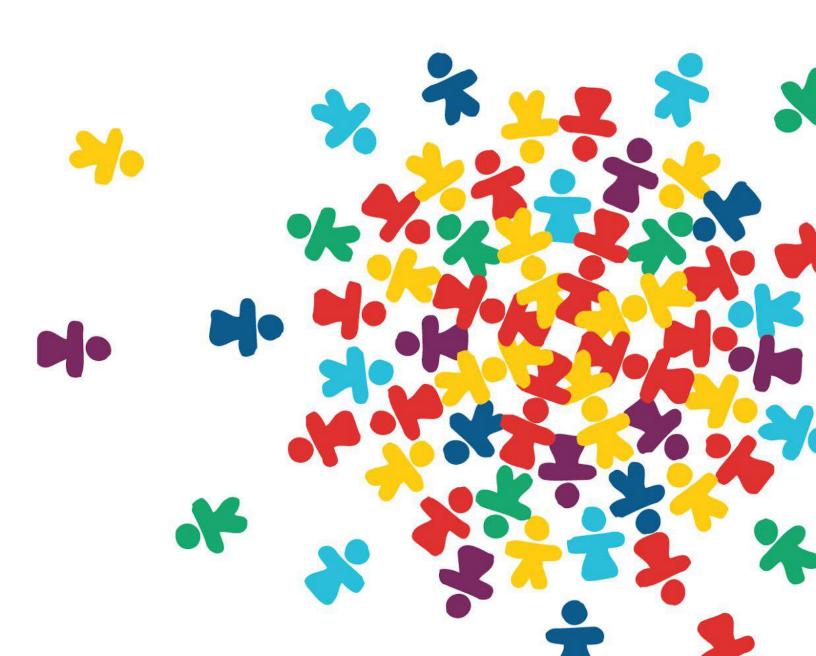
# 2016 Global Symposium on Overcoming Social Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness

# FINAL OUTCOME REPORT





The Samuel Family Foundation would like to acknowledge that the 2016 Global Symposium on Overcoming Social Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness hosted by McGill University occured on the traditional territory of the Kanien'keha:ka, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange among peoples. With our gathering, we recognize and respect the Kanien'keha:ka as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of this territory that we had the privilege of connecting on during this event.



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## **Executive Summary**

Over a hundred leading thinkers, activists and community leaders from over 23 countries gathered in Montreal in October 2016 to develop a shared perspective on the importance of social connectedness in community-driven change and development.

From remote regions of Nunavut, to the Maasai homelands of East Africa, participants came together as both teachers and learners to develop relationships and to share insights, experience and strategies to overcome social isolation and accelerate a global movement of unity and inclusiveness.

Based on the principles of respect, reciprocity and recognition, participants engaged in three days of collaborative dialogue which drew together lived experience, traditional Indigenous knowledge, academic research and practice. Perspectives synthesized from Indigenous youth and elders, McGill students, and people within government and civil society came together to connect and support the diverse range of projects and challenges from the communities represented at the Symposium.



Aiming to bridge academic research and community practice, we examined how stories are central to our understanding of the world, and how research needs to be made more compatible, accessible and valuable to the communities with whom it is generated. We learned that our relationships are the greatest overall predictor of our health and that the outcomes of research need to be communicated through art and stories in order to reach beyond the ivory tower often associated with the academy.

The Symposium helped to reveal and strengthen the commonalities between Indigenous worldviews across Canada and around the world. It provided the opportunity to align and define a common vocabulary, to advance each other's' projects through collaboration and to celebrate the diversity and creativity across the network of participants.

Challenging perspectives were presented to illustrate concepts we may not be familiar with and to inform our practice and work.



#### These included:

- That many 'States' are an imposed idea, responsible for advancing a dangerous and hurtful commodifying culture,
- How legislation and policy have been used as a tool of the State to intentionally isolate, divide and remove the connection of peoples from their lands and resources
- 'Poverty' as a foreign concept for peoples who see the Earth as a sacred provider of all the things we need in order to survive on this planet.

Through an appreciation and honoring of the inter-connectedness of all peoples and the natural world, we examined effective, sustainable and successful strategies to tackle our shared global goals such as those expressed through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Social isolation is a critical dimension which lies at the intersections of key challenges relating to poverty, health and community resilience, either causing or reinforcing some of the most pervasive aspects of development challenges.

Education is both an essential aspect to overcoming isolation but also one requiring particular focus, care and respect for cultural affirmation, community capacity and enabling self-determination.

During the Symposium participants confirmed that strategies embedded in listening, awareness and solidarity are the most effective methods for building cohesion and connection in and across our communities. We must respond to challenges and build social connectedness on many levels and also work from a spirit of equity to ensure we rebuild and balance in a way that allows every individual to achieve their greatest potential.



### **Opening Remarks**

"Hand in hand you can accomplish many things. As individuals you're getting nowhere. Your voice is there but no one is listening."

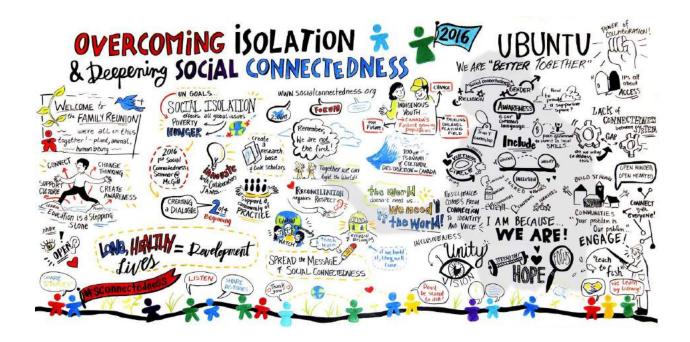
Alex Sonny Diabo, Elder, Kahnawake Mohawk First Nation

Sage smoke slowly graces the room, cleansing our minds, bodies and spirits in preparation for the work to come. As participants come up, one by one, they clear their eyes, ears, minds and hearts, opening up and walking away with a greater sense of clarity, ready to connect in a safe, open space.

Beginning with a reminder of our connection to land and nature, our ancestors and future generations, this year's Global Symposium on Overcoming Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness started with the intention to overcome isolation in all its forms. The focus was to build



upon the progress made from the last gathering, specifically to harness the power of collaboration in the hope of manifesting a willingness to share, and ultimately to contribute to a world characterized by connectedness.





