

ASSEMBLY OF SEVEN
GENERATIONS



Mapping Indigenous Youth Services Ottawa

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HOW WE GOT HERE

Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G) is an Indigenous youth-led, youth-driven non-profit organization located on the traditional lands of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people, also known as Ottawa, Ontario.

A7G focusses on cultural support and empowerment programs/policies for Indigenous youth while being led by traditional knowledge and Elder guidance. A7G has been operating in this area of work since 2014 and is led by Indigenous youth executives and board members, and also takes strategic guidance from active Indigenous youth that participate in weekly programming. A7G has no core funding or program funding and utilizes spaces that are donated by partner organizations such as Kateri Native Ministry and Museo-Parc.

A7G holds events such as an annual Elders and Youth Gathering, Round Dance and Land Camp, monthly sweat ceremonies, weekly youth drop-ins and language drop-ins. The organization is often helping Indigenous youth in the Ottawa area navigate systems from applying for SIN cards, finding tutors and learning about healthy relationships to emergency services like shelters, mental health hotlines and planned pregnancy programs.

A7G youth use weekly drop-ins to create a safe space where they can share their experiences with each other, meet other Indigenous youth in the city and offer peer-to-peer support with assistance from Elders and knowledge keepers. A7G celebrated its two-year anniversary of Friday night drop-ins on February 28, 2020.

Over the course of the last two years, A7G youth have faced crises such as homelessness, addictions and suicide, stemming from a combination of inter-generational traumas and systemic racism. A7G sees this firsthand on a weekly basis. Despite being in an urban environment, resources to support youth in these crises are often limited or non-existent. The reality of many Indigenous youth is not having access to appropriate services when they need them most. This lack of service impedes the success of Indigenous youth in multiple areas of life including education and employment.



THE REALITY OF MANY INDIGENOUS YOUTH IS NOT HAVING ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE SERVICES WHEN THEY NEED THEM MOST. THIS LACK OF SERVICE IMPEDES THE SUCCESS OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH IN MULTIPLE AREAS OF LIFE INCLUDING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT.

RESEARCH ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY

Database

This database was compiled by four Indigenous youth through online research, word of mouth and the focus group of Indigenous youth on February 7th.

This is a database of services specifically for Indigenous youth but can be used by all youth, when applicable. The services include cultural, mental health, educational support and employment services. Best practices and inclusive services are also noted; examples of those include dental services and eye clinics. An add-on to the database will be made for services that were specifically recommended by Indigenous youth.

This database will be hosted by A7G and will continue to be updated. A visual map with pinned addresses for services in the database will be created.

A full review of the database findings can be found in the supporting document of this report.

Focus group

On February 7, 2020, A7G hosted a focus group at the Bronson Centre in Ottawa. Twenty Indigenous youth attended the focus group and had a lot to share about their experiences with services for Indigenous youth in the Ottawa area. The focus group began with a review of ethics, methodology and purpose of the research.

A team of five Indigenous youth created, facilitated and led the focus group while utilizing research ethics from *Indigenous Youth Voices: A Way Forward in Conducting Research with and by Indigenous Youth*.

The requirements listed in the *Indigenous Youth Voices: A Way Forward in Conducting Research with and by Indigenous Youth* for ethical research with Indigenous youth are as follows:

- accessibility
- Indigenous youth leading and developing research
- holistic approaches
- research ethics defined by Indigenous youth
- community-led and culturally specific
- reciprocity
- supports the implementation of TRC Call to Action 66

These seven requirements were met in the following ways:

- Types of access considered during the research were whether services had wheelchair and mobility access; were accessible to low-income people; had transportation access; were youth friendly; were family friendly; and were inclusive of Indigenous and LGBTQ2S+.
- The research was Indigenous youth-led and -developed.
- Families, parents and Elders were all invited to take part in this research with priority given to youth voices.
- *Indigenous Youth Voices: A Way Forward in Conducting Research with and by Indigenous Youth*, which was created by Indigenous youth, was used as our ethics. Group norms and consent were also ethics the participating youth defined.
- This research responds to a need from community and was led by A7G, a community-centred organization. This research was external, meaning it focussed on services for all Indigenous youth instead of being internal research focussed on a specific Indigenous culture; however, services specific to cultures or nations were categorized in the database.
 - Indigenous youth were hired to complete this research and were compensated at discussed wages. Participants that attended the focus group were compensated for their time and energy in the forms of funds, food and gifts. After receiving all the information for this report from the community, A7G will provide a map that the community and youth will be able to utilize. A7G also looks forward to potential ways the recommendations (see Recommendations, page 16) will be put into action. The best way that research can show reciprocity is by making recommendations and seeing them create changes.
- Lastly, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action 66 reads, “We call upon the federal government to establish multi-year funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation, and establish a national network to share information and best practices.” The research of A7G supports the implementation of TRC 66 by continuing to show both the need for multi-year funding for Indigenous youth organizations and programming, and the systemic challenges that Indigenous youth continue to face.



