youth earned a well-deserved lunch break at Colonel Samuel Smith Park in Etobicoke before heading back to Cedar Glen for a rest break and swim, and then spent the evening doing final preparations for their Forum Finale presentations the next day.





Daily Bread
Food Bank

THE DAILY BREAD FOODBANK



Going to the Daily Bread Foodbank was an incredible opportunity! Participants were able to take on the role of volunteers by organizing and storing donated goods. We also got a tour of the facility and learned about the different communities who rely on the food bank for their weekly groceries. It was a welcome reminder of how these services are an essential part of the fabric of our community and why we need to work together to preserve them!

– Sherifa Hadi, Youth Leader



DAY 6: FORUM FINALE



On what would feel like the hottest day of the summer in Toronto – reaching 29 degrees by 10 am – our youth put on an excellent show for the day campers at the YMCA and special guests Deb Schulte, MP and Ontario Minister of Education, the Honourable Stephen Lecce, PC, MP. They hosted 3 sessions during the morning: The first focused on inclusion for people of all abilities, offered the youth participants' version of the Community Living "Spinclusion" activity presented as a game show.

The second session was titled "We Have a Voice!" and focused on inclusion based on economic circumstances, presenting a lively series of tableaux about difference issues requiring political action and encouraging youth engagement to effect change.

The third session focused on Reconciliation and social and cultural inclusion, and presented a series of interactive scenes illustrating how empathy and understanding can make a real difference. The presentation highlights were the Dene traditional songs performed by Cody Orlas, a youth participant from the Northwest Territories.

The event concluded with all youth participants, including the day campers, pinning their own reflections and commitments to action on a large blue stream of fabric representing the "river of difference": individual actions the youth made to acknowledge the strengths of diversity and fostering a more inclusive environment.

Later that day, the youth ended the week with an outdoor bonfire, music, and slide show presentation of photos taken throughout the week. Many stayed up all night to share some more time together before first departures home began at 4 am the next morning!





FINAL REFLECTIONS



My name is Mindalynn Frelick and this was one of the best weeks I have ever had in my life. Honestly the thing that surprised me the most was the connections that formed and the lifelong friends we made in such a short time. If you had asked me on day one if I expected to be so close to so many people, my answer would have been "No, that seems impossible in just a week." But now I can honestly say that I don't know what I would do without some of these crazy awesome people. The friends I made and the memories we shared will be with me wherever I go. Someday when I look back on this week, I will feel so amazingly lucky to know all of them. As individuals, as a group, as friends. We are connected for life. Another big surprise was the diversity of these individuals. I learned so much just by talking to some of them. I would never have thought about so many things in these ways. I would have never gained the sense of knowledge and connection to these cultures and traditions. This giant group of people came from all over Canada and spoke in such a variety of languages and accents.

It made it a much more meaningful experience to me. The ups and downs and surprises in this life will never cease to amaze me, but the dark seems a little lighter with these friends. The light is brighter when you have someone to share it with. The experiences and surprises are more fun with someone to share it with.

- Mindalynn Frelick





I left Newfoundland scared I would be lost on my way to Experiences Canada in Toronto this summer, and scared that I would not make any friends. Now that I am home (without getting lost), I am scared that I may never get to see some of my friends again. I was given the opportunity to meet with youth from all across Canada and now I have friends all across Canada. I loved walking into any room knowing that everyone was a friend and that I would get to spend a whole week with them. In each activity we did as well as learning the material presented to us I learned about everyone's interests and passions too, which helped me connect to everyone better. I never managed to learn everyone's name, although I learned how much we all had in common and how a friendship starts with a smile. I became so close with so many people and I am so lucky that I met them, because they changed my life.



Now I sit in my room and look through the pictures from that week, and a laugh or a grin always appears on my face because of the memories we made. I wish I had a photo of every single person, or a letter or their number because everyone was so kind and the only bad memory I have is of leaving them. Not a day goes by when I don't think of Experiences Canada and how it changed my life by introducing me to some of my best friends, even if they are on the other end of the country. Every single person had a friendly face and I want us to see each other again someday. Until then, I have the pictures, videos, letters and memories of the people who changed my life in a week. I loved every single person there and I am so grateful that they are all my friends.

- Brooklyn Bixby

One of the best parts of going to Experiences Canada Inclusion and Diversity Forum is the friends I made. The opportunity to be surrounded by like-minded people is incomparable. The conversations and connections made at the Forum were so rich because I was amongst people that share the same interests and values as me. Not only did I make lifelong friends, but also I established a support network that encourages me on our journey to promote an inclusive and diverse global community.

- Lauren Dibbon



The 2019 week-long Youth Leadership Forum on Diversity & Inclusion allowed dynamic youth from all around Canada to learn about societal challenges and opportunities.