### **Celebrating Progress**



Kim Samuel opened the 2016 Global Symposium first by celebrating progress and also by setting key objectives and aspirations to deepen and strengthen the global movement.

"Two years ago, we came together to share perspectives, stories and to build understanding. We left resolved to build together a global movement on social connectedness... Conversations about how we can work together to better explain, confront, advocate around and ultimately overcome the problem of social isolation." Kim Samuel

The movement has stayed true to commitments defined at the last gathering in 2014, making enormous strides towards overcoming social isolation and deepening social connectedness.

An online platform <a href="www.socialconnectedness.org">www.socialconnectedness.org</a> was established in 2014. It hosts highlights from the last symposium, over 60 original articles, resources and information about how to join the movement. This follows through on the commitment of, "Creating safe places for dialogue and providing a voice for those experiencing social isolation as the first step to building connectedness through new online resources and dedicated forums." The website has attracted over 22,000 individual users from over 119 countries as the outreach of this movement continues to grow.



Furthermore, the conversation around fostering social connectedness is accelerating on Twitter. This growth has seen over 3500 engaged followers and more than 2000 tweets sharing resources, articles and ideas, connecting a solid base of thought leaders and community workers to engage and support one another in this work.



In 2014 we also committed, "to support and encourage academic involvement and the development of a solid research base" and that "we would link research to practice to advance outcomes supporting social connectedness." Through a partnership with McGill University, young scholars are participating in the first ever seminar in social connectedness in international development, exposing them to the real impact of isolation and strategies to overcome it. Through this engagement and as Professor of Practice at McGill, Kim has also taken the lessons of social connectedness to a broad range of important policy forums including a recent engagement with The Caribbean Development Bank.

This reconvening of partners in the movement is part of the commitment, "to supporting the development of a community of practice to advance specific actions for both program design and policy development



shaped by an understanding of social isolation and directly contributing to deepening social connectedness."

These actions can be seen through a number of initiatives spearheaded by partner organizations. From connecting communities in the remote north through <u>TakingITGlobal's Connected North program</u>, to <u>Synergos South Africa</u> building understanding of traditional models of care, family and belonging in partnership with Indigenous communities, to the Special Olympics expanding its network of <u>Unified Champion Schools</u>, this community of practice is rapidly building strength and reach.

As the community of practice moves forward, so does the importance of opening a new dialogue and inviting new partners to share in the common goal of social overcoming isolation and deepening social connectedness. In fact, new dialogues are already taking place, "tackling issues including reconciliation with Indigenous communities here in Canada, disability rights, refugees, and the need to build sustainability and to build for belonging in our growing urban environments."





### **Insights from Opening Ceremony**

- Issues surrounding social isolation are not reserved for the international arena or developing societies, Sonia Laszlo, Director of McGill University's Institute for the Study of International Development mentioned. She acknowledges the gathering as an opportunity to, "collectively reflect on how social isolation can be a thing of the past."
- "We have started a conversation. But outside of these walls, social isolation is still not widely understood or readily identified." Kim Samuel
- "The knowledge we have—whether from firsthand experience or from our work—is the foundational knowledge for this area of study." Kim Samuel
- Paige Isaac from Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nations and Coordinator of the First Peoples' House reminds us of the isolating effects post-secondary institutions can have on Indigenous students. "There is no one size fits all. When you think about universities and these institutions they weren't built for Indigenous people so we need to find ways to build more opportunities for people to feel connected and be involved in how that is done. How those decisions are being made."
- Social connectedness is a theme that is relevant across all of the Sustainable Development Goals.
   "Social isolation is not only driven by the existential crises of our era. Social isolation drives them." Kim Samuel
- Connecting to and acknowledging the land is vital in conversations surrounding inclusion. "What
  does man need in order to survive? Everything. Everything from the atomic particle level up.
  Nothing in the world needs me for survival, yet I need everything for my survival." Joseph
  Boyden, Author.





"A tsunami hit Canada for 140 years. It rolled up and drowned communities and swept away children...It has finally stopped. The tsunami has reached its peak." Joseph Boyden, Author

At the beginning of the 2016 Global Symposium, Kim Samuel pointed to the power in truth and reconciliation commissions around the world. With this recognition, she identified a cross-cutting phrase that connected conversations throughout the Symposium, "Overcoming social isolation is always done with and not for."

This key piece to the movement was restated by several other participants with the notion that rather than trying to fix injustices from the past, one must ask people what they need and listen. Joseph Boyden stated, "What we are realizing is that if we want true reconciliation in our country, we must begin to understand how the other, the Indigenous person, sees the world." He urges each and everyone of us to read the <u>94 Calls to Action</u> from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and contribute to one of them.



"Embrace this circle of trust in this safe loving place and make the most of it." Kim Samuel



Photo: Youth Orientation Session

It was very important to include and represent youth voices during the 2016 Global Symposium. Indigenous youth are a rapidly growing population in Canada. Yet, they face a loss of heritage and culture, high suicide risk as well as a lack of resources.

John Sawyer, an Indigenous Elder, stated that, "When we talk about the young kids in our life we talk about connecting, when you watch kids play they don't have barriers or walls, they play with everybody. If adults want to learn, they need to watch children. When did we stop watching, learning?" When looking at inclusion and connectedness it is crucial to incorporate youth voices to fully understand what these concepts look like within our communities.





### **Practicing the Soulcraft of Inclusion**

"We need to teach the soulcraft of inclusion - with training or practice we can learn it."

Tim Shriver, Chairman, Special Olympics International

According to Tim Shriver, people would rather live in a more inclusive world but are prone to misunderstanding each other. "We isolate what we feel we don't understand and we don't include it... We don't just isolate to make someone feel bad, we isolate to destroy them. This is a violent act that starts from simple stigma, judgement and stereotyping."



Speaking from his experience as Chair of Special Olympics International as well as his own family history, Shriver proposes thinking about the "soulcraft of inclusion" which includes bringing everyone's gifts to the table. This outlook redefines what it means to win and incorporates the head, heart and action into inclusion.

This perspective first takes a bit of self-reflection. Ask yourself. "What makes you feel fully alive?"

For Georgina Maton, a Special Olympian, she feels fully alive riding a horse. "It gives a sense of freedom. My life is hard and the horse doesn't judge me." For Kim Samuel, teaching makes her feel fully alive.

Though what makes us feel fully alive may differ, it is important to broaden the definition of inclusion to broaden what it means to matter.



One of the main challenges of creating a movement is being mindful of what people are being invited into. "We are including people into what? Is this so people with intellectual disabilities can be like us? Like normal people?" asks Tim Shriver. It is important to be clear about what people are being included into. Furthermore, it is important to give space for people living in isolation to participate and redefine what it means to belong. These steps will assist with leaving space for people of all backgrounds to lead the movement, tell their stories and unlock their own capacities for what inclusion looks like.



#### How to practice the soulcraft of inclusion?

#### Head

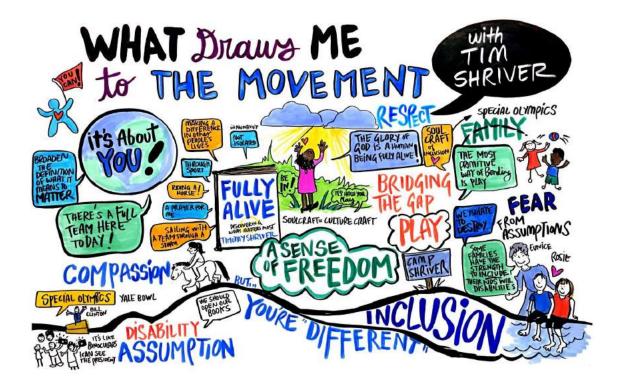
- Think about political, economic, physical, social, educational and spiritual dimensions when fighting against serious injustices
- Clarify real and lasting "results"
- Make benefits of joining the movement clear

#### Heart

- Experiences that create social connection for participants
- Psychic return: deep and lasting impact on personal meaning making and positive emotion. "Every human being is beautiful."
- Being a part of "something bigger"

#### Action

- Empower people who see a role for themselves in the movement.
- Make the benefits clear "What happens when we get this done?
- Stories. Tell great stories. Experiences that are hands-on, fun, clear, and universally appealing
- Roles for diverse skill sets and age groups
- Don't tell people what to do, create space for them to find their own place.





#### **Self-reflection on the Movement**



"Let us ask ourselves: Where is my commitment? What will be my difference? What will be my impact? How do we want to be remembered?"

Dikembe Mutombo NBA AllStar, Dikembe Mutombo Foundation (DRC)



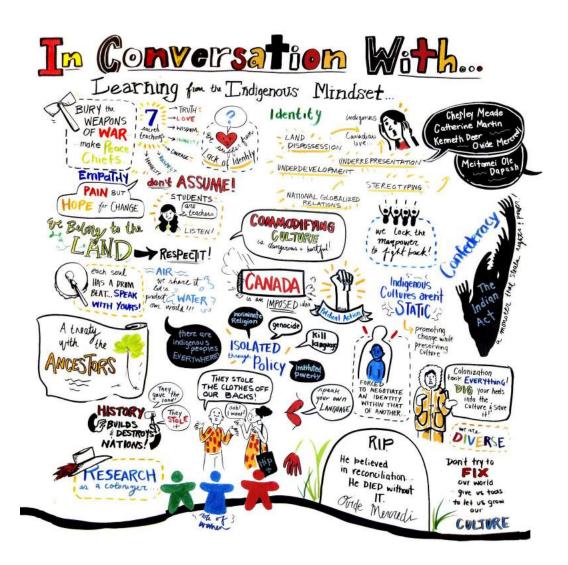


When thinking about expanding the movement to overcome social isolation and deepen social connectedness, NBA AllStar Dikembe Mutombo challenges us to expand our definition of society to include each individual. In a rapidly globalizing world, it is easy to get confused and forget to self-reflect on our responsibility to society. He urges people to think about this responsibility and commit to using their skills and knowledge to make the world more socially connected. "Sharing your knowledge, your money, your time and skills is love," he says, encouraging us to live life to the fullest.

"It is in your hands, my friends, to make the world a better place, go and make a change, stop living in an isolated world, because we need you."



### Perspectives on an Indigenous Worldview







Chelsea Meade, Indigenous youth/ Canadian Roots Exchange

- Expand the notion of family to include neighbours. Remind everyone to come together and listen to each other.
- Difficult conversations are essential to create change.
- "Leading with empathy and love is more effective than leading with sympathy and fear"
- "I am emotional because as Indigenous people, we see each other as brothers and sisters. When I see pain, I want to help, but I can only provide support and resources."



Kenneth Deer, International Indigenous Rights Activist

• "We aren't culture under glass. Anthropologists arrived and decided Indigenous culture can never change. We aren't static. We grow and learn."



- A strong sense of nationalism and identity creates resilience, but it doesn't mean culture cannot change.
- "We have learned to bend, not break."
- Keeping core values is important while adapting to a changing environment
- Understand that ingrained, institutionalized racism exists.

Catherine Martin, Mi'kmaq, Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies, Mount Saint Vincent University

- The concept of ownership is a foreign concept. People don't own the land, rather, they belong to it.
- "Every decision we make we consider the past 7 generations and the 7 generations ahead."
- "We are aware of the history, but how do we move forward as people? Meet people where they are at and help people understand the heartbeat of the land."

Meitamei Dapash, Founder and Co-Director, Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition

- A lack of education has disadvantaged Maasai, leading to the theft of land due to illiteracy.
- A key element to survival is education, so that people can defend themselves against language they do not understand.
- Research can be a strong tool in comparing history to the knowledge of elders.
- "I'm a historian but there's one thing I know about history, it is the most helpful but it can be a very destructive thing. History creates nations, defines people, identifies boundaries."
- Historical accounts are influenced by colonization, Indigenous people need to reclaim their own narratives.
- "So much has been written and spoken about us. Every account about ourselves has been colonized. It's time we define ourselves"
- Isolation is a creation of national policies, in Maasai communities, isolation does not exist.
- "The way our traditional systems are set up is that every one of the people is recognized and appreciated in the community. If you have a single child, the child belongs to the community. If you have a deformity, we are not going to put you in the closet or hide you. You are taken care of in community."