After the ethics, methodology and purpose were reviewed and consented to by the participants, the focus group began by asking a variety of questions that were documented for all to see using chart paper. Additional notes were recorded by a minute-taker.

Firstly, participants were asked about best practices in services they have witnessed or experienced.

Secondly, participants were asked questions regarding services: What services do you need? What services are lacking? What services do you want to see? What are some of the gaps in services?

Thirdly, participants were asked: What makes a service/space safe? For example, what are characteristics of safe and accessible youth services and workers? How does a safe space feel?

WHAT THE YOUTH TOLD US

During a three-month scan of services available to Indigenous youth in Ottawa (both Indigenous-specific and/or youth-specific), working with a team of four Indigenous youth, we compiled a database of 43 organizations that listed services for Indigenous youth, from mental health and medical services to housing, employment and cultural services.

Invitations for organizations to provide lists of their services available to Indigenous youth were sent out via email and social media call-out. Organizations were also asked to share the focus group invitation and participate if interested so A7G would learn more about services in the Ottawa area. Of the 43 service providers listed in the initial database, only six responded to invitations sent out via email and social media. Service providers did not attend the focus group.

When searching to get in touch with services, youth would be required to fill out a form and wait for a response from the services. This can be considered a barrier, slowing down access to services. Additionally, when searching for services online, youth would often find many dead links to services.

Another important finding is the lack of services available across the city. The majority of services listed are either located in Vanier (Central East) or downtown Ottawa. There is a lack of services available in Orleans, Kanata, Barrhaven and South Keys. While there was not much research done regarding the Gatineau area, no services were reported in the Gatineau area, which suggests there is also a lack of appropriate services for Indigenous youth living in the Gatineau area.

Services for Indigenous youth in Ottawa

The following are examples of services that participants said they need:

- housing
- tutoring
- post-secondary guidance
- scholarships
- mental health services
- sexual health services
- Planned Parenthood
- childcare



- health care
- legal aid
- dental health
- ceremonies
- employment
- cultural services
- supports for learning disabilities
- Indigenous language

Participants said that even though some of these services exist, some are very limited, underfunded and/or difficult to access for low-income youth. For example, discovering and learning about these services often requires data or WiFi, which isn't always provided or accessible for youth living in poverty.

Some of the barriers Indigenous youth experience when trying to access services include the following:

- Some services need recommendations from professionals (doctors, probation officers, etc.) to access and therefore are not preventative.
- Lack of understanding of Indigenous youth by non-Indigenous service providers or non-youth workers
- Lack of understanding of systemic challenges
- Unapproachable or inappropriate workers
- In some school boards, Indigenous participants mentioned they felt that there were no supports at all.
- Some services seemed to be looking for "good" youth to work with; low-income youth were overlooked as not deserving of help and services.
- Most participants mentioned they had at least one negative experience with a teacher in their lifetime.
- Tokenizing experiences of Indigenous youth to form programming for Indigenous youth
- Some non-Indigenous workers or services often ask Indigenous youth to do cultural work for them without compensating them for their time or energy.
- Some youth felt that trying to access services was like a full-time job.