65 ATTENDEES

16 Average Age

43% Part of the LGBT+ community

15% **83%** Non-binary

13 Different cultural or racial backgrounds

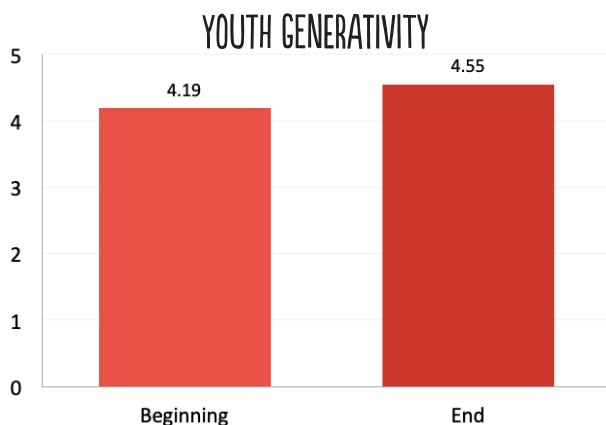
12 Different languages

The theme "Diversity" was well represented within the forum's participants.

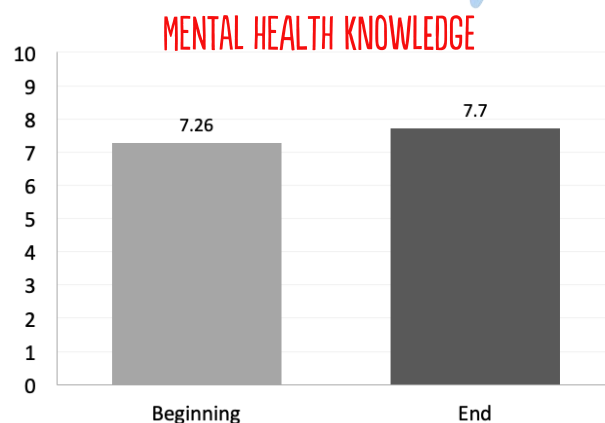
Through mentorship, volunteering, and working together, participants were able to find personal and creative solutions to make a difference in their community.

To measure the success of this forum, we surveyed youth at the beginning and at the end of the week about their mental health, their networking, problem solving and critical thinking skills, and we asked about their appreciation of the week.

MENTAL WELLNESS



Youth generativity (or the desire to leave a legacy for future generations) increased with the forum.



Attendees' knowledge about mental health issues and resources also increased with the forum.

The Diversity and Inclusion Forum allowed to...

- ☒ Open the dialogue about mental health issues and challenges, and how to address the stigma surrounding this topic.
- ☒ Help youth identify how they can have a positive impact on future generations.

NETWORKING SKILLS

Includes finding and accessing resources, building relationships, and being engaged in one's community.

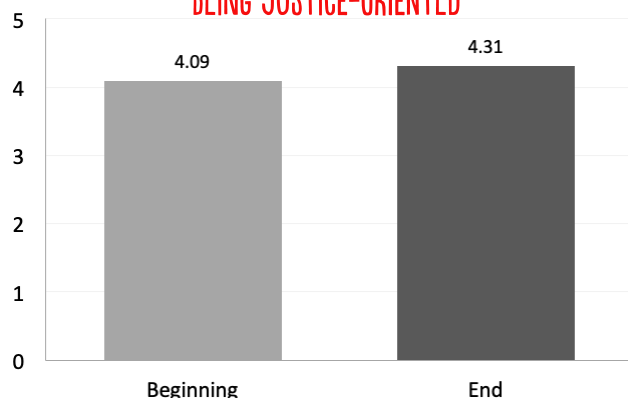
- In general, attendees reported knowing about the main resources in their community and feeling comfortable seeking more information when they need it. These stayed consistent throughout the forum.
- The fact that youth were not in their respective communities might have impacted the ability to capture concrete changes.

Nonetheless, the Diversity & Inclusion Forum strengthened these networking skills.

"I learned that communities as a whole can support those in need in many different ways, from donating food to volunteering. While I knew that before, I certainly didn't see the scale of the impact."

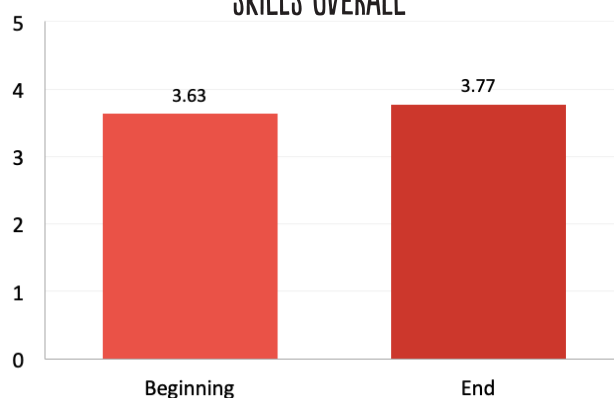
PROBLEM SOLVING & CRITICAL THINKING

BEING JUSTICE-ORIENTED



Although already high at the beginning, participants reported being even more justice-oriented after the forum.

SKILLS OVERALL



Overall, there was an increase in problem solving and critical thinking skills with the forum.

The Diversity and Inclusion Forum...

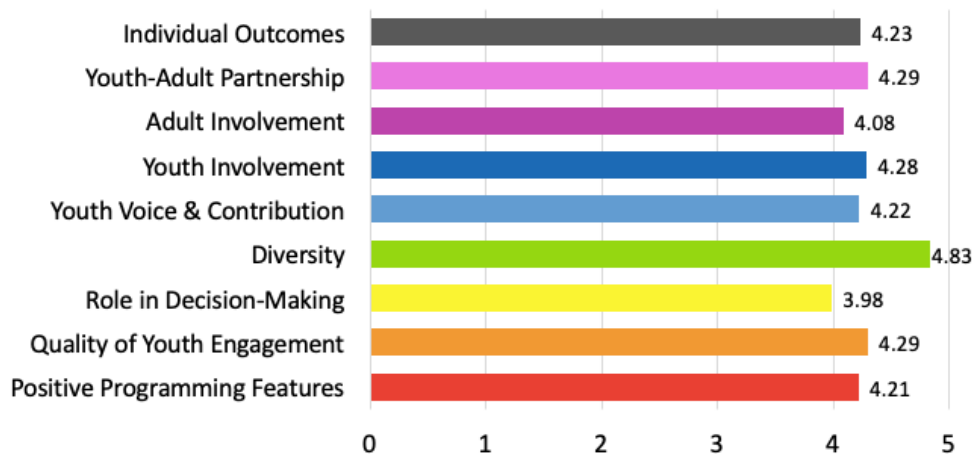
- ☒ Was eye opening regarding the different injustices in Canada, reinforcing the desire for justice and inclusion.
- ☒ Encouraged youth to stand up and gave them potential strategies to address these issues.

FORUM EVALUATION

OVERALL SATISFACTION

4.3/5

SATISFACTION OF THE KEY FEATURES



The Diversity and Inclusion Forum possessed many key features to engage youth and to allow them to thrive, learn, and create long lasting bonds with other youth all around the country.

HIGHLIGHTS

ACTIVITIES



"[I learned] a lot about homelessness and the effects on youth. Also about the accommodations for immigrants & human trafficking recoveries."
 "The highlight was the mosque visit."

1ST OF JULY



"[My highlight was] Canada day tour and fireworks show. I felt proud to be Canadian."

MEETING NEW PEOPLE



"[My highlight was] meeting people from all across Canada and hearing their opinions."
 "[My highlight was] the community of incredible friends I made."

FORUM IN GENERAL



"This was the most amazing and life-changing opportunity ever."



ALUMNI / NEXT STEPS

Experiences Canada is committed to inspiring youth to build on their travel experience and connect with other youth that share their passion and interest in exploring our country. We operate alumni pages on Instagram (@EC_alumni_anciens participants) and Facebook (Experiences Canada Alumni / Anciens Participants) where youth can share photos and reflections from their experience, and keep in touch with each other. We also use those pages to post information about other youth opportunities available, some offered by Experiences Canada, and some offered by other youth organizations. We encourage you to sign up and check the space regularly so you can continue to explore what this country has to offer in ways you may never have imagined!

Youth looking to stay involved in Experiences Canada may wish to consider applying to become part of our National Youth Advisory Committee. Each year Experiences Canada invites 12-18 youth from across Canada to serve on its advisory committee. They meet in Ottawa for a weekend in November to talk about their ideas for youth travel and exchanges with the Board of Directors and set their plan for supporting the organization through volunteer projects throughout the year. The advisory committee is a great way to develop your leadership and advocacy skills and gain valuable training and experience making presentations, advocating for projects, and learning about how youth programs are developed.

In June 2020, Experiences Canada is presenting the second Youth Leadership Forum on the topic of reconciliation. 64 youth, half of whom will be Indigenous will be selected to participate in a week-long program that explores First Nation, Inuit and Metis history, culture, and rights, and involves them in learning and discussion about the many challenging paths toward reconciliation. Youth can apply via our website answering the question "what does reconciliation mean to you" using whatever medium they choose: art, music, performance, written or spoken word.



Experiences Canada is also interested in understanding the longer impact of youth travel and exchange experiences. We are always looking for alumni interested in keeping in touch with us through occasional surveys and updates to hear your thoughts on issues, ideas, as well as program impact. We are happy to hear from you at any time so feel free to connect via our social media pages, or drop us an email at info@experiencescanada.ca



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32 Indigenous youth and 32 non-indigenous youth between the ages of 14-18 will be selected from across Canada, to travel to Winnipeg for a week-long program to develop their knowledge and foster greater dialogue and understanding among non-Indigenous and Indigenous young people about indigenous history, culture, and the path forward to Reconciliation.

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RBC Future Launch

Empowering the youth of today for the jobs of tomorrow.