Chief Ovide Mercredi, Indigenous leader, Misipawistik Cree Nation

- There are commonalities in the struggles Indigenous peoples face around the world including land dispossession, underdevelopment, underrepresentation, national globalized relations and stereotyping
- The creation of Canada was done without the presence of Indigenous peoples
- According to Chief Mercredi, one of the greatest sources of isolation in Canada is The Indian Act because it denies Indigenous people self-rule.
- History contributes to poverty, people are not inherently poor.
- Poverty is a consequence of colonization.
- The deep collective trauma resulting from isolation can lead to the oppression of community members. "When you oppress people so much the tendency is to oppress others in the community."
- Reconciliation involves returning to Indigenous spiritual values and belief systems as well as creating political bodies to represent people.
- "When I die, I want my stone to say, 'He believed in reconciliation, he died without it.""

During the 2016 Global Symposium's Indigenous Worldview Panel, the question of how can non-Indigenous people work better with Indigenous communities was raised. A common answer amongst the panel was that the solution to a strong partnership involves not trying to fix things but rather to listen and offer support and resources. This speaks to Kim Samuel's statement of overcoming social isolation with and not for communities.

With this outlook of "with, not for" it is important to let Indigenous people find solutions within their communities and to be able to share these with other communities. It is crucial to recognize how diverse nations are and that each community has a voice to be heard. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge

that reconciliation is a long process; a process that everyone must be a part of. Two of the panelists spoke of this process by addressing the concept of "being an ally". Catherine Martin stated that "An ally is a support, not a person in control. A colonized approach to fixing means taking, digging, destroying and changing who we are. Instead try and help us with languages....this gives us connection to ancestors and way of life...We are isolated without ancestors."





Chelsea Meade commented that reconciliation "Is truly about being part of a community. When I hear the word ally, it's distancing." These differing viewpoints on the term 'allyship' bring to light the importance of language and the intent of how it is used in building connectedness. Kenneth Deer spoke to this by stating, "Social connection can be destroyed by the words we use with each other. Is the intent to keep distance or find closeness?"



During the Indigenous Worldview Panel, former National Chief Ovide Mercredi turns to Maasai leader Meitamei Dapash and takes his notebook. Ovide Mercredi stated, "Meitamei spoke like a national chief... Anything he said I could have said."



## The Language of Connectedness

With diverse experiences, histories and beliefs, it can be a challenge to agree upon common definitions. From the differences between equality and equity to the South African understanding of reciprocity and belonging, using a collaborative process, participants honoured the collective wisdom and experience of all people present, taking advantage of the opportunity to define the key terms of the movement.





#### From Research to Practice

## FROM RESEARCH & PRACTICE



How can an Indigenous worldview be incorporated into research design? Is it possible to decolonize research? How can findings be made relevant to a diverse range of stakeholders?

Experts from a diverse range of backgrounds provided insight on how to conduct ethical, relevant research considering communities first.







Dr. William Alford, Harvard University Chair, Law School Project on Disability; Vice Dean for the Graduate Program and International Legal Studies

#### "Research and engagement must be interwoven so each informs the other."

- Provide self-advocacy training to people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities so that they can speak about their own struggles.
- Demystify policies and commitments through creating publications and guides with accessible language so that people understand what their representatives and governments have agreed to.

John Hammock, Co-Founder and Research Associate, Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford

# "Do you want to be a prophet or an insider? Insiders need to use evidence to create change"

- Poverty is multidimensional, not just related to income, i.e. <u>Bhutan's</u>
   <u>Gross National Happiness Index</u>
- Multidimensional poverty measures can help to better target social programs, monitor the effectiveness of policies over time and improve policy design.
- How can we globally connect policymakers?
- Solid academics and evidence are essential in showing policymakers the strength of your positions.
- Find champions and partners.
- Be confident in what you are saying and have clear positions.







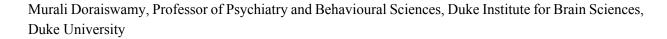
- Be prepared to provide counter arguments to your opponents. Invite them into the conversation. It will only make your position stronger.
- One size doesn't fit all. Build on local initiatives.
- Advocacy needs to be clear, concise and strong.
- Fill a perceived need by politicians and decision makers.
- Think about global, national and local context and what people want to see.

#### Andrea Breen

University of Guelph, Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

"There is research on problems that get kids into trouble, but no research looking at what helps youth turn their lives around."

- Communities need to allow space for youth to sculpt a new story for themselves. This can help to change lives around and overcome stigma that comes with violence. "When someone is trying to change, community has to recognize the change."
- Question your role as a researcher. Think about what is valuable and meaningful to the community, with the community.
- Indigenous research methodologies can be challenging for
  Western researchers because they focus on connections to the land and ceremony rather than
  being structured by time. To decolonize research, understand that storytelling norms vary
  between cultures. Not all stories have a beginning, middle and end. Not all stories are written
  down, particularly in cultures that are rooted in oral communication.
- Think of research as a ceremony and consider the relationships you build as harmonious to the ceremony.
- Research shouldn't belong to people in universities. Invite communities to be co-authors, legitimizing their voices and citizen research.
- "Change our sense of what valuable research products are, create things that are beautiful."



"Health is affected at every stage in your life by the quality, not quantity of relationships you have"





- Social influences impact the development of children's brains.
   Children that grow up in homes have better formed brains than those who grew up in an institutionalized environment
- There is a high economic return on non-cognitive skills such as social and emotional skills that come through relationships. According to <u>James Heckman</u> a leader in the field of human capital policy, for every dollar spent on developing these skills through relevant programs, there is a \$8.70 return over the course of a person's lifetime.
- Technology can play a role in overcoming isolation The Hawn Foundation's <u>MINDUP</u> application is a tool that provides mindfulness training to children, developing cognitive, social and emotional skills.
- Modern technology can play an isolating role but can also play a role in building connection.



**Gabe Hughes,** Mixed heritage Wampanoag Scholar and drummer, DPhil candidate, Wadham College, University of Oxford

# "Our communities have been researched to death and a lot of that research has created and perpetuated harmful 'facts'"

- We need to think about how to protect tradition and culture
- Research can be humanized by recognition of Indigenous research protocol
- The biggest "R" is relationships. Build ongoing relationships with people being studied.
- "We need to think about the intent of research and its impact research should build relationships"
- Be willing and open to being challenged. Respect expertise and perspectives within communities, even when it doesn't support the intended research.
- "There are things we are not supposed to know or not ready to know"
- "Reciprocity means research should return knowledge to its source"
- There is an idea that giving back to a community will delegitimize data collected but in order to decolonize education, reciprocity and sustained relationships should be key in research design.
- See the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession document from First Nations Information Governance Centre





## **Modelling Connectedness**



What are the relationships between poverty, community, resilience and community? How can we model connectedness?



Team 10, presented by Gabe Hughes, DPhil candidate, Wadham College, University of Oxford

"The links between education and building resilient and sustainable communities requires not just giving ideas or facts, but increasing agency. Individual needs, such as culture or different abilities, must be addressed. How can we step out of the classic way of understanding education? How can technology and other resources form new pathways to act and inspire new ways of thinking? Teachers can be mentors, rather than imposing knowledge, and support youth through the learning process."





Team 14, presented by Lois Suluk-Locke Connected North Partner School Support Coordinator, Arviat, Nunavut

"Community to us is the family, the connectedness, we are all happy in them. This is the colour of the medicine wheel which presents our own culture, we are rich in our own culture. When we talked about poverty, poverty is nowhere on this, it is a measure of a foreign concept. Resiliency is a community happy within itself defined by their own terms. The resources we use are from nature, it provides for us. Education would be best delivered to the younger generation if we deliver it in our own time. Trying to educate a young person using a foreign language, like english, it will not sink in. If we use our own mother tongue it will last longer."





Team 7 model, presented by John Sawyer, Indigenous Elder

"We talk about all the things connected in education. From an aboriginal perspective, education took all these things out of us. We need to put in the identity of the history we come from. when we include everyone we all become one. When you leave the community to get an education remember why you left. Remember your gifts. When giving back to your community you are giving a part of you. Why we used the braid and why we tied it all together is because once you bring all these things into your education you put a tie on it and join the threads of community, identity and education."



## Additional Insights

- The concept of listening should be at the heart of everything we do. It is important not to dictate to communities but to suggest, guide and support.
- Trust is earned but never demanded.
- Respect for other people's opinions is very important. For others going into communities, listen.
- Education can be disempowering, as well as empowering.
- Feedback to communities as well as work must benefit and include the people you are working with.



- Thinking about education, there is also a dark side. To create more inclusive education and step
  out of rigid boxes that define success we must consider whose truths are being taught and whose
  voices are being represented.
- Place based education can provide culturally grounded teaching and learning from the ground up.



### Creativity and Artistic Reflections on Belonging



During the 2016 Symposium on Overcoming Social Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness, TakingITGlobal in partnership with the Samuel Family Foundation and McGill University, hosted "An evening of creativity and artistic reflections on belonging". This evening represented the idea that art has the ability to build bridges and create a sense of connection as art has the power to connect and amplify a diversity of voices.

The movement toward overcoming isolation and fostering social connectedness has always viewed art and creativity as a tool for cultivating a sense of belonging. In a study done by students at York University, Let's Talk Art: A study of art and belonging, research showed that there is a high correlation between creating art and feelings of belonging and inclusion, especially in youth. Through creativity people are able to share their thoughts and feelings with others, which contributes to feelings of connectedness and acceptance.

The night brought together people from diverse backgrounds to share in enjoying various forms of artistic expression that encouraged feelings of belonging and inclusion. The room came together to contribute to creating a space in which every individual felt a sense of kinship. The night featured artists from Toronto and Montreal in a variety of mediums including spoken word, photography, live graffiti, dance and music that uniquely spoke to a variety of issues surrounding connection and belonging.



Starting off with poetry and spoken word that focused on overcoming inequalities and promoting justice across Indigenous and black communities, the room was brought together in a way that fostered a sense of understanding and compassion.

Along the walls of the space the room was filled with visual representations of what belonging looks like to youth across the globe. Pictures featured everything from abstract paintings to photography, familial connections to collective women's movements. Regardless of the medium or group, one message was



clear – when we come together, we are stronger and it is those connections that strengthen resiliency across all communities.

As the night progressed, social connection within and across communities was further explored through the power of movement. Four Indigenous dancers, two women and two men, shared their culture and history with those in attendance. Each dancer performed a unique dance, representing the communities they belong to, and giving others a chance to experience inclusion and explore a sense of community in that moment.

The night came to a close with the world's first hip-hop brass band, Urban Science Brass Band. Marching and weaving through the crowd, the band was able to bring everyone together in movement and dance leaving the entire audience in awe.

Art is the one thing that levels the playing field. In art, there is a humanness that refuses to acknowledge titles, backgrounds, or difference. It allows people to live in a moment that exists only in a way that those who are enjoying it allow it to





exist. There are no inherent borders or boundaries. For a moment, the audience is able to transcend all barriers and the artists are able to stimulate a lasting emotional response. Through this experience people are able to connect and build bridges which bring people together - fostering mutual understanding and acceptance.

"If we think we can all agree that we need a better world, a more just world, why is it that we are not using the one language that has consistently showed us that we can break down barriers, that can we can reach people?

What I need to say to the planners of the world, the governments, the strategists is, 'You have treated the arts as the cherry on the cake. It needs to be the yeast"

- Mallika Sarabhai, Dance to Change the World



### **Town Hall: Exploring Social Connectedness in Current Affairs**



Media can play an incredibly polarizing role in society, pitting one group of people against another, scapegoating and stereotyping people into a pit of isolation. Rather than focussing on extreme points of view, building social connectedness requires a holistic sense of understanding and willingness to listen. From the root causes of muslim extremism to suicide in Indigenous communities, to the importance of connecting youth with the land, Matthew Bishop, Senior Editor at The Economist facilitated an evening of stories and sharing, creating a global narrative of connectedness.

Expressing her passion for working with youth in the muslim community, Rehmah Kasule, the founder of CEDA International in Uganda shared insights on the effects social isolation can have on these youth in her country. Kasule explained how youth are often labelled as lazy by adults, but points to a deeper social problem. "The education in Uganda doesn't empower youth to be creative, there are no jobs, and what happens specifically in the muslim community where I work is that youth are being put into violent extremism. When you talk to them, they are good people, but they are called criminals and outlaws. All the bad names come to them. So they think, if they call us that, let that be our reality." Kasule feels that overcoming isolation means rethinking the labels we give to these youth and providing them with education and economic empowerment. "The effects of youth unemployment are big, if we don't do anything about it, it's a global challenge." Rehmah Kasule shared an African proverb that speaks to the



importance of connectedness and what this means for all, "The night sky is never lit by one bright star, it is lit by billions of stars that come together. If you walk alone, you go very fast. With others with you, you go very far."

An overarching theme across the symposium has been thinking about the effects of the residential school system in Canada, and how to create a path forward in a time of reconciliation. During the Town Hall, Laurie Robinson, Indigenous Advisor to the Ontario Ministry of Colleges, Training and Universities shared her thoughts and experience as a young Indigenous person, answering questions such as: How can real progress be made on historic injustices faced by Indigenous people in Canada? How can pathways be created for First Nation's youth?

Acknowledging issues such as poverty, violence and suicide, Laurie Robinson focussed on her current opportunity as an advisor to create a meaningful path forward that honours her ancestors, family and future generations. "As an Indigenous person in that role, I am called to speak for all Indigenous people who lived, ever live and live right now. It is quite the responsibility but an important one. When those moments come, you really do have to stand up and speak for your



family, speak for yourself, and speak for your community." Referencing her mother's teachings, Laurie feels it will take a lot of love and recognition, creating connections with youth and spending time charging forward through education. "We need youth to attend institutions, but we need to do it together. We are going to make mistakes and have some slips, but boy, if we don't try, we already have an idea of the costs of not trying."

The issue of suicide amongst Indigenous youth is pervasive and complex. Boredom, isolation, mental health challenges and the effects of colonization are some of many contributing factors to youth losing hope in some of these communities. Ariel Tweto, Co-Founder of Popping Bubbles, expressed her joy at meeting people from around the world that faced the same problems as seen in her village in Alaska. "It's comforting to know other people are experiencing the same problems as my people. I feel I have so much more to offer to the kids and people in my village. I feel like I can share your message." Popping Bubbles brings motivational speakers to engage youth in remote villages with the intention of getting people excited to live. "People would be so much happier and present and excited about life is we popped each others' bubbles." She feels this strategy could help youth to understand their importance and role in contributing to the world. "You can live an amazing life, live it with purpose and make people happy."



To contextualize the difficulty in combating colonial attitudes in Canada, Lois Suluk-Locke, a Connected North Partner School Support Coordinator in Arviat, Nunavut brought up a recent article published on CBC in Canada that highlighted the experience of students in Cape Dorset who were threatened with suspension after speaking Inuktitut in class. For her, this story shows how a lack of understanding and respect for self-determination can have devastating, isolating effects on youth what are a continuation of assimilation policies towards Indigenous peoples in Canada. Moving forward, she feels it is essential to educate people on the importance of language and identity and the role that this plays in education. Lois Suluk-Locke declared, "A solution to this would be to educate the rest of the world that we are a culture, and that we have a basic right to speak our native tongue. We need to educate the rest of the world that it



is okay to be who you are no matter where you're from."

Stephen Kay is the Head of Education and Training at Dumfries House in Scotland. He shared his experience in helping people overcome isolation through facilitating training programs that reconnect children with nature. From providing access to complementary medicines and therapies general education, Dumfries House aims to build confidence and life skills in youth. He explained how the programs are based on harmony, and allow children to

experience a connection to the land. "The intention is showing where food comes from....they think it comes from a supermarket or out of a can." Stephen Kay explained how children participate in planting seeds, watching vegetables grow and transforming them into a soup. For him, the value of connecting to the land is harmonious with an Indigenous worldview. "From a country that is separated from what is happening in Canada, Africa and Australia, we are looking at a problem we can support in our own way."

While visiting over 12 institutions in Serbia, Shantha Rau Barriga, the Director of Human Rights Watch's Disability Rights Division, saw the effects of isolation first hand. "In one home, there were 30 children that had disabilities, confined in cribs all day long. They didn't go to school, there were no windows. There were eleven children with one caregiver." As Shanta continued walking around the institution, she came across a 7 year old boy who was confined to a room for the past 6 years, alone, due to fear and stigma surrounding his HIV positive status. "He didn't eat or play with other children because of fear he would infect them with HIV." One of her colleagues hugged him despite the warnings of nurses. The boy



didn't want to let go. Through a partnership with Kim Samuel, this boy's story along with the stories of other children were made public. This generated media attention and challenged the public's perception of children with disabilities. Now, the government has made a deinstitutionalization plan to help these children live dignified lives.

"Seeing the human voice, the humanity, is one way we are going to change people's' minds and at least get popular support. The reason I do it is to meet that 7 year old boy. When you hear their stories you know you have to do something about it. One of the ways is amplifying their voices and using evidence we have along with that person's experience to create change."

Julio Mutemba, the Country Director for REPSSI, a social services and child care organization in South Africa and East Africa feels that the most important thing we can do to overcome isolation is to build emotional intelligence. He calls on global leadership bodies to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the world and find solutions to things that may seem isolated to a particular country.



Julio Mutemba stated that, "One thing that makes the world hopeless is the understanding that the world works like a system. We try to define problems that happen in some way as a Syrian problem, a Nigerian problem. We don't understand this problem so we define it and attribute it to certain communities, however it isn't just a Syrian or Nigerian problem, it also affects us. When we see a problem happening somewhere, global leadership should be concerned of how to solve that problem before it bounces back and affects them."



## **Wear Your Identity**

Paint your skin, show your face Let your colors carve their place In this world, the disconnect can be daunting But in your dance I see an unmistakable sign: The winds are in our favour

Humble and kind lions
Your presence and your motion
is the revival of our memories
the beating heart of our ambitions
the promise to reveal our true selves

Dance my uncles, sing my sisters And inspire me to confess my strengths The vibrations under your feet reach the peaks of our mountains

Your bravery colored the night And your courage grazes the skies You are humble so let me tell you That as your wear your identity Our spirits soar and you inspire our youth to rise

Stand strong against discrimination make the walls of isolation tremble Unable to contain our love Together we can make it crumble

You are the leaders, shine the light
When our doubts and fear make us unsteady
Your colors help us hold strong to one truth
Our lives are twisted together likes vines
So let them circle around the stranger, the
foreigner, the other
You, and I, and him, will never be alone.



Rim Sabrina Sassi Researcher/Phd Candidate in Public communication Jeanne Sauvé Fellow International Peace Scholar



#### **Collaboration Jams**



"Let's focus today on dreaming together." Jennifer Corriero, Executive Director, TakingITGlobal

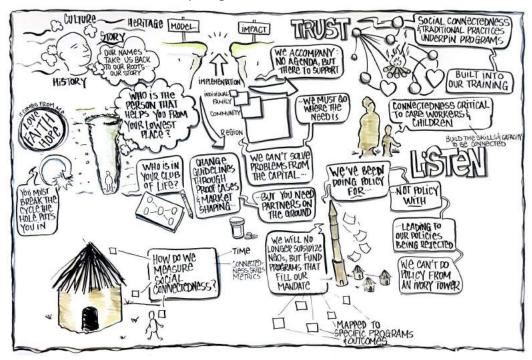
Moving from theory to practice, key partners pitched questions to participants, asking for help in overcoming challenges their organizations face during four collaboration jams. These jams represented an open, inclusive model for co-creation and collaborative problem-solving, designed to harness the collective wisdom, knowledge and lived experience of diverse stakeholders to further embedded the notion of working with and not for.





## **Community Wellbeing and Ending Poverty**

Collaboration Jam Lead Partners: Synergos and Partners in Health



**Key Question:** How can we integrate community knowledge and social connectedness into program design and policy implementation?

# **Insights**

- "We use community health workers to deepen trust in existing health system. Health workers "accompany" people in interacting with health system." Dr. Fernet Leandre, Partners in Health, Haiti
- Policies to meet the needs of children are strong in South Africa but implementation is a challenge. Policymakers need to actively listen and speak directly with communities to ensure better implementation.





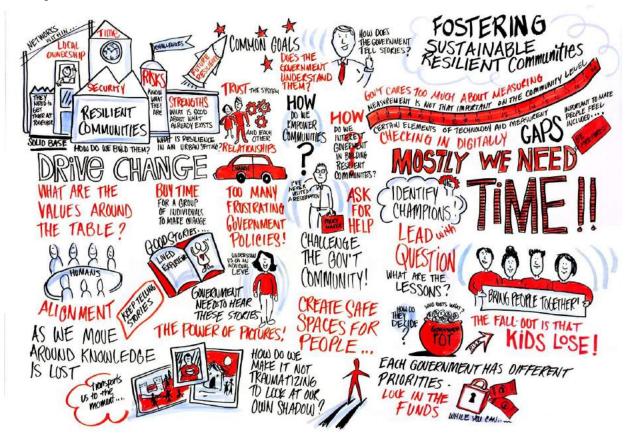


- Rather than complete or work alongside government, external actors such as NGOs should complement programs, model what they can be and then hand the best practices over to the government to build scale and sustainability
- Strengthening social connectedness and inclusion efforts can help to build trust in services provided by governments, an important accompaniment to improvements in infrastructure such as schools and health facilities.
- Both physical and psychosocial needs must be met to create more systemic change
- Community and popular trust is essential. Care workers can better meet community needs, particularly when they come from within the community.
- Support care workers with training and skills. This benefits the whole community.
- Self-knowledge and self-reflection can strengthen skills necessary for empathy and collaboration.
   Provide opportunities for all development workers to engage in building self-knowledge and awareness.
- Simple technology such as phone cameras can help development workers capture their own stories.
- Show government evidence of impact, including evidence of the benefits of participatory or bottom-up approaches.
- Work with governments to empower mid-level and frontline government workers.
- NGOs can leverage community connections by aligning with government priorities and policies.



#### **Fostering Sustainable, Resilient Communities**

Collaboration Jam Lead Partner: McGill University, Institute for the Study of International Development



**Key Questions:** Keeping in mind the UN Sustainable Development goals, how can we foster Sustainable Resilient Communities? How can we apply lessons from local Research to global policy? What role can social policy play in building resilient communities?

#### **Insights**

- Communities need resources to cope with challenges. Not just financial resources, but also social, natural, physical and human capital.
- Connectedness really matters in isolated communities and plays a direct role on building resilience.
- In Oliver T. Coomes experience in the Peruvian Amazon, he learned that change was the baseline in some communities. When he asked, "What changed," it made no sense to communities because everything changes.
- Pay attention to local networks. "These networks which may seem just like a soccer network can be incredibly important for building resilience. In the community and outside." For instance,



- community members used soccer games to trade seeds and information with each other, leading to greater resilience and food security.
- Enable and provide space for Indigenous innovation.
   For instance, in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, the people with the least financial resources did better because it allowed for the opportunity to create a new landholding regime in which everyone gets an equal part. This allowed people to build a more resilient community.
- Be aware of scapegoating and fear mongering. This awareness can create an openness to change. The more we understand, the more we can let go of harmful patterns.
- There is danger and opportunity in times of crisis, this opportunity can be leveraged to create social change.
- Use community members as periphery researchers.
- Song can play a role in building social connectedness in hardship. For instance, in Haiti, women on the periphery use song to begin and end meals. This gives them the ability to express difficult aspects of their lives while sharing love with and for their families.
- Give people an opportunity to define themselves by successes, not just challenges, through creative storytelling tools like <a href="Photovoice">Photovoice</a>.
- Share "lived experience" stories with governments.
- Building resilience takes time, strong relationships, community ownership, resources and security.





#### **Education and Social Connectedness**

Collaboration Jam Lead Partner: Special Olympics



**Key Question:** Special Olympics would like to set up 10,000 more Unified Schools by 2020. How can decision maker-makers and key influencers in the field of education be identified, then effectively motivated and mobilized to adopt inclusive strategies (policies and practices) in schools so that more inclusive and accepting school settings become the norm?

"It's not all about ticking boxes. The more you tick a box about one person about anything, you isolate them. We need to find a way to not tick boxes, but integrate them into the community. This is the change we need to get things moving in the right way."

Georgina Maton, Special Olympics UK athlete

#### **Insights**

- "If we want to take care of society, we need to take care of youth. Adults can learn a lot from youth. They play without boundaries." Elder John Sawyer
- Align to people's goals



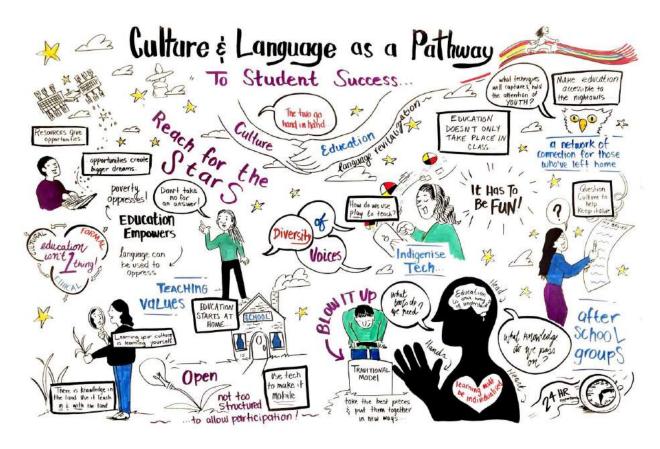
- There is a demand for socially engaged people to enter the workforce. Align with business owners and schools, build connections between them to create a demand for the core values of Unified Schools.
- Change happens at the grassroots because people care. Figure out how to get access to the people who this really matters to.
- Use a team approach to get people involved such as fans and people with disabilities but also school boards, guidance counsellors, students, educational leaders.
- Send regular newsletters.
- Labels are isolating. We need to stop pigeonholing people into where they belong.
- Speak teachers' language
- When people hear about Special Olympics, they think about sports. Infiltrate the education system. Not just providing education around sport, but education around inclusion.
- Focus on academic outcomes related to inclusion, research exists on this.
- How do we motivate people then to change without explaining to them what we are trying to change?
- Use more subversive methods such as a "drip process" where you gradually build trust in a group over time.
- Let young people tell stories in their own way.
- Talking about people is more personal than processes.
- We need to speak differently to educators. Document research done that shows the link between physical activity and cognitive development such as stress and anxiety reduction.
- Teachers are busy and underpaid. Make it easy for them through resources and tools.
- Find champions. Even the best resources are wasted without the right people to implement them.





## **Community Learning and Technology**

Collaboration Jam Lead Partner: TakingITGlobal



**Key Question:** "We are working within an education system that has done harm. What are the possibilities of how technology can be used not to right the wrongs, but to create new possibilities? What can respect look like?" Jennifer Corriero, Executive Director, TakingITGlobal

# **Insights**

"It is important that we create education initiatives that uphold culture and language because to our very core, that is who we are. Being proud of who we are is healthy. Being healthy means we perform better in everyday life. Someone who is proud of who they are and where they come from is confident, happy, and treats themselves and the world around them with respect.



Education brings a brighter future for our people, but culture and language bring healing. For settlers, learning a few words of the language whose territory you are on, it is a sign of respect. This is important in a time of reconciliation.

Technology connects us, and provides opportunity not otherwise available. It is important to connect each other just so we know that we are not alone, and also that people outside of the community care about us. It is pretty badass to be able to do a class lesson with a real doctor!

The potential in a program like Connected North is huge! This program is opening so many doors and is making our youth confident. It's hard to be in an isolated place and wonder what the "real world" is doing. On the other hand, it's extremely hard to leave home. This program bridges those issues.

My hope is that this program will eventually be able to connect communities to other communities. So we can inspire each other. Look up to each other, lean on each other, and cheer each other on. Meeting other youth who experience the same social issues you do is refreshing. I hope this program inspires youth to keep on their educational journey. Education is key for anybody who wishes to contribute to their community and the future generations in a meaningful way." Devin Pielle, Tla'amin First Nation



# **Taking the Movement Forward**





#### **Closing**

As the symposium transitioned from Collaboration Jams to a Closing panel of leaders bringing voices from across sectors and regions engaged in the movement, Kim Samuel offered the following reflection:



"We've come together these last few days with great courage to tackle some of the globe's most complex challenges. We've seen inspiring commonality emerge despite our differences and we've gained new insights. We've been inspired by creativity, dedication and commitment to build community. We've learned that listening, awareness and solidarity are key ingredients to build the most effective, sustainable and successful strategies to address our shared goals."

"It's time to move from being at a symposium about movement building, to thinking about our commitments to working together to grow the momentum that has been building." Jennifer Corriero, Executive Director, TakingITGlobal

[We need to] Harness the positive momentum around us to make sure these changes take place at an individual level. If you want to make real meaningful change, you need to have empathy.

We must all work to nurture a deeper understanding of our differences and promote communities where people feel truly connected to each other, understand each other and see each other from each other's' eyes. We must find ways to deepen connections with one another. Now more than ever must ensure our actions are consistent with our words." Marie-Claude Landry, Chief Commissioner, Canadian Human Rights Commission

"One of the keys in building trust is creating safe environments and spaces where people can actually be vulnerable with the heart so they can have less fear to speak and freely open their hearts." Peggy Dulany, Founder and Chair, Synergos Institute

"Social connectedness is very personal. It has to happen within each of us, then among us. It has to be built from bottom-up but also across divides. Sectoral and vertical social class divides. It isn't about top-down, or bottom-up.









It's side by side." Dr. Fernet Leandre, Partners in Health, Haiti.

"As we go forward we have to move from this passivity. Right now, we are connected passively. Sometimes we see some websites and conferences and after that we are silent. We need to stop being so shy and timid. We need to push to build this movement. We need to be louder, speak up." Dr. Fernet Leandre, Partners in Health, Haiti.

"When we look at what we are being called to do, one of the most important things we can do is make a space and hold it with intention." Kim Samuel

"I would prefer and long for the day when we don't need to lose labels. Obliterate them from our language. Rid our labels and call ourselves people." Mary Davis CEO Special Olympics

"We're not all gifted of course we are not. We don't all have equal talent but should be given opportunity to develop our talents. That uniqueness is what we need to realize in people around us. Make space for all of us who are different in our lives." Mary Davis CEO Special Olympics



# Thank you!



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