



From Discrimination to Meaningful Work
**A Look into the Status of Urban
Indigenous Youth Employment**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to the National Association of Friendship Centres for reaching out to us to take on this work. The Friendship Centres play such a big role in the lives of so many urban Indigenous youth. Some of us are “Friendship Centre Babies,” some of us got our first job or role on a Board at the Friendship Centres and some of us have attended workshops and programs that have supported our connections to community. So often the experience of urban Indigenous people is forgotten but the Friendship Centres are always advocating for better.

We want to extend so much gratitude and humility to all the youth that filled out our survey! It was just a simple survey with no big incentives to give back but almost 400 Indigenous youth took the time to respond to this survey. We take the trust you have in us very seriously and will use this report to push your voices forward.



TRIGGER WARNING

Before reading this report, we want to warn you that some of the content will discuss suicide, sexual violence, alcohol and drug use, colonial violence and racism. Often the truths we live as Indigenous people is very hard to hear about but we strongly encourage non-Indigenous employers in the public and private sector as well as policymakers, funders, government officials and stakeholders to read this full report with an open mind and open heart to meet Indigenous youth where they are at.

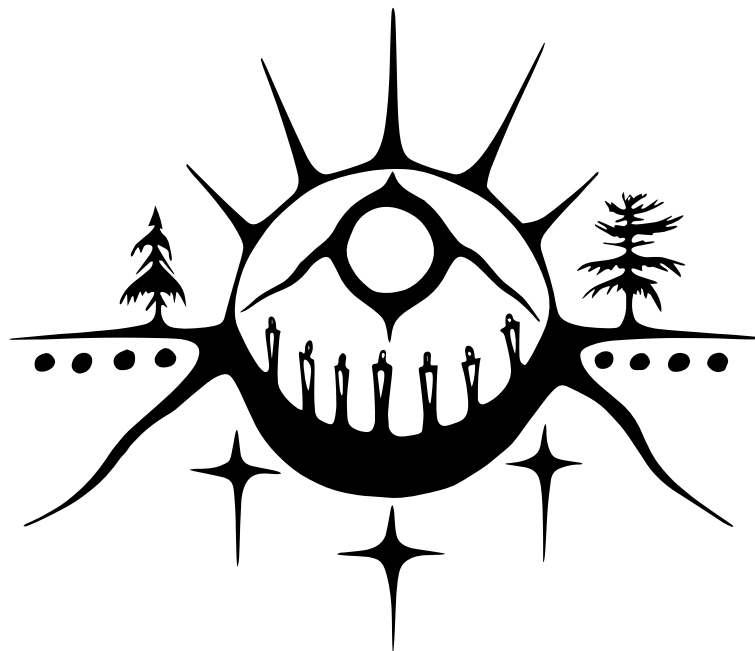


ABOUT A7G

Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G) is an Indigenous-owned and youth-led, non-profit organization focused on cultural support and empowerment programs/policies for Indigenous youth while being influenced by traditional knowledge and Elder guidance.

We have been actively working as A7G since 2014. We incorporated as a national non-profit organization in 2015. Our work continues to expand as our networks and capacity grow with the needs and aspirations of Indigenous youth.

Since 2015, A7G continues to grow and serve Indigenous youth locally and nationally in the following ways: Indigenous youth-led and ethical report writing and research, weekly drop-ins, and land-based activities such as hunting, medicine picking, survival camps and moose hide tanning, to name a few. Additionally, A7G supports youth experiencing crisis, finding housing and finding employment.



ASSEMBLY OF SEVEN
GENERATIONS

ABOUT THE NAFC

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) was established in 1972 to represent, nationally, the growing number of **Friendship Centres**¹ emerging across Canada. The NAFC represents over 100 Friendship Centres and Provincial/Territorial Associations (PTAs) from coast-to-coast-to-coast and make up the **Friendship Centre Movement** (FCM).²

For a full list of Friendship Centres and PTAs, please visit the **Friendship Centres section**³ on our website.

What We Do

As the national body of the FCM, the NAFC is democratically governed, status-inclusive, and accountable to its membership.

The NAFC seeks to:

- be a central, unifying body for the FCM;
- promote and advocate the concerns of our Member Friendship Centres and PTAs; and
- provide important urban Indigenous perspectives to, municipal, provincial and federal governments, and non-Indigenous civil society organizations.



The NAFC, Today

Today, over half a century after the initial development of Friendship Centres in Canada, the FCM continues to rapidly grow and expand their work, extending to include 125 active Friendship Centres and seven PTAs. The Friendship Centre Movement (FCM) is Canada's most significant national network of self-determined Indigenous-owned and -operated civil society community hubs

1 <https://nafc.ca/friendship-centres>

2 <https://nafc.ca/friendship-centres>

3 <https://nafc.ca/friendship-centres>

offering programs, services and supports to Indigenous people living in urban, rural, and remote settings, and specifically for First Nations living off-reserve, Métis living outside of the Métis Homelands, and Inuit living in the south.

Our collective work reaches millions of points of contact in a year and hundreds of thousands of people every single day from coast to coast to coast. We are proud that our work is driven by the communities we serve, trusted by our community members, and rooted in the rich cultures and diverse traditions of Indigenous people that have called these lands, towns, and cities home since time immemorial. Friendship Centres embrace and operationalize these cultures and traditions every day in the work that we collectively do across the country.

Most recently, Friendship Centres demonstrated a heroic collective response when the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. Friendship Centres moved quickly to respond effectively to support both urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

BACKGROUND

For many Indigenous peoples, employment has been a struggle. Over the decades, we've seen a higher than average rate of unemployment for Indigenous peoples compared to the non-Indigenous population in Canada.⁴ The disparity of unemployment rates for Indigenous peoples compared to non-Indigenous peoples correlates to the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples that live in poverty, who are incarcerated, and/or who are impacted by the child welfare system, to name a few. In addition to these factors that correlate to unemployment rates, simply being a young Indigenous person can also lead to a lack of opportunities. All of these experiences stem from a history of colonial violence and are interrelated with the legacy of residential schools.

In 2016, almost 900,000 Indigenous people lived in urban areas (towns and cities with a population of 30,000 or more), accounting for more than half of Indigenous people in Canada. They are often referred to as "Urban Indigenous peoples." The largest Urban Indigenous populations are in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto.

Many Indigenous people move to cities seeking employment or educational opportunities. Some have lived in cities for generations, while for others the transition from rural areas or reserves to urban settings is still very new. Many Canadian cities occupy the traditional territories and reserves of First Nations. For example, Vancouver lies on the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

—An excerpt from *Pulling Together: Foundations Guide* by Kory Wilson



⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00085-eng.htm>

The findings in this report are targeted for employers to better understand how to meet the needs of Indigenous employees and how to maintain good relationships with Indigenous communities and their Indigenous employees. We believe that up-to-date and ethical research led by Indigenous peoples is important to know how things are going and where to go next. There is very little research that exists for and by Indigenous youth, especially urban Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth that live and work in urban areas deserve to be heard and we hope that this report helps to amplify their voices.

METHODOLOGY

For this report, we collected data via an online survey, a scan of existing literature and statistics, and examined two case studies based on real experiences from Indigenous youth.

The survey was created using Google Forms and was sent out by email across our networks, shared through word of mouth, as well as advertised through Facebook and Instagram ads. The survey was live for over a month, which is a short time given the project's time constraints, but we still received 374 responses. Due to a limited budget, we were only able to offer three small incentives for respondents by way of a live draw.

Despite the limited timeframe and limited incentives for this survey, many Indigenous youth still chose to share their experiences with us and we are very grateful for the time and energy that they gave to us to create this report.

Some previous reports and literature we have used to influence this report include:

- **Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study, Published by Environics Institute**⁵
- Poverty Canada
- Labour Force Survey, Statistics Canada
- **Indigenous people in urban areas: Vulnerabilities to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, Stats Canada**⁶
- **Mapping Indigenous Youth Services in Ottawa**⁷
- **Roadmap to TRC 66**⁸
- **The Gen Z Reckoning, BBMG and GlobeScan**⁹



5 https://www.uaps.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/UAPS-Main-Report_Dec.pdf

6 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00023-eng.pdf?st=a2-rXZkO>

7 https://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/mapping_indigenous_youth_services_a7g_-_final_.pdf

8 https://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/final__2_-_indigenous_youth_voices_-_roadmap_to_trc_66_-_compressed.pdf

9 http://bbmg.com/BBMG_GlobeScan_GenZPresentation_2019.pdf

While reading the data collected in this survey and research, here are some important findings from previous research on Indigenous employment:

A recent study from Global News stated that “Figures from December 2019 to February 2020 show the Indigenous unemployment rate at 10 per cent while it was just 5.5 per cent for non-Indigenous people. That jumped more than six percentage points for both groups between February and May. Indigenous unemployment shot up to 16.6 per cent while non-Indigenous sat at 11.7%.” These types of disparities in employment are not new to Indigenous peoples; however, COVID-19 impacted many communities poorly. You will notice in the data we collected from urban Indigenous youth in this research that the unemployment rate for youth is much higher.¹⁰

In 2010, the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS) did an intensive report on the lives of the urban Indigenous population, some findings of interest for this report are as follows:

“Almost all believe they are consistently viewed in negative ways by non-Aboriginal people. Almost three in four participants perceived assumptions about addiction problems, while many felt negative stereotypes about laziness (30%), lack of intelligence (20%) and poverty (20%).”



We heard from Indigenous youth having very similar experiences, many of these stereotypes and negative views are placed onto Indigenous youth by employers and their co-workers. Another interesting finding from the UAPS report was: “Money was cited as the No.1 barrier to getting a post-secondary education among 36 per cent of those planning to attend – and 45 per cent of those already enrolled in – a university or college”^{11,12}

10 <https://globalnews.ca/news/7440640/unemployment-indigenous-coronavirus-economy>

11 <https://www.uaps.ca/knowledge/key-findings>

12 https://www.uaps.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/UAPS-Main-Report_Dec.pdf

Another report of interest titled *The Gen Z Reckoning*, was created by BBMG and GlobeScan in 2019. Some key findings that have similar themes with the data we collected are:

Gen Z is 3× more likely to say that the purpose of business is to “serve communities and society” rather than to simply “make good products and services,” and they are more likely than all others to call on brands to make a difference by “using their voice to advocate or speak out” on the most pressing issues of our times.

One last report we would like to draw attention to is the *Roadmap on the Implementation of TRC 66* which was written in 2018. The chart of Community Challenges Identified by Survey Respondents (Figure 1, following page) shows major concerns from Indigenous youth that prevent them from living well. It is important to note that for many youth, coping with traumas stemming from colonization is a full-time job. It must be acknowledged that Indigenous youth face so many additional barriers to make it to a job interview or to keep a job.



Figure 1. Community Challenges Identified by Survey Respondents



Source: Roadmap on the Implementation of TRC 66

WHAT WE HEARD

In the online survey, we heard directly from over 370 Indigenous youth across Canada. Firstly, we will list out the demographics from the respondents.

- 93% of the respondents we heard from were under the age of 30.
- 80% of the respondents identified as First Nation, 14% identified as Metis, 7% identified as Inuit and 1% identified as mixed (FN/Metis, FN/Inuit or Metis/Inuit).

Figure 2. How Old Are You? (374 responses)

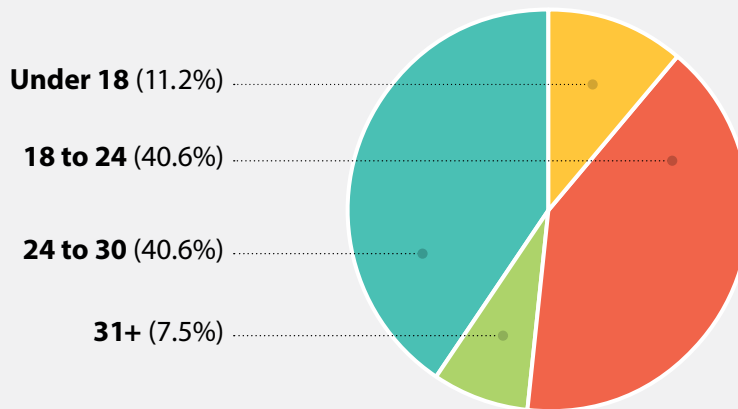
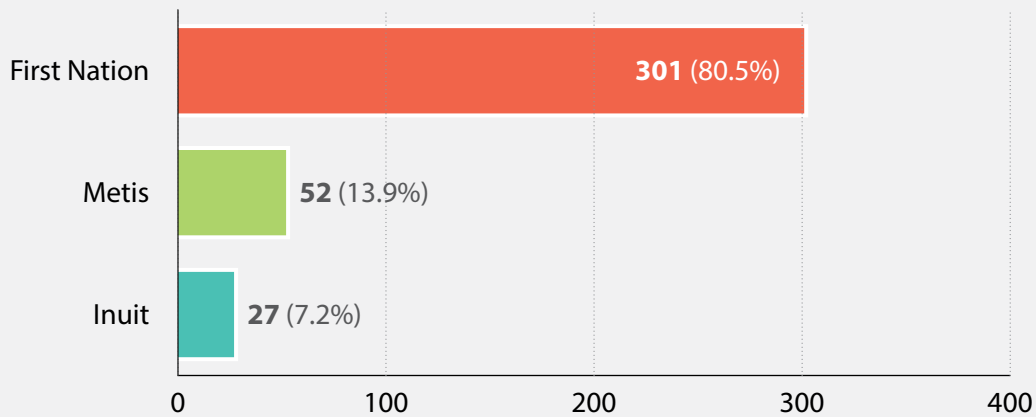


Figure 3. How Do You Identify re: Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution?* (374 responses)



* For more information about Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution go to http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/constitution_act_1982_section_35/

Indigenous peoples under Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution make up many diverse nations and communities. We also want to acknowledge the specific nations and communities that shared their voices in this report.

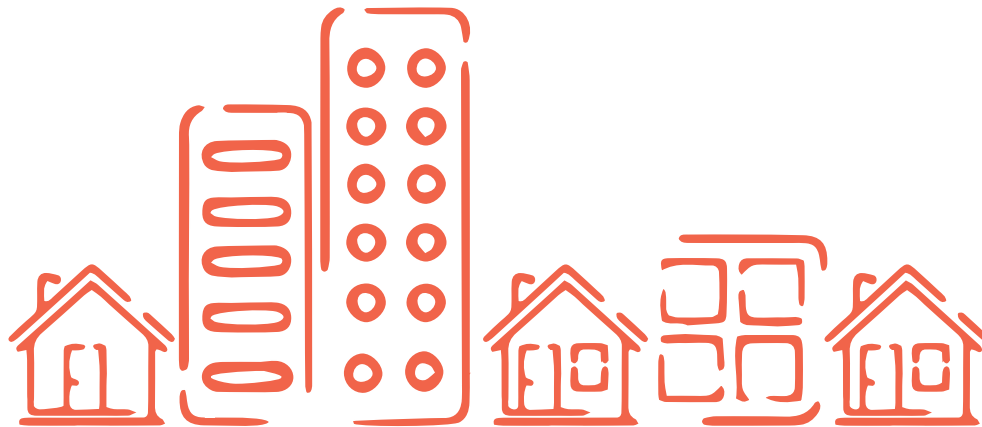
We heard from Indigenous youth that come from and have connections to over 130 specific communities and 48 Nations. Some youth moved to cities for school or work, some were adopted out and some left for other reasons. Many urban Indigenous youth have two or more communities that they are a part of and represent: their homelands (often reserve or Metis settlement that claims them, where their family is from, where their ancestors lived) and their urban Indigenous community (sometimes far away from their homelands).

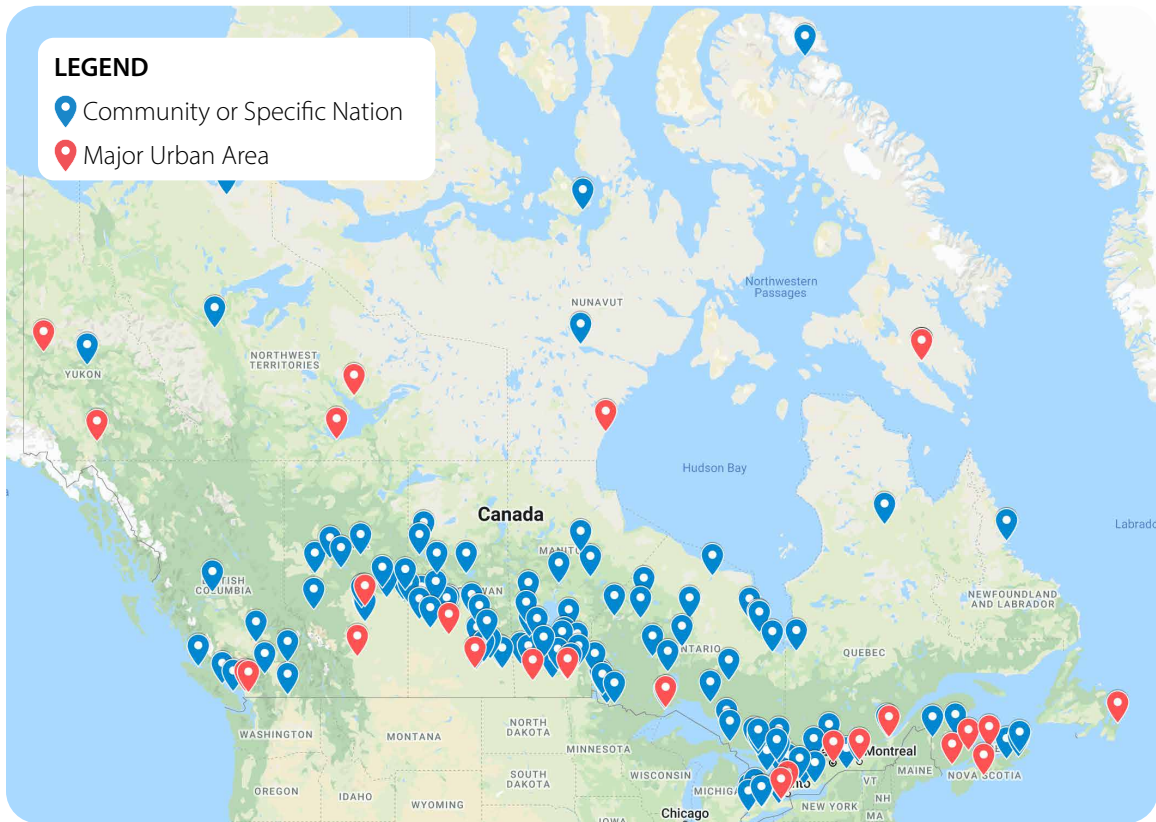
Communities:

- Aamjiwnaang FN
- Akwesasne FN
- Alderville FN
- Alexis Nakoda Sioux FN
- Attawapiskat FN
- Baker Lake, Nunavut
- Barrens River FN
- Barriere Lake FN
- Batchewana FN
- Bearskin Lake FN
- Beausoleil FN
- Big Grassy FN
- Big Stone Cree FN
- Birch Narrows
- Buffalo River Dene Nation
- Bunibonibee Cree Nation
- Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation
- Chippewas of Rama
- Cold Lake First Nations
- Constance Lake First Nation
- Couchiching First Nation
- Cross Lake FN
- Curve Lake FN
- Delaware Nation of the Thames
- Dokis FN
- Eabametoong First Nation
- Ebb and Flow First Nation
- English River First Nation
- Enoch Cree Nation
- Eskasoni First Nation
- Esketemc First Nation
- Fisher river Cree nation
- Fishing Lake FN
- Fort Albany FN
- Fort William first nation
- Frog Lake FN
- Garden River First Nation
- George Gordon's First Nation
- Gjoa Haven Nunavut
- Hinton, AB
- Hollow Water FN
- Inuvialuit
- James Smith Cree Nation
- Kahkewistahaw FN
- Kahnawake FN
- Kalaallit
- Kashechewan FN
- Kawacatoose FN
- Keeseekoowenin,
- Kettle and Stony Point
- Kikino Metis Settlement
- Kinistin Saulteaux Nation
- Kitigan Zibi FN
- Komoks
- Lac Laronge
- Lake Babine FN
- Lake St. Martin First Nation
- Little Pine Band
- Long Plain First Nation
- Louis Bull FN
- Lower Similkameen Indian Band
- Manitoba Metis Federation
- Metepenagiag First Nation
- Metis Nation of Alberta
- Metis Nation of Ontario
- Metis Nation of Saskatchewan
- Mishkeegogamang First Nation
- Mississaugas of the Credit
- Mistawasis FN
- Moose Cree First Nation
- Mosakahiken Cree Nation
- Mosquito-Grizzly Bear's Head-Lean Man First Nations
- Muskeg Lake Cree Nation



- Na-cho Nyak Dun FN
- Namgis FN
- Nanoose First Nation
- Naongashiing FN
- Neskonlith Indian Band
- Neyaashiimiing FN
- North Caribou Lake First Nation
- Nunatsiavut
- Nunavik
- Nunavut tunngavik
- Ochapowace Cree Nation
- Okanese First Nation
- Oneida Nation of the Thames
- Onion Lake Cree Nation
- Paqtnkek FN
- Pasqua First Nation
- Peavine Metis Settlement
- Peawanuck
- Peguis First Nation
- Pelican Lake First Nation
- Piapot First Nation
- Pic Mobert, FN
- Pikwakanagan FN
- Pine Creek First Nation
- Pond Inlet
- Poplar River FN
- Poplar River FN
- Potlotek First Nation
- Rainy River First Nations
- Red Pheasant FN
- Red River Metis
- Saddle Lake Cree Nation
- Sagamok FN
- Sagkeeng First Nation
- Saint Laurent, Manitoba
- Samson Cree Nation
- Sandy Lake First Nation
- Sapotaweyak Cree Nation
- Shawanaga First Nation
- Six Nations FN
- Skownan First Nation
- Skuppah Indian Band
- Southern Baffin Island
- Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation
- Stoney Nakoda First Nation
- Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation
- Swan River FN
- Thunderchild
- Tobique FN
- Tulita Dene First Nation
- Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory
- Upper Mohawk FN
- Wabaseemoong first nation
- Walpole Island First Nation/ Bkejwanong
- Wasauksing First Nation
- Waskaganish FN
- Waywayseecappo FN
- Webequie First Nation #240
- Wendake FN
- Whitefish River First Nation
- Whitesand FN
- Wikwemikong FN
- York Factory First Nation





Specific Nations:

- Abenaki
- Ahousaht
- Algonquin
- Atikamekw
- Blackfoot (Kainai Nation, Blood Tribe, Piikani, Siksika)
- Chilcotin
- Chippewa
- Coast Salish
- Delaware
- Deline
- Dene
- Gingolx
- Gitxsan
- Haida
- Haudenosaunee (Mohawk, Cayuga, Tuscarora, Oneida, Onondaga)
- Heilstuk
- Hesquiaht
- Innu
- Inuit
- James Bay Cree (Eeyou)
- Metis
- Mi'kmaq
- Moose Cree
- Nisga'a
- Nuuchahnulth
- Nuxalk Nation
- Odawa
- Oji-Cree
- Ojibway
- Passamaquoddy
- Plains Cree (Nehiyaw)
- Potawatomi
- Saulteaux (Nakawe)
- Sioux (Dakota, Nakoda)
- Swampy Cree (Mushkego)
- Syilx Secwepemc
- Tlicho Dene
- Wendat
- Wet'suwet'en
- Wolastoqey

We heard predominantly from folks who identify as female (65%) as well as 32% of respondents who identify as LGBTQ2S+. Specifically, 7% non-binary, 2% trans, 18% Two Spirit, 0.3% she/him, transmasculine, bisexual, gender fluid, unsure, questioning trans, genderqueer, ayahkwew, still figuring it out and questioning two spirit, as well as 2% of respondents who prefer not to share.

It was very important for us to make sure that we were not forcing gender norms or barriers on youth who filled out the survey.

Figure 4. What is Your Gender Identity? (It's okay if you have more than one gender identity or if you're still figuring it out) (369 responses)

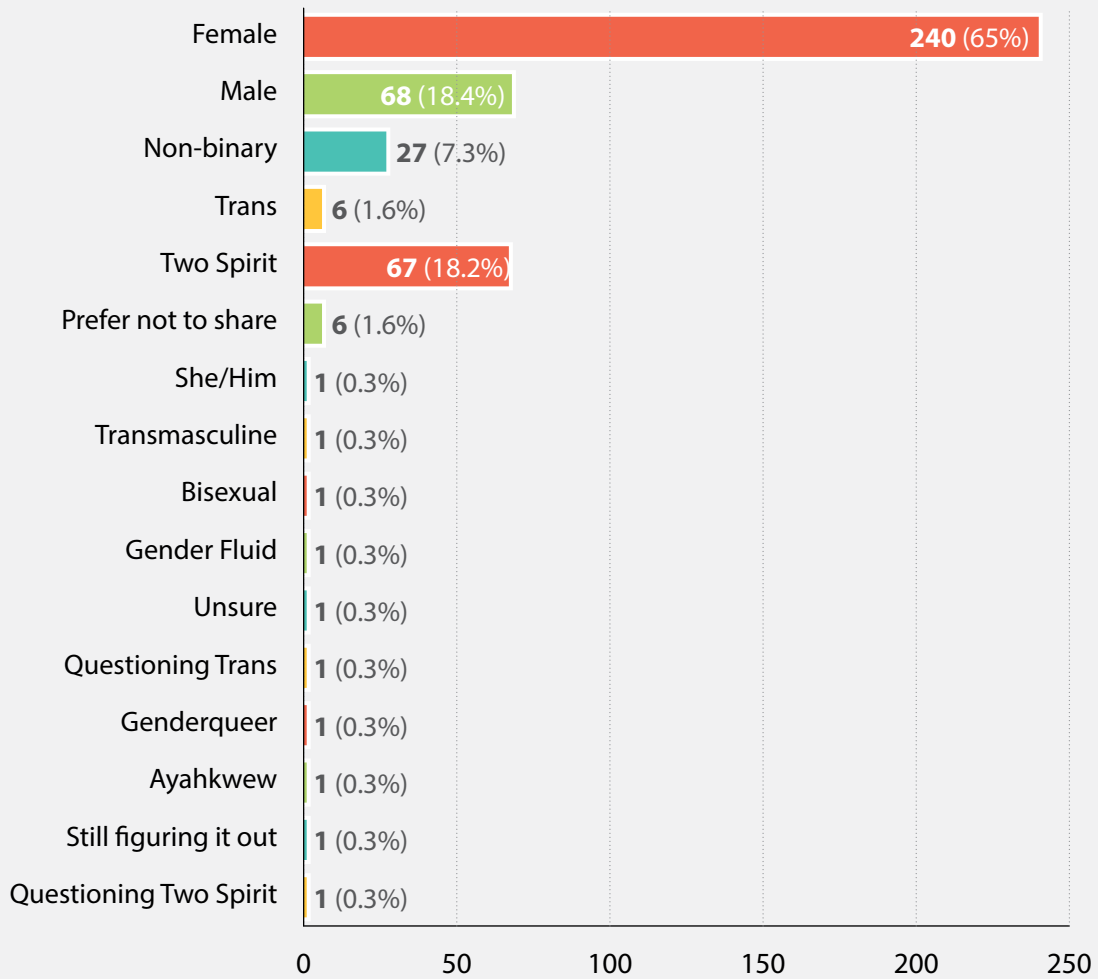
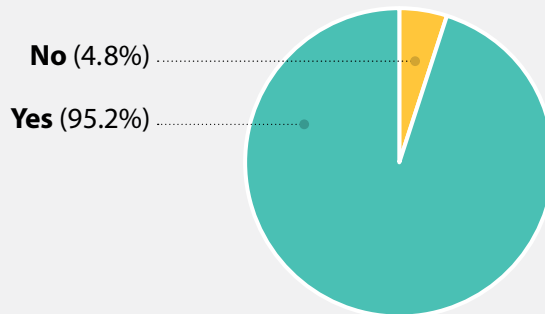


Figure 5. Do You Live in an Urban Environment (Town/City)?*
(374 responses)

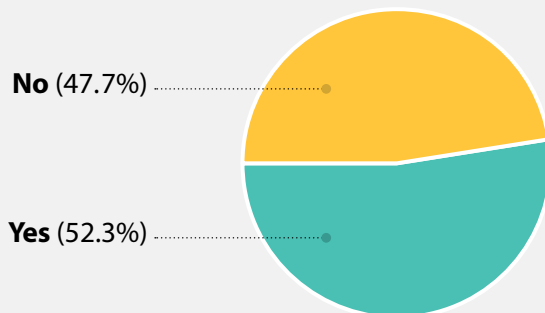


* Statistics Canada defines an urban area as a community with 1,000 residents or more and also off-reserve.

95% of respondents who filled out the survey live in an urban environment as defined by Stats Canada; however, it is important to note that Indigenous youth that live on reserve may also travel to urban environments for employment. For example, Enoch Cree Nation is just across the street from the municipality of Edmonton.

Of the 5% that said they do not live in a town or city, the following themes seemed to be of most concern:

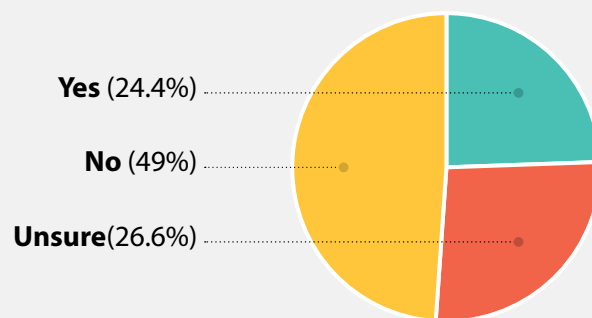
Figure 6. Are You Currently Employed? (367 responses)



Close to half of the Indigenous youth we heard from were unemployed. This is a drastic difference from the entire Canadian population Stats Canada 2022 findings, which showed a 7.2% unemployment rate.

“Statistics Canada also says the unemployment rate would have been 7.2 per cent had it included in calculations people who wanted a job but did not look for one.”¹³

Figure 7. When You Are Employed Do You Feel Like You Make Enough Money to Live Comfortably? (365 responses)



Only 24% of Indigenous youth we heard from felt that they were making enough money to live comfortably. This data, unfortunately, is proven time and time again. Data from the Poverty Institute, from the early 2000–2010s states that: “Indigenous peoples in Canada experience the highest levels of poverty:

A shocking **1 in 4 Indigenous peoples**

(Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit) or 25% are living in poverty and 4 in 10 or 40% of Canada’s Indigenous children live in poverty.”^{14,15}

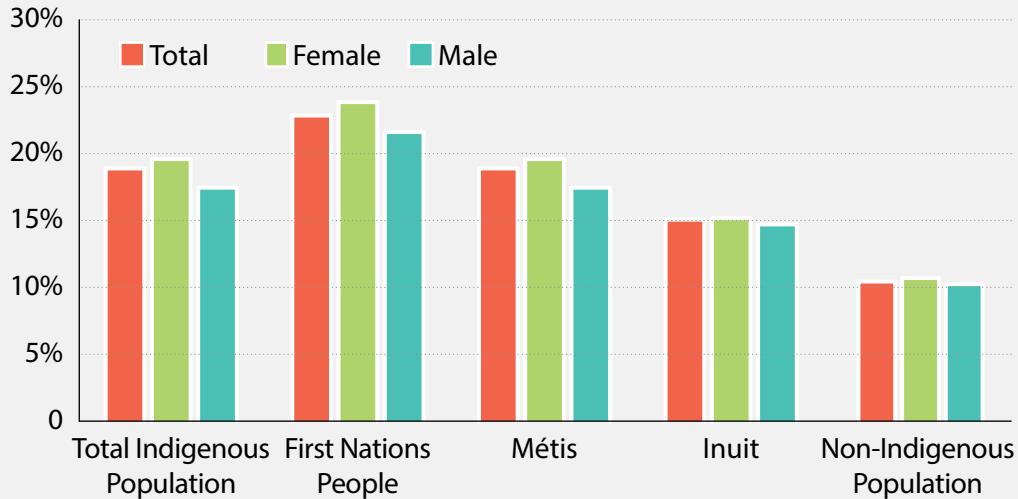
“I would feel more valued and supported in my workplace if there were more divergency with the people I work with.”
—Survey Respondent

¹³ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8745528/statistics-canada-march-unemployment-rate-job-numbers>

¹⁴ <https://www.povertyinstitute.ca/poverty-canada#:~:text=Indigenous%20peoples%20in%20Canada%20experience,Indigenous%20children%20live%20in%20poverty>

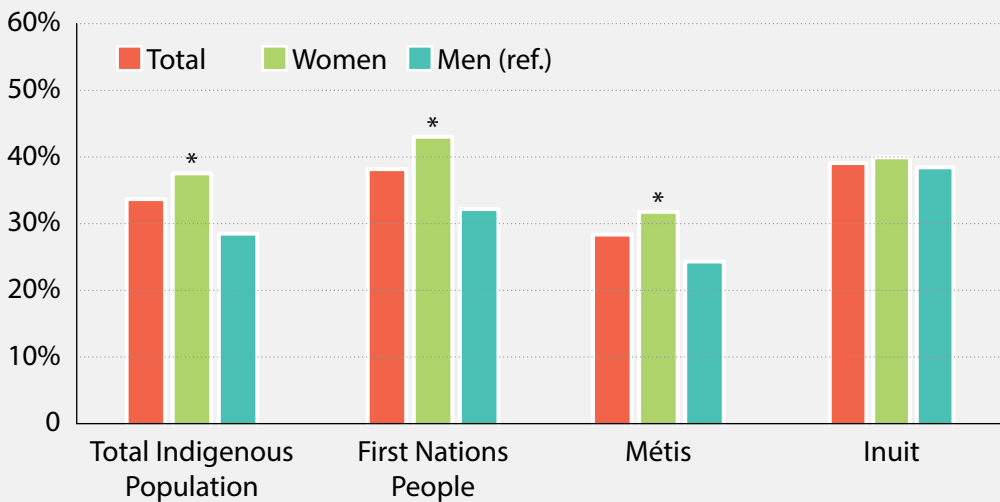
¹⁵ <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/topics-start/poverty>

Figure 8. Percentage Living Below the Poverty Line – Market Basket Measured in Urban Areas, Canada (Excluding the Territories), 2015



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016

Figure 9. Percentage Unable to Cover Unexpected Expenses Among Indigenous People 18 Years and Older in Urban Areas, Canada, 2017



* Significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016

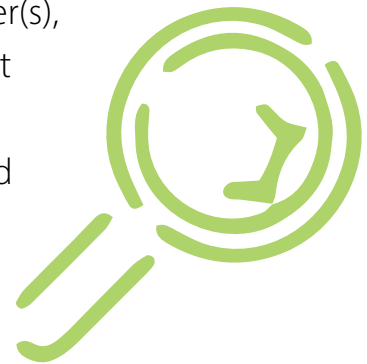
Source for Figures 8 and 9: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/topics-start/poverty>

KEY THEMES

In order to identify barriers to employment that urban Indigenous youth experience, we asked participants, “What has been the hardest part for you at finding employment?” in a checkbox format. We provided several examples, like “Can’t find meaningful employment” or “Discrimination by employers,” which respondents could select if relevant but also allowed respondents to fill out an “other” box with their own experiences. Respondents could select all, none, or some of the checkbox answer choices.

Of the 355 urban-identified participants, the top two selected answer choices were “Can’t find meaningful employment” at 48% and “No or not enough experience” at 36%. About a quarter of participants identified “Lack of safe, accessible, and/or frequent transportation,” “Discrimination by employers,” “Lack of neurodivergent accessibility accommodations,” “Don’t do well in interviews,” “Lack of motivation,” and/or “Not enough work clothes” as their hardest parts of finding employment. Fourteen percent of respondents selected “Not enough support creating a resume.” Nineteen percent of respondents provided “other” answers as well.

Only 12% of respondents selected “No or limited child care” as their reason but, of the 227 respondents who identified themselves as female or female and another gender(s) (e.g. two-spirit, non-binary, or both male and female), the percentage was at 16%. In contrast, of the 62 respondents who identified themselves as male or male and another gender(s), only 5% identified “No or limited child care” as the hardest part for them at finding employment. As well, 7% of two-spiritgender-fluidnon-binary, and other genders identified “No or limited child care” as the hardest part for them at finding employment. It appears within our survey that



those who identify as female or female and another gender(s) may disproportionately experience the burden of child care and consequential impacts on employment.

In the “other” answers provided by urban-identified participants, being a student was the most identified challenge to finding employment. Students felt they couldn’t find work with flexible hours necessary to accommodate their academic schedules and personal responsibilities, such as raising their children. Further, when such flexible positions were found, pay was often not adequate and/or not enough hours were available to support themselves and their families. These challenges to employment while being a student

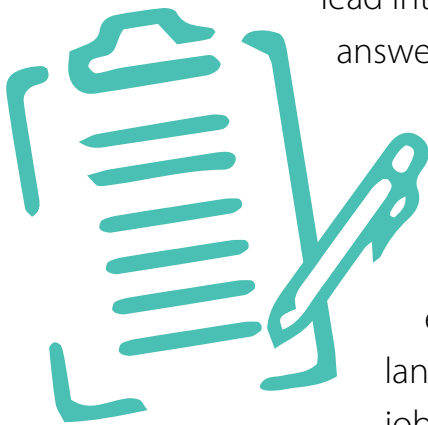
lead into another difficulty frequently discussed in the “other” answers: lack of education required for positions. How can

potential employees be expected to achieve certain levels of education when that education itself makes it difficult to retain employment and receive adequate pay? Sometimes, this lack of access to

education also lent itself to additional challenges like language barriers. Depending on the jurisdiction, some jobs may have a “bilingual” requirement (bilingual in

English and French specifically, rarely Indigenous languages) or require fluency in either English or French.

Several “other” answers raised physical and mental health–related challenges with finding employment. Of course, COVID concerns were raised by several survey participants as jurisdictions across the country open up and rescind mask or vaccine mandates. Furthermore, multiple participants indicated their own health as being a barrier to accessing and keeping employment. While this may be covered by the option for “Lack of physical accessibility accommodations” and “Lack of neurodivergent accessibility accommodations,” survey participants went into detail about their struggles to maintain the impact levels, amount of work, and frequency of work expected by employers. Some of the participants included the disabilities or health conditions which



they live with, including ADHD and other learning disabilities, being deaf, living with one or more mental health diagnoses, and long-term disabilities from chronic illnesses as well as accidents like concussions.

The types of positions available, or not available, were also mentioned as an issue for participants. For several “other” respondents, stable, full-time positions in their field were rarely available or required major relocation. On the other hand, some respondents were looking for part-time positions to better accommodate their personal lives, which included raising a family or studying, but couldn’t find such positions in their field or with adequate pay. The issue of adequate pay was raised multiple times, with many respondents feeling that the amount they’d make even from a full-time job wouldn’t be livable. This also interacts with social assistance, where programs such as Ontario Works place a limit on the amount of income which can be made by program recipients without penalty each month. Remaining unemployed may actually make more financial sense for social assistance recipients living in certain jurisdictions. In a related vein, several “other” respondents identified their precarious housing situations as a barrier to employment and could benefit from social assistance programs focused on providing access to safe, secure, and stable housing. Another participant mentioned difficulties getting access to their personal documents, like birth certificates and social insurance numbers. Our research found there have also been documented instances of these difficulties occurring due to aging out of child welfare and other social service systems.

The final category of “other” responses addressed the issue of workplace racism and toxic work environments. Some respondents felt that workplaces advertised themselves as working on “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion” (EDI) but didn’t take real, meaningful steps towards anti-racism, understanding of Indigenous issues, and other principles of EDI. Some respondents had



experienced toxic workplace environments and felt these workplaces did not value in their employees. Furthermore, these respondents were wary of returning to work in toxic environments.

Eighteen participants identified themselves as living in non-urban areas. Of these participants, 56% identified “No or not enough experience” as a barrier – a number 19% higher than their urban counterparts. On the other hand, 33% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Can’t find meaningful employment” as a barrier, which is 14% lower than their urban counterparts.

A couple other differences came through in the data for non-urban Indigenous youth compared to urban Indigenous youth as well. This includes the 11% of non-urban respondents who selected “Don’t have access to a computer, cell phone, or internet” as a challenge to employment, a proportion 5% greater than their urban counterparts. Surprisingly, the “lack of transport” option was only selected by 11% of non-urban youth respondents, which is 16% lower than for urban youth respondents. And finally, 22% of non-urban Indigenous youth identified “Lack of child care” as a difficulty to finding employment, which is 10% greater than their urban counterparts and may point to a limited amount of daycare or other child care options available in non-urban areas (for example, rural or on-reserve).

Note that this report focuses on urban Indigenous youth employment, which is why the number of non-urban respondents is relatively low and why the report does not go further into the non-urban context. It is recommended that research specific to non-urban Indigenous youth employment be undertaken.



WHAT DO YOU WISH EMPLOYERS KNEW ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN FINDING AND KEEPING A JOB?

Most survey respondents provided in-depth answers to this question. A thematic analysis identified five major themes from their answers: understanding barriers, aligning values, supporting mental and physical health and disabilities, healthy workplace environments, and bias against youth. An additional theme which arose was what respondents wanted potential employers to know about them personally and as workers.

Understanding Barriers

Survey respondents most wished that employers knew about the barriers they face to accessing and keeping employment. Some of these barriers, like intergenerational trauma, span across generations and have a profound impact on Indigenous youths' entire lifetimes. Barriers like precarious living situations, mental and physical health issues, and interrupted work and educational experiences were commonly referenced by respondents.

Potential employers need to make their postings accessible and advertise them in the correct places. They need to be willing to consider reasons behind resumé gaps, be they for raising a family, mental health, school, or other reasons, and not immediately disqualify candidates with several months or years between their work experiences.

Aligning Values

Alignment of personal and workplace values were frequently raised as something respondents wished employers knew. Respondents wanted employers to know that their personal values, like supporting family and community or actively participating their culture, were of the utmost importance to them. As potential employees, they needed to be reassured they could take time to support their children or attend ceremony. Some respondents



had experienced workplaces where these values were not aligned and chose to leave their jobs. Others were wary that an employer would claim to be flexible, for example allowing an employee to leave early to pick up a sick child from school, but in actuality not allow for supporting their families in emergencies.

Furthermore, the employer's value of Indigenous employees and their work was important to respondents. Respondents wanted to be seen as more than just a token Indigenous person. Tokenization does not work to diversity or make workplaces safe. Instead, values and actions need to change institutionally. The meaningfulness of the work being done was also important to respondents, as many indicated wanting to make a positive difference for their Indigenous community or communities. Some felt that workplaces did not understand or prioritize the importance of this meaningful work, indicating again a need for the workplace to realign their values.



source: <https://monkeylearn.com/word-cloud/result>

Supporting Mental and Physical Health and Disabilities

Experiences with mental health were one of the most mentioned experiences of respondents that they wished their potential employers would know about. Mental health impacts searching, applying, and interviewing for jobs as a potential employee as well as job performance and likelihood of keeping a job once an employee. Several respondents mentioned they experienced serious interview anxiety, which led to them not receiving job offers, but that they knew they could have performed well at the jobs they had interviewed for.

Other respondents pointed out that the process of job searching is nearly like a full-time job itself and that it took a significant amount of energy and time – aspects which are impacted by mental health. Respondents with learning disabilities like ADHD and physical health issues and disabilities like



persistent post-concussive symptoms wanted potential employers to know that the amount of energy and time expended on job searching and applications was even greater for them and takes a greater toll on them than job applicants without disabilities. Application and search processes need to be as streamlined and as accessible as possible to better support those with disabilities.

Ensuring Healthy Workplace Environments

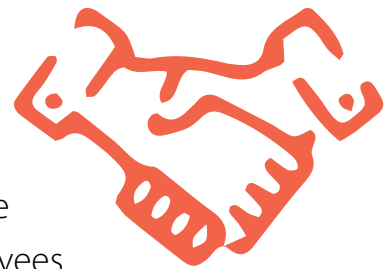
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives were appreciated but mostly raised by respondents as not going far enough. In addition to needing diversity in the workplace, including more than just one token Indigenous employee, workplace environments as a whole needed to be healthy and supportive of their Indigenous employees. Many respondents explained they had left jobs or chosen to not apply to jobs due to experiencing or hearing experiences of a toxic workplace environment and wanted potential employers to know that no one wants to work in a toxic environment and employers have a responsibility to make their workplaces safe and healthy.

Bias Against Youth

Given that the survey focused on Indigenous youth, it is unsurprising that numerous respondents wanted potential employers to know that their young age was not a reason to discount them as employees. They wanted to be given a chance even if they did not have five years of work experience. School was raised many times as something employers should keep in mind when evaluating job applicants, as being a student makes it hard to gain years of work experience and likewise it is hard to gain work experience without a proper education. Regardless of being young or being a student, respondents felt they deserved to receive living wages and adequate hours. Student internships and other forms of youth employment should not be a reason for employers to choose to underpay or not at all pay their employees.

Considering Indigenous Youth as Job Candidates

A number of respondents interpreted the question to be asking what employers should know about them personally when considering them as a candidate for a job. These respondents consistently stated that they are passionate, hard workers with the ability to learn and excel at potential jobs despite all the barriers to employment they experience. They shared that they simply need to be given the chance to work and show their abilities, as well as be supported to continue their skills development to become even better employees.



Real Experiences of Indigenous Youth in the Workplace

– Sexual Assault

A youth began work at a retail store to help get themselves out of poverty and as a part of their rehabilitation from drug and alcohol use. They really enjoyed being busy and have a structured schedule at their job.

Like at most jobs, the youth began making friends and disclosed personal details to their supervisor about their struggles with alcohol. The youth was starting to feel really good about life and how well they were doing but around Christmas time, which is a really hard time for many, the supervisor lured the youth to their house promising alcohol.

The supervisor said there would be many people at their house for a get together but when the youth arrived it was only them and the supervisor. The youth started drinking with the supervisor and blacked out only to wake up a few hours later at their house with only a few memories of the night, some of which involved sexual assault.

Thankfully, the youth talked to a trusted source which confirmed that this was sexual assault and that the youth should talk to their head manager. Later, the supervisor was fired and the retail store offered the youth unpaid time off.

Recommendations for this situation:

- Stronger orientation on workplace harassment
- All staff should know their rights
- Stronger accountability processes should be created
- Paid time off should have been offered
- Mental health professional services should have been offered
- Workplaces need to make an effort to end rape culture in their companies especially considering the MMIWG2S crisis that Indigenous women and two-spirit folks are so at risk of



WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL VALUED AND SUPPORTED IN A WORKPLACE?

Indigenous youth did not hold back in this survey. They were clear on what they wanted to see in their workplaces. Indigenous youth want and deserve more than a paycheque, they deserve to feel safe and comfortable where they work. Many cited wanting respect, to be valued and to be understood. Below are the top themes that came from their answers.

Tokenizing Indigenous Employees is a Form of Racism

Many Indigenous youth often have a story in their workplace or at school when they've been tokenized as the Indigenous person or youth in a setting. Tokenism is a form of racism. Tokenism puts a person of a certain race or ethnicity in a very uncomfortable situation where they often feel forced to speak on behalf of a racial or ethnic group that they belong to. This is very unfair to an Indigenous youth who is just trying to live or work at a minimum wage paying job. Not only do they feel pressured by their employer but they will also be pressured by their community.

*"Tokenism is something every minority, whether its by race, gender, sexual orientation or disability, may be familiar with. Some of us may have at times felt like a placeholder to tick the box that can make a brand or company 'diverse.' Something we can all relate to is the feeling of exclusion. Whether it be in our personal lives like not getting the wedding invitation, or career like feeling left out on business decisions during 'smoke breaks,' we've all felt it. This feeling is more sporadic but similar to feeling like a token in the workspace. These can be hard to define and even more difficult to explain to those not exposed to the same experiences; metrics and numbers mean nothing if everyone does not take part."*¹⁷



¹⁶ <https://medium.com/@judithritananyonga/tokenism-vs-representation-in-the-workplace-where-s-the-line-da7455698ea>

Some recommendations to avoid tokenizing your Indigenous employees include:

- Hiring multiple Indigenous employees
- Not using Indigenous employees to reach a quotas but ensuring your hiring process is non-discriminatory, which would increase Indigenous employees naturally
- Listening to all Indigenous employee voices, especially the ones that make you feel uncomfortable or are calling for improvements in the workforce
- Do not repeat or encourage stereotypes about Indigenous peoples
- Ensuring your workplace is implementing TRC Calls to Action, UNDRIP, Calls to Justice by the Inquiry on MMIWG, and other Indigenous-led reports and research

Truth & Reconciliation Commission: Call to Action # 92 Business and Reconciliation

We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:

- i** Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.
- ii** Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.

- iii Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

Mandatory Training and Harassment/Racism Policies

An important theme that came from the youth we heard from was around mandatory cultural training for employers and employees in all workplaces as well as processes/policies to address racism or other workplace harassment or violence. Here are some specific requirements from youth:

- “Mandatory cultural and sensitivity training, Mandatory reconciliation dialogue workshop, safe spaces recognition, achievement, independence, support, working conditions, justice”
- “Inclusive environment”
- “Understanding of Indigenous protocols and family roles”
- “Honouring my indigenous identity and having appropriate supports”
- “To be able to voice my opinions or concerns and be heard, to make a difference with youth and to be able to work from home”
- “More Indigenous Education so you are not explaining your existence”
- “Having more Indigenous representation, flexibility, cultural awareness”



- “More resources to reach out to when I feel discriminated against. I feel like when my employers or other employees are thoughtless and ignorant, there is no one to turn to”
- “To be able to voice my opinions or concerns and be heard, to make a difference with youth and to be able to work from home”

While you are creating mandatory training and policies, we strongly recommend creating training and policies with external Indigenous organizations that are experts in these fields as well as consulting your Indigenous employees. All consultations should include compensation.

We’ve also included special sections in this report of real experiences Indigenous youth have shared with us and how these experiences could have been handled better and can be prevented. We encourage employers to read them and reflect on them. All names and business names have been removed from the section.

Real Experiences of Indigenous Youth in the Workplace – Experiencing Racism

A youth finished some training and apprenticing to enter into the trades. They really enjoyed working with their hands and felt like it would be a great career choice for them. The youth went to their job placement every day and learned many new skills; however, English is still a second language for them from their Indigenous language. Sometimes they have a hard time understanding English or need a little extra time to process things.

One day on the job, one of their colleagues called them lazy and used a racial slur because the youth was having a hard time with language. This type of treatment made the youth very depressed and the youth stopped coming to work and was considering quitting.

Luckily, the youth had the courage to speak to community members about their experience and was encouraged to write to their boss about what happened. After writing the letter to their boss, their boss responded and apologized and then placed the youth at a different location with the hope that the workers at the new location would not treat the youth the same way.

Recommendations for this situation:

- Create an accountability process for racist remarks and treatment
- Foster better relationships with Indigenous youth so they feel safe enough to talk to you
- Talk to youth about their rights and HR processes for concerns
- Arrange for anti-racism and anti-oppression workshops for all workers in the workplace

“Anti-oppression workshops at the leadership level, familiarity with reconciliation and TRC calls to action, awareness of Indigenous protocol, inter-agency and cross-cultural understanding of empathy, and desire to lead with an inclusive framework.”

—Survey Respondent



Pay Youth a Living Wage

In another report done by Daniel Wilson and David MacDonald in 2016, researchers found that “the median income for Aboriginal peoples was \$18,962 – 30% lower than the \$27,097 median income for the rest of Canadians. The difference of \$8,135 that existed in 2006, however, was marginally smaller than the difference of \$9,045 in 2001 or \$9,428 in 1996.”¹⁸



There is very limited up-to-date statistics however it is no surprise that Indigenous peoples suffer from poverty, lower median incomes and wage gaps compared to non-Indigenous Canadians. In a research paper by Taylor N Paul, it is quoted that “While Indigenous women experience an 11% to 14% wage gap, only registered First Nations men experience a wage gap of approximately 16%. Additionally, Indigenous workers living in cities with a large Indigenous population face a particularly severe gap in wages.”

—Paul, Taylor N., On Unequal Terms: The Indigenous Wage Gap In Canada (2020). MA Research Paper. 46.¹⁸

These statistics also anticipated that “while income disparity between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canadians narrowed slightly between 1996 and 2006, at this rate it would take 63 years for the gap to be erased.”

In 2022, we continue to see wage gaps increase between the rich and the working class and so we know that this also impacts Indigenous youth. We encourage employers to provide all employees a living wage at the bare minimum, which is usually just a bit higher than the minimum wage

¹⁷ https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sociology_masrp/46

¹⁸ <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/reports/docs/Aboriginal%20Income%20Gap.pdf>

designated by governments. Luckily, it is fairly easy to Google the living wage in each region these days and there are a lot of organizations and unions advocating for all employees to have a living wage. Here are some examples:

- **Living Wage for Families BC**¹⁹
- **Ontario Living Wage Network**²⁰
- **Alberta Living Wage Network**²¹

Be Flexible

“Understanding that I have a child and believing in my capability.”

—Survey Respondent



One of the best ways to improve the experience of Indigenous youth is to be a flexible employer. When employees feel supported and are able to feel stable in their day-to-day life, employees will be better

equipped to participate in the workplace. This means understanding that Indigenous employees may need additional mental health supports, additional time to find proper housing or child care and time to dedicate towards their communities. Many Indigenous youth also come from large families and may have many responsibilities that will need to come first before a job. Being able to adapt and have open conversations with youth is a skill that will benefit many employers. Like all employees, Indigenous youth want to feel like their employer trusts and believes in them.



“Knowing my mental health is a priority and stability in my position.”

—Survey Respondent

“Childcare and mental health support. Although I do get this support once or maybe twice a year at my current casual part-time contract job, it’s not nearly enough.”

—Survey Respondent



19 https://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca/living_wage_rates

20 https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/living_wage_by_region

21 <https://livingwagealberta.ca/how-living-wages-are-calculated>

More Funding for Indigenous Businesses and Organizations

Many youth said they felt like they were doing meaningful work while working for Indigenous organizations and businesses. However, due to the socio-economic disadvantages that Indigenous peoples suffer from in Canada, there are very few Indigenous organizations or businesses and, of the few, many are quite small. Canadians must continue to support Indigenous businesses while governments and corporations must also continue to partner and share resources in an equitable way with Indigenous businesses and organizations in the spirit of Reconciliation.

Non-Indigenous employers can also support workplace morale by reaching out to local Indigenous businesses and organizations and finding ways to collaborate. For example, consider hiring Indigenous caterers, Indigenous businesses for gifting and even consider donating to a local Indigenous organization that your employees support.

“Since I am trans, I tend to see something related to being a safe space. My current workplace gives all indigenous staff the day off during days that are either like mourning for MMIWG or residential school survivors but I haven’t worked there long enough to experience it myself.”



CONCLUSION

While there are many steps that have been taken to better the lives of Indigenous peoples, much of it seems to be at a surface level and not much has changed despite so much of Canada's population becoming aware of the history of residential schools and the systemic racism towards Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous youth told us that they definitely do not want to live in poverty but they were also very clear that they also want work that does not go against their beliefs or that is unsafe for them. Half of the youth we spoke to said that they want meaningful employment. Indigenous youth do not want to live in fear of who they are and they want to make a living while also being able to maintain and reclaim their Indigenous cultures for the next generations. This is not a big ask, these are basic human rights.

All employers must know that it is a violation of human rights to deny Indigenous youth the right to work.

Employers hold the power in all situations and therefore must use their power to adapt so that Indigenous youth today are not further displaced or harmed by colonial policies that have taken away so much of Indigenous peoples' livelihoods.

Article 21 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states:

- 1 Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health, and social security.*
- 2 States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children, and persons with disabilities.*

APPENDIX

Question: What has been the hardest part for you at finding employment?

- **374 participants** total
- **1 participant didn't identify themselves as living in an urban or non-urban area** but identified "Don't do well in interviews" as a barrier
- 355 participants identified themselves as living in urban areas
- 48% of participants in urban areas identified "Can't find meaningful employment" as a barrier
- 36% of participants in urban areas identified "No or not enough experience" as barrier
- 28% of participants in urban areas identified "Lack of safe, accessible, and/or frequent transportation" as a barrier
- 27% of participants in urban areas identified "Discrimination by employers" as a barrier
- 26% of participants in urban areas identified "Lack of neurodivergent accessibility accommodations (e.g., limited distractions in workspaces, accommodation of diverse learning types, preventing becoming overwhelmed by tasks, providing room to debrief, etc.)" as a barrier
- 26% of participants in urban areas identified "Don't do well in interviews" as a barrier
- 24% of participants in urban areas identified "Lack of motivation" as a barrier
- 22% of participants in urban areas identified "Not enough work clothes" as a barrier
- 19% of participants in urban areas identified "other" reasons as barriers (discussed below)

- 14% of participants in urban areas identified “Not enough support creating resume” as a barrier
- 12% of participants in urban areas identified “No or limited child care” as a barrier
- 6% of participants in urban areas identified “Don’t have access to a computer, cell phone, or internet” as a barrier
- 3% of participants in urban areas identified “Having a criminal record” as a barrier
- 3% of participants in urban areas identified “Lack of physical accessibility accommodations (e.g., wheelchair ramp, lighting for visual support, etc.)” as a barrier

18 participants identified themselves as living in non-urban areas

- 56% of participants in non-urban areas identified “No or not enough experience” as a barrier
- 33% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Can’t find meaningful employment” as a barrier
- 28% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Not enough work clothes” as a barrier
- 28% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Lack of motivation” as a barrier
- 22% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Discrimination by employers” as a barrier
- 22% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Don’t do well in interviews” as a barrier
- 22% of participants in non-urban areas identified “No or limited child care” as a barrier

- 22% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Lack of neurodivergent accessibility accommodations (e.g., limited distractions in workspaces, accommodation of diverse learning types, preventing becoming overwhelmed by tasks, providing room to debrief, etc.)” as a barrier.
- 17% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Not enough support creating resume” as a barrier
- 11% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Don’t have access to a computer, cell phone, or internet” as a barrier
- 11% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Lack of safe, accessible, and/or frequent transportation” as a barrier
- 6% of participants in non-urban areas identified “other” reasons as barriers
- 0% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Having a criminal record” as a barrier
- 0% of participants in non-urban areas identified “Lack of physical accessibility accommodations (e.g., wheelchair ramp, lighting for visual support, etc.)” as a barrier