Characteristics of safe service-providers

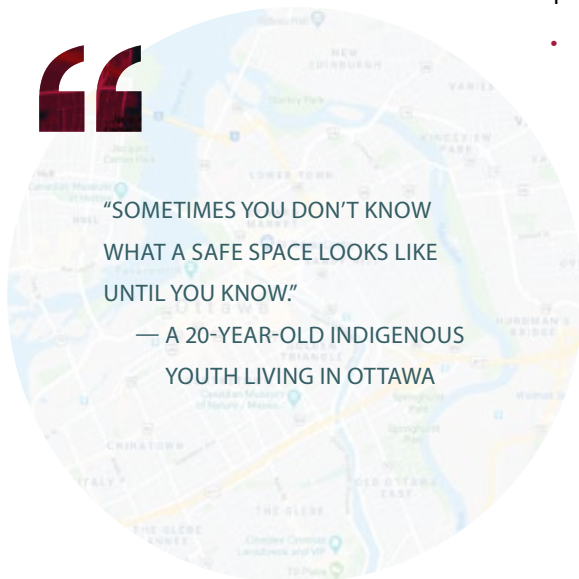
It's important to acknowledge that talking about safe spaces can be a new thing to some people. Some youth have never been asked about safety. Some youth have been desensitized to problematic behaviour and have accepted the lack of services available to them.

What makes a space safe?

According to Indigenous youth we spoke to, a safe space needs the following components.

Led by community

- Everyone is welcome, accepted
- Space is cleaned properly and maintained
 - Everyone acts accordingly to contribute to maintenance of space
 - Acknowledgment, validation/belief, kindness
 - Normalizing asking for help
 - Relationship maintenance, accountability, trust-building
 - Warm, cozy, comfortable atmosphere as opposed to industrial, cold, medical
 - Community takes care of the space and everyone is responsible for taking care of their own space
 - Atmosphere can make a space safe
 - Even people in need of housing should be able to feel like they have a home
 - A place where community can come together and be together



Peer-to-peer support

- A place where you can learn from each other
- Pressure-free
- A place to share best practices and coping skills with each other
- Organic, natural flow

Culturally safe

- Consent in everything
- Culturally appropriate (for example, smudge accessible)

- Holistic
- Trauma-informed, behaving respectfully around serious/personal/sensitive issues
- Casual; accessibility in culture
- Valuing Indigenous youth as the experts
- Food is needed
- A place where older and younger generations can share stories and skills with each other
- A place to share cultural knowledge
- A place where you don't need to educate people about being Indigenous
- Understanding intergenerational effects, grief, disconnect

Meets youth where they are at

- No need to pretend to be happy or anything else; freedom to be honest
- Feel comfortable sharing anything and asking questions
- Respect paid to person speaking
- Space to speak/express yourself
- Consistent programming and locations
- No expectations

Space for self-autonomy

- Each individual can make a space safe or not; therefore taking responsibility for your own words and actions is important
- Data responsibility and transparency with taking people's information
- Limited amount of surveys or paperwork
- Trusting youth to self-determine and lead as opposed to dictating how they should be
- Freedom to choose to take breaks

What makes a service provider safe?

Indigenous youth also determined the criteria and characteristics for employees working with Indigenous youth and community. They explained what makes an employee or service provider safe. Recognizing a person as safe can be broken down into the following in-depth requirements.

Indigenous-led

- Workers should be Indigenous
- Trying their best and apologizing when making mistakes
- Real cultural safety

Trauma informed

- Offering consent
 - > Consent about sharing information
 - > Consent about hugging and asking personal questions
- Believing survivors
 - Acknowledging, validating and valuing lived experiences
 - Aware of triggering words

- Using accessible language
- Understanding of complex and compounded grief
 - Reassuring
 - Non-discriminatory
 - Healthy boundaries

Youth friendly

- Non-judgmental
- Open
- Trustworthy
- Inclusive
- Kind
- Respectful
- Accepting everyone's experiences and not assuming
- Honest, including honesty about capacity and expectations (for example, waitlists)
- Gives space to speak and learn for youth
- Accountable
- Consistent



“WITH MY FAMILY MEMBERS NOT PLAYING THEIR ROLES IN MY LIFE BECAUSE OF THE EFFECTS OF INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA, I AM IN NEED OF SERVICES TO HELP ME WITH THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE. THESE SERVICES ARE SUPPOSED TO EXIST IN THE CITY YET TIME AND TIME AGAIN AT CRITICAL POINTS I MEET NEGLIGENCE AND AM SUBJECTED TO TRAUMATIZING ENCOUNTERS. OUR COMMUNITIES DESERVE BETTER.”

— A 19-YEAR-OLD INDIGENOUS YOUTH LIVING IN OTTAWA

Best practices

To discover and gather data about best practices during the focus group, youth were asked what services they found accessible, what they would recommend and what have been good services for them. These are some examples of best practices based on lived experience and expertise of the youth contributors within five categories: housing, health, culture, employment and education.

The service providers listed were recommended by Indigenous youth because they embodied most, if not all, of the requirements for safe spaces and safe service providers listed above, or were at least more accepting or better than other service providers (for example, a dental office might not meet all of the requirements of a safe space, but one that takes Status without being intrusive is better than most dental offices).

A map of these services can be viewed at bit.ly/OttawaIndigenousYouthServicesA7G.

Housing

Butterfly House: Women's Shelter. This shelter has been recommended as a safe place for members of different communities with cultural days and safety for folks of different religions.

Tewegan: Indigenous Transitional Housing for Women. The services provided by Tewegan were described as “opportunities for growth and support for those who are housing-insecure to live together with others in a cooperative way, practising life skills like cooking for one another.”

Health

Bell Dental, Kent Street Dental, Ottawa West Orthodontics, Smyth Dental Centre, Trainyards Dental. These five dental health providers have been recommended as safe for Indigenous clients and accepting of Indian Status.

Odawa Native Friendship Centre Gym. This gym has been recommended for being open Tuesdays from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. for any Indigenous people to use facilities without any membership or cost. Youth have appreciated the weights, volleyball and spacious location.

YMCA Downtown/Centretown. The gym was recommended by youth.

Ottawa Eye Clinic. This eye clinic has been recommended as safe for Indigenous clients and accepting of Indian Status.

Culture

Assembly of Seven Generations. A7G offers weekly youth gatherings, language classes, peer support, special cultural events and land-based programming.

Employment/Skills

Agilec. Agilec offers employment support and \$500 reimbursement for professional/job interview clothing.

Kagita Mikam. Offers different types of training and employment opportunities. However, there are a limited number of spots due to funding. It is also Indigenous-led, which creates a safer environment for many youth.

Minwaashin Lodge. Minwaashin Lodge provides jobs, women's training, student funding and support, cultural workshops and skill building.

Education

Christie Lake Camps. Offers free summer and winter camps for children and youth in Ottawa. They were described as "non-sectoral and accepting of all faiths and backgrounds." Youth said they also offer social services for children and youth.

Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) Indigenous Education Team. One participant said, "The education team helped me get connected to A7G." OCDSB helps support students with an all-Indigenous team. Although there were many concerns around the current education system, participants recommended the Indigenous Education Team as a resource to help navigate the education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

1. There was a lack of services in Ottawa using best practices that could be recommended by Indigenous youth. This can be discouraging, but if services and funders can better understand and respect the voices of Indigenous youth by following through on recommendations listed in reports such as this and others written and led by Indigenous youth, funds and services can definitely effectively meet the needs of Indigenous youth. It is not hopeless; Indigenous youth and communities have always carried the solutions and guidelines to better serve Indigenous youth.

2. The limited response and engagement from service providers in Ottawa to emails and social media can be narrowed down to several factors:

- a. Lack of connection to grassroots and Indigenous youth-led calls to action
- b. Lack of capacity within service providers to respond to external requests
- c. Barriers similar to those listed on page 8

3. There are some examples of organizational best practices that we would like to shed light on. One educational best-practice service provider that was highlighted by A7G and youth participants in the focus group was the Ottawa Carleton District School Board's Indigenous Educational Team. A few reasons this was highlighted for best practices include the following:

- a. The Team members were described as youth friendly (criteria listed on page 11).
- b. The Team was responsive to A7G's call for research, provided lists of their services and also helped advertise the call for services and the focus group.
- c. The Team has developed a good relationship with A7G, students, Elders and knowledge keepers. They also have a list of community partners which shows accountability. Community partners must go through screening processes and can also be removed from the list.



It is important to acknowledge that this report is in no way trying to undermine or discredit current services providers and the work they are committed to. We recognize we are all trying our best in our respective fields. However, the voices and needs of Indigenous youth can no longer be ignored or dismissed. Meeting bare-minimum standards of services for Indigenous youth ultimately results in crises for Indigenous communities. Services for Indigenous youth must meet the standards and needs of the Indigenous youth that are using them.

Based on the guidance of Indigenous youth and with the knowledge A7G has gained over the past few years, below is a list of recommendations with which to move forward to better meet the needs of Indigenous youth in the Ottawa area.

Recommendations that A7G can lead with support of ESDC

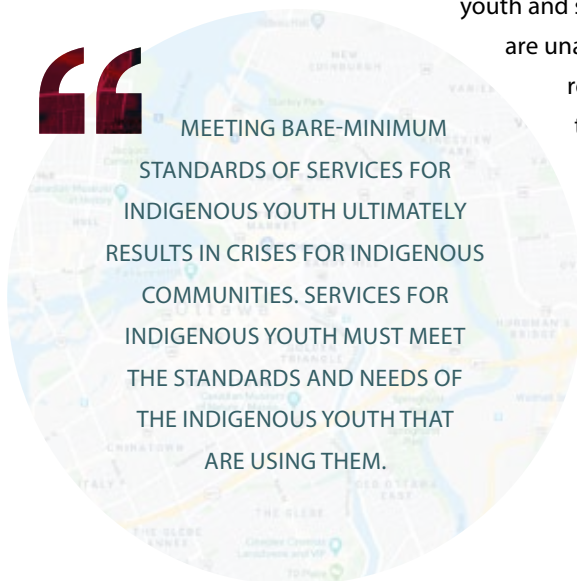
Currently, A7G takes on the role of a connector to many services for Indigenous youth and sometimes must even intervene as a service provider when services are unavailable. Navigating services is an important role that requires responsibility and capacity. A7G would like to host a dedicated team that would help Indigenous youth navigate services in their local area. Details about the composition, criteria and requirements of the Service Navigation Team would be as follows:

Composition

- Service Navigation Indigenous Youth Think Tank (4–10 Indigenous youth with support of Elders and service providers in the area)
- Service Navigation Coordinator (1–3 paid positions, depending on the needs of the community)

Criteria for Service Navigation Indigenous Youth Think Tank

- The Indigenous Youth Think Tank would serve as a guiding body for the Services Navigator Coordinator(s).
- The Think Tank would meet regularly (between once a month and quarterly).
- The goal of the Think Tank is to be an advisory and guiding body with lived experiences and/or knowledge of Indigenous youth experiences on the ground.
- The Think Tank can advise on best practices as well as services that have been unsafe for Indigenous youth.



- When and if possible, the Think Tank could also advise existing services on how to better serve Indigenous youth in Ottawa with the support of A7G and the Coordinator(s).
- Roles and responsibilities would be clearly outlined by the Think Tank after reviewing the initial report.
- Members of the Think Tank would be compensated for their time with funds, food and travel.

Criteria for Service Navigation Coordinator

- The Service Navigation Coordinator would be a trained advocate from within the community that would help connect youth to existing supports to address challenges that they face.
- The Coordinator would need to have a strong understanding of local services such as education, housing and health.
- The Coordinator would build relationships with community partners to facilitate the connections for youth.
- The Coordinator should have a consistent and dedicated office/room to work from.
- The Coordinator should be housed within A7G (Ottawa specific), and would work in relation to the group norms and work already outlined by A7G youth.
- The Coordinator would update the Services Map regularly and receive feedback or recommendations for appropriate services.
- The Coordinator would receive guidance directly from the Indigenous Youth Think Tank as well as Elders and knowledge keepers recommended by A7G.
- Funding for the Coordinator position(s) should take into consideration salary, admin, supplies and office space.

As a base, training for the Service Navigation Coordinator(s) would need to include, but not be limited to, the following:

- ASIST training (suicide intervention training)
- suicide prevention training
- trauma informed training
- bystander intervention training

Service Navigation Coordinator characteristics should take into consideration the following:

- should be a youth or relatable to youth

- should be Indigenous
- vulnerable sector clearance
- should support safe space and safe service provider best practices outlined above, as well as with the consensus of the Youth Think Tank

Potential Sector Partners

The involvement of multiple sectors is key in creating the solutions advised by Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth voices, which include the concerns and the solutions to the service gaps we have witnessed, have to be acknowledged and accepted. This will mean that organizations and institutions that are used to taking the lead will need to make room for Indigenous youth to be the leaders. A certain amount of humility will be required and sectors that serve Indigenous youth will have to admit that there are serious gaps in services. Being honest about the situations that Indigenous youