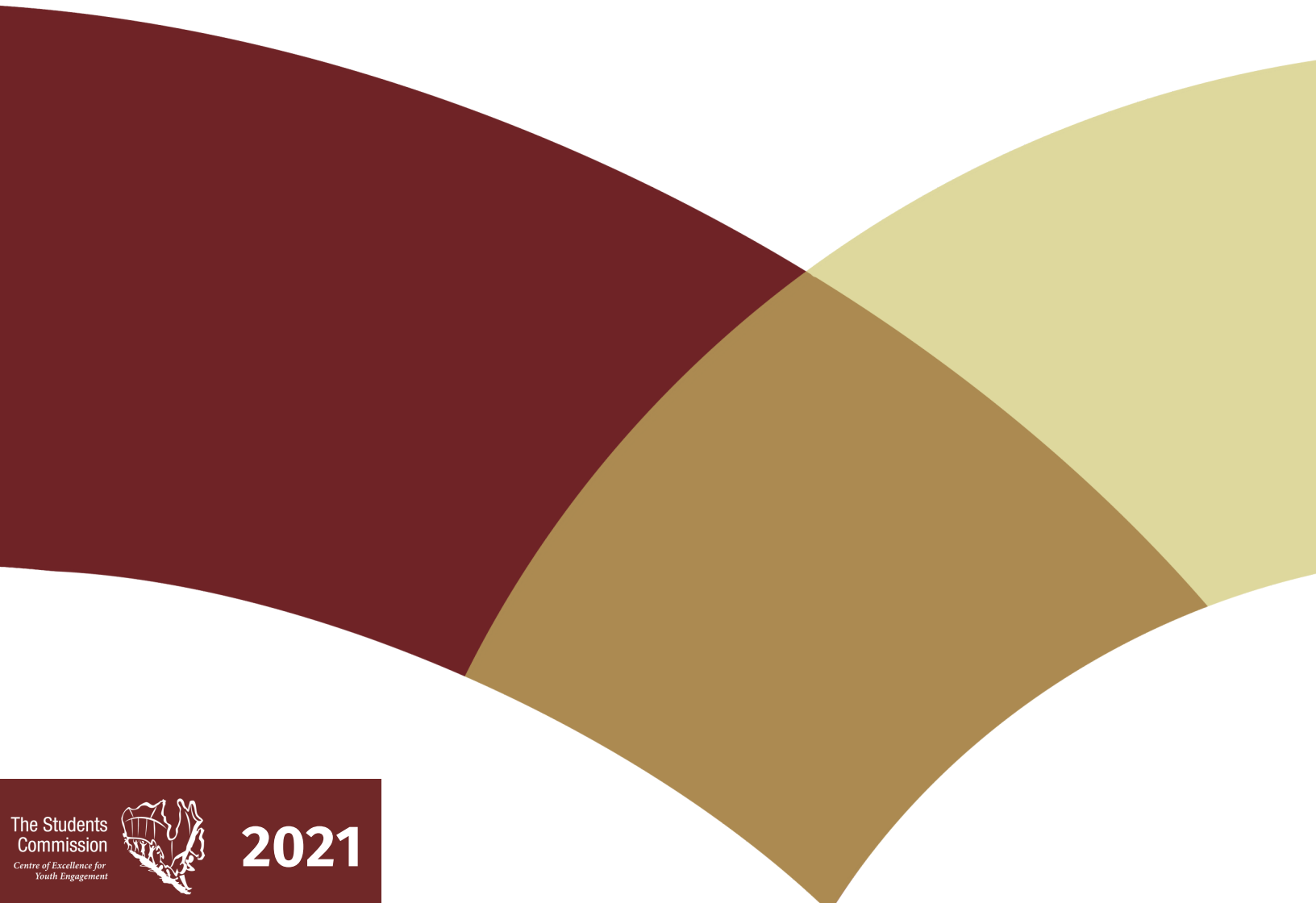


Assembly of 7 Generations

Year 3 Report



Origin Story

In 2012 the founders of A7G along with many young people in Ottawa and across Turtle Island were inspired by the Idle No More movement. There were many youth in Ottawa that were at the rallies and ceremonies associated with the movement. And although the movement was predominately led by Indigenous youth, there were not a lot of opportunities for Indigenous youth to speak and share their truths directly.

In 2013 the founders of A7G talked about starting a platform for youth to speak their truth. And the idea of gathering youth began. Many of the teachings that provided the foundation for the group held the number Seven. The Seven Grandfather Teachings, the Seven Generations Teachings and The Seven Fires Prophecy. Because of this, the group was named Assembly of Seven Generations or A7G.

Before the group was incorporated, they participated in a tech program that typically focused on tech support for countries around the world. They worked with A7G because they wanted to support Indigenous youth in Canada. An important lesson the group gleaned from this experience was that you can't have a program that is not made by Indigenous people and try and Indigenize it after. You need to start with an Indigenous program. Another key learning during this time was that the most important aspect of programming for young people was to have a safe place to gather every week. To laugh, share and sing. Creating the safety of the group was the most important thing.

In 2015, the group was incorporated as a non-profit and they took part in activities as they arose. In 2017, the first youth/elders gathering was held which has become a staple of the A7G programming. In 2018, A7G had the opportunity to meet youth from Winnipeg who were active in Aboriginal Youth Opportunity/Meet Me at the Bell Tower and were able to hear from them directly.

The group was inspired by those in Winnipeg that didn't necessarily have nonprofit status or a lot of funds but were steadfast in their commitment to support Indigenous youth in their community.

Around this time, a city funded drop-in lost its funding. The program, 510 Rideau, had served Indigenous people who were experiencing homelessness. This program closed its doors due to these city cuts. In the two years following there were several deaths including young people. Although not recognized by the City of Ottawa, it was clear to the leaders at A7G that these deaths could have been prevented if people just had somewhere to go. Because the group could see the connection between the loss of community members and the closing of the drop-in they decided they had to do something to prevent more loss. Six members that were friends decided to get together as a supportive group every Friday night to provide that safe and consistent place in the community. This Friday night gathering has been happening ever since.

From this Friday night group, called the council, ideas for other programs and activities took root. Today A7G runs Anishinaabemowin language programs, sweats, land based activities like gardening and maple tapping, and annual programs like the Round Dances and Land Camps. Because of the groups deep connections with youth in the community, A7G also holds a leadership role advocating for systems change and adequate supports for Indigenous youth in Ottawa.

In late 2020 and early 2021 the group started exploring how to move to a place of self-sustenance for the organization. Through this process, the idea of the A7G marketplace emerged. The A7G Marketplace, is a space where the community can get the things they need by trading for it. These can be material things like clothing, food and art, or it can be skills, knowledge or time.

Process & Tools

This report was completed to better understand the role of the A7G Marketplace in the community: Why it is important and what impacts it is having on youth and the wider community? One focus group was held via Zoom with people who play different roles in the A7G community including both staff and youth participants. This focus group was later transcribed and analyzed for recurrent themes. These themes were divided into 5 different sections described below.

1. **The Roots of the Market**

- o Self Determination & Self Sustenance
- o Revitalizing: Old Ways & Economies

2. **Strengthening Relationships**

- o With Place & Between Communities
- o With Home Communities
- o With Each Other
- o With The Land

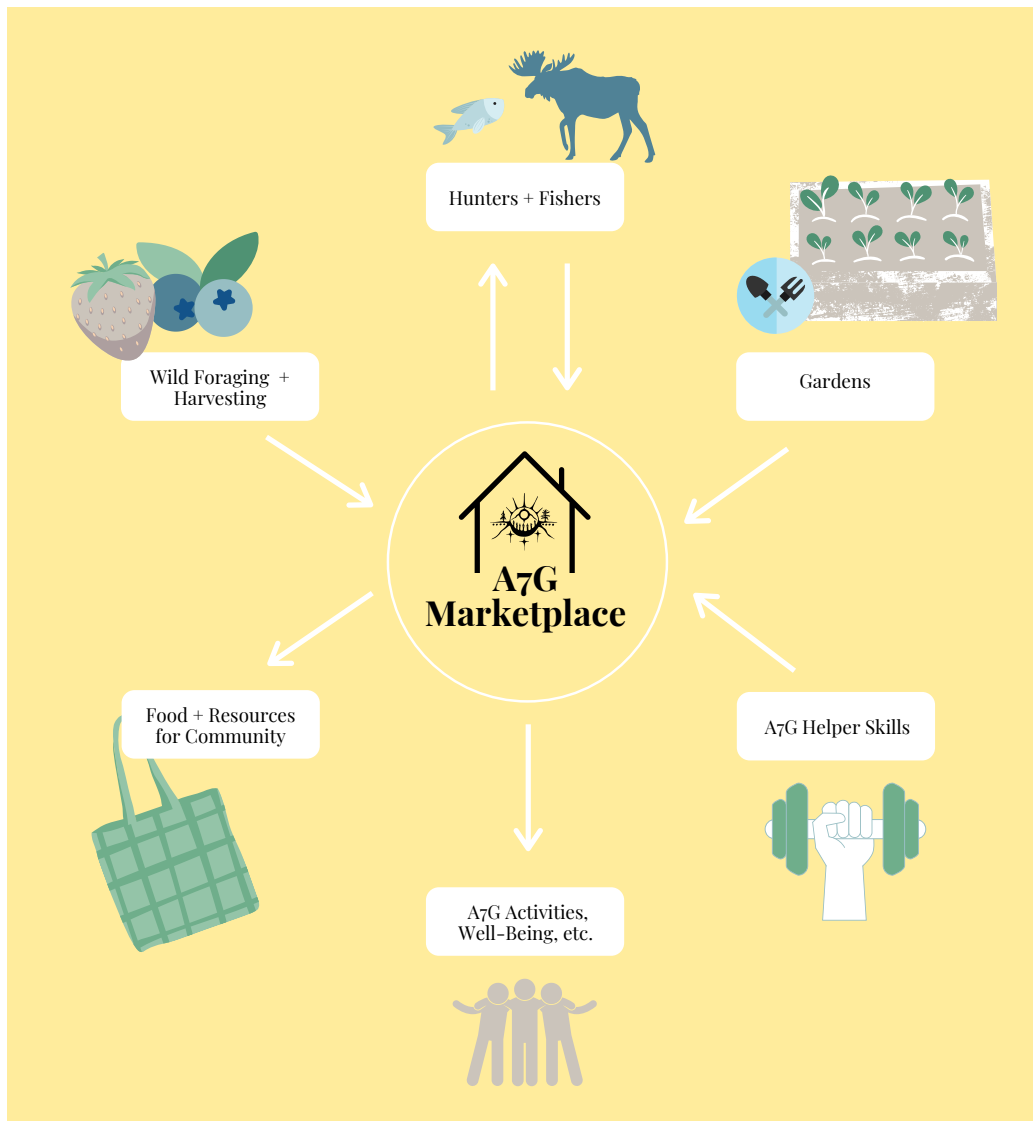
3. **Building Up Young People**

- o Skill Building
- o Highlighting the Work of Artists

4. **Challenges**

5. **Ideas for the Future**

A7G Marketplace



The A7G Marketplace, is a space where the community can get the things they need by trading. Trades can be material things like clothing, food and art, or can be skills, knowledge or time. Produce from A7G's garden, country foods from Hunters and Fishers, medicines and foods gathered from foraging and harvesting are all traded. Young artists and designers have space to showcase and trade their work, and people can also trade their help or skills. During the spring of 2021 the Market was open on Mondays from 11-5pm by appointment. Indigenous young people and their families are prioritized.

1. The Roots of the Market

Participants in the focus group discussed that there are underlying roots that hold the marketplace firm. The Marketplace is a space where self-determination and self-sustenance are practiced and where old ways are revitalized.

Self Determination & Self Sustenance

“It’s a hub for the other land based activity we’re doing. Like our harvest from the garden will be able to go back. Pickles, jams, dried herbs. It’s bringing back those old ways of trading. Getting away from having to feel like we’re dependent on capitalism or government. And can sustain ourselves away from those systems. It’s really important that we live out self-sustaining and self-determination.”

“We need to re-imagine and get away from that [government] dependency. And it’s hard work. Sometimes I think Capitalism is so easy to engage in. It’s like sucking your health and really harmful, but it’s easy. Taking care of relationships and yourself is hard work. For so many years A7G has been revitalizing concepts that our ancestors would have done. It would be great if government would come forward but we’re not waiting for them. In the meantime we’ll still be here doing the work, building our communities.”

Revitalizing Old Ways

“It’s a way for us to step away from capitalism and revitalize old ways. It’s complicated. It’s a Marketplace but so much more.”

“...it’s a like a restoring. My ancestors were involved in North West and Hudson Bay trading. So this is an interesting way, a continuation of those practices but in a better way. You don’t have to trade with the companies but with your community [...]. It allows you to practice your culture and also be supported by it. It reflects what things might have been like before. You can work on your skills and you can get the things you need through other’s skills. I love how community oriented it is and none individualistic.”

“We’ve had 150 years of things in our way, but it’s not our way. It’s not a hard thing to grasp once you get it. It feels new but it’s not new.”

“Being with A7G for the last seven years it’s always misunderstood. But seeing it, people feel like these things, these [revitalized] practices, are normalized. It’s the endless part, the young people are watching us and learning [...]. I hope that more people watch. It’s a generational thing that normalizes it.”

Revitalizing Indigenous Economies

“Our Indigenous economy and enterprises have been stomped out historically through policy. But we’re seeing an emergence of Indigenous economies and strengthening and expanding these networks are important[...] Everyone has their own circles and connections where we can get other folks involved in these non-capitalist Indigenous Economies.”

“Indigenous ways are undervalued by capitalism. Capitalism will never value us for what we’re worth. But maybe we don’t want to be part of that [...] not everything is calculated in minutes and seconds. That’s not how we value things.”

“Most hunters won’t accept money in exchange, medicine harvesters as well. So honouring those practices.”

“Marketplace has never felt transactional. It’s a feel good trade always. I went to foodbanks too and it always felt like you owed something . It doesn’t feel like that. It’s a good trade.”

“For me, trades are really important. Often people say you’re giving me too much. If you took the time to cut up a deer and smoke it and prepare it, I don’t have the money to compensate that. But maybe I can give you medicine that I took the time to harvest or the beadwork I took the time to make.”

“I’ve been in this marketplace, it resonates with me too. It feels like I have this to offer and they just took what they needed. They had so much things they could have taken but they only took what they need. And this is important as well, just taking what you need.”

Takeaway:

For participants, an essential piece of the Marketplace is that it creates a space to practice self-determination, self-sustenance, the revitalization of culture and of Indigenous Economies. The existence of the Marketplace allows young people to reject capitalist models which are culturally inappropriate and provides opportunity for the community to engage in revitalized traditional practices and relationships.

2. Strengthening Relationships

Throughout the focus group, participants shared the important ways in which the Marketplace allowed for them to be in good relations:

- With Place & Between Communities
- With Home Communities
- With Each Other
- With The Land

With Place & Between Communities

"Around the name of Ottawa/Odawa, it's connected to the way of trading. Putting action to the name of where we're at. The marketplace its full of different things as well. Not just Anishinaabe things. Things that resonate with, Haudenosaunee, Metis, Inuit communities. Going back to our original names of who we are and the territory of where we are. We're linking to the place. it resonates even deeper, doing it on this territory."

"The Marketplace is a blueprint for being in good relationship with the people and ideally the surrounding reserves. We hope to get close reserves to trade some of the things they might have, like their maple syrup or something, and that they will get a good deal out of it as well."

"We're urban Indigenous so this is not our home territory for a lot of us. So it is a responsibility to contribute to the land you are on, like the Algonquin people on the land, and to honour that relationship as well."

With the Land

"We are often in a lot of spaces where environmentalists want us in their spaces. They want to be inclusive so they include us. But meanwhile a lot of that work is led and guided from a white perspective. So right from the get go we are left out. This returning to old ways is actually part of us taking care of the land in better ways. If we're the ones that have to grow and harvest the food. We know how much not to harvest. There is much more care and intention. We put our ethics into it. The intention is there. It's not an entitlement."

"There's a lot of wild fruits and vegetables, nuts and medicines that you can't grow in a garden. For me I love the wild stuff. Raspberries and strawberries, sage, sweetgrass. It's a secret. You don't put it on a google map for the world to see. It's exclusive out of protection. Wild foraging and harvesting."

"[...]if we're going to be doing the gardening and things are coming from the land...for the most part the things we're doing is sustainably owned. So we're setting something up that is sustainable for 1000 years in the future. Economies now are not sustainable for the future. Doing this is with purpose for the future. We are contributing to a sustainable future."

With Each Other

"We all have resources and skills and this is a way to share these with community in a way where all sides can benefit."

"Everyone has an entry point or something to bring. Skills or resources. Everyone has something."

"We want to recognize folks in the community can sometimes be low on resources. A lot of us live in poverty. We don't want to focus on that. We want to focus on what people have."

"It's about not treating people like clients or numbers."

"I made sure people felt really welcome. Sometimes I would be meeting people for the first time. People would also ask about other programs for A7G so there was an opportunity to share more about what we do with them."

"People wanting to know more about A7G and wanting to learn about us. An opportunity to talk face to face. It's really cool how much people support it. People ask what they can provide. What we need. It's cool seeing people's skills."

With Home Communities

"I had some moose meat connections from my reserve and we brought that to the marketplace. And my family was able to see what I am doing in Ottawa. My Nookomis was able to see what I was doing. It was cool to see my reserve. It's awesome what different people can bring. We were able to get a lot of moose meat. Hopefully our connections keep expanding."

Takeaway:

The Marketplace provides a blueprint for strengthening relationships between communities, between people, and with the land. Participants emphasized the importance of recognizing the Algonquin Territory they are on and the process of strengthening relationships between communities. They valued that the Marketplace provides alternatives to colonized ideas of client/staff relationships and recognizes that everyone has value, can contribute to community and deserves respect. The Marketplace also provides an opportunity to do outreach for other programs and services. Finally, participants shared that by having Indigenous practices guide the harvest and creation of goods in the marketplace, that the marketplace itself strengthens the land and contributes to sustainable economies for future generations.

3. Building Up Young People

Participants discussed the skills they had been exposed to through the Marketplace and the space the Marketplace created for young artists to gain exposure.

Highlighting the Work of Artists

"People have been making clothes. Someone just made a bunch of ribbon skirts. I did a colab with someone who does jean jackets. Someone who found shoes for like 3 dollars will do a colab with [name] who is an artist."

"[There is] no other place where people can showcase their clothes unless you're at a powwow. [It's] an opportunity for people to showcase their works. It's makes room for people to get exposure, to get out their art and fashion. One of our youth's artwork is all over our space [...] There is so much buildings here but not space for everyone in Ottawa. Sometimes places can be exclusionary. Our space if more open."

Skill Building

"I've learned so many things. I had never made a budget or written invoices. Interacting with people was really really special."

"The gardens are really cool. Excited to see what we can grow and can."

"We're doing a webinar next week with caribou fur. Youth are going to learn caribou tufting. My kokum did it and it was sort of dying out but we are teaching it again."

"Interesting to see people from different traditions and cultures come together. For example, we got a 1.5 foot long salmon. I don't know how to cut it but [name] and [name] know how to do Arctic char, so we used that tradition. They taught us too how they would prepare fish in their community."

Takeaway:

The Marketplace provides opportunity to gain a wide variety of skills both in the running of the space and in the exchange of skills between community members. It also provides a place for young artists to gain exposure for their work.

4. Challenges

Although an overwhelmingly positive experience, like any new venture, the Marketplace has faced challenges. In the focus group, participants mentioned that running during Covid had presented some operational challenges. However, the main challenges have related to individuals not fully understanding the concept of the space.

"Some people look at it like a food bank. It is a hard to get past the brainwashing of colonialism and capitalism. It took a while for me. But seeing it in person is amazing. Some people still see it. Our communities have had to rely on government and there has been a few moments where people have been like, "can you just give it to me". There has been a little bit of entitlement for some people. It goes back to colonialism. Some people have seen it as a foodbank but that's not the point."

"[A challenges is] people not understanding the concept. People trying to come in that are not safe for the place. Or adults who don't need the market place. Or people who have ulterior motives. The calendar app allows for some screening to happen because we can see people's names. It's a close community."

"The market relies on other people having an understanding of their privilege. If you're a white person with resources, or anyone with resources, you can share without taking. Ultimately it's for a broad community, not just Indigenous, we hope people are taking what they need and it's not being exploited. That could possibly be a challenge."

Takeaway:

The Marketplace has had some challenges with individuals not understanding the trading concept, not having an understanding of their privilege or not being safe for the space. However, the group has been able to address this by screening visitors, and continue to work with the community to understand the purpose and intention of the space.

5. Ideas for the Future

Participants were asked about ideas for the future of the Marketplace.

"The Possibilities are endless. Coming off that dependency and that narrative of needing stuff. The trading post is about building the community, building new skills. It can expand in so many directions. As long as we keep the foundations of it stable. I see it just continuing to expand."

"We could be trading not just physical things but skill sets. Knowing the skills set of people there is so much to trade. For example, trading Bead work for powwow dancing. Not just physical stuff but other things as well."

"It would be cool if we could have an invitation to say, if you come and get something, you can contribute in other ways. There is so much fear of the unknown and anxiety, and inviting people specifically can help people join."

Takeaways:

The Marketplace has a strong foundation and participants feel that if the foundation remains strong, there is opportunity to build, bring in new people by reaching out and inviting them, and explore new ways that people can trade skills.

Conclusion

The voices in this report demonstrate the positive impacts of the A7G Marketplace. By engaging young people in a culturally anchored community project, the Marketplace goes beyond the usual outcomes of a youth program and creates a space for the community to practice self-determination, self-sustenance and to actively work on the revitalization of culture and of Indigenous Economies.

Focus group participants spoke to the many ways the Marketplace strengthens relationships between communities, between people, and with the land. Participants emphasized that the Marketplace provides alternatives to colonized ideas of relationships between communities, interrupts client/staff relationships often present in social services, and recognizes that everyone has value, can contribute to community, and deserves respect. Participants also spoke to the idea that by having Indigenous practices guide what goods come into the space, the marketplace plays a role in strengthening relationships with the land and contributes to sustainable economies for future generations.

Participants shared that by participating in the market, they have been exposed to a variety of new skills. Skills related to running the space, but also revitalizing traditional skills and through cross cultural exchange between community members. The Marketplace also provides an important place for young artists to gain exposure for their work.

Within the focus group, people shared that while the Marketplace has gone overwhelmingly well, there have been some limited challenges with individuals not understanding the trading concept, not having an understanding of their privilege or not being safe for the space. However, the group has been able to address this by screening visitors, and continuing to work with the community to understand the purpose and intention of the space.

In the focus group, participants also brought ideas for future direction of the Marketplace including the opportunity to bring in new people by reaching out and specifically inviting them, and exploring new ways that people can trade skills.

The A7G Marketplace is providing a meaningful space for Indigenous youth. Through this project young people are able to practice culture, engage in meaningful relationships, revitalize old ways, and learn new skills. Perhaps most importantly, this project makes space for young people to have a place leading the community in practices of self-determination and self-sustenance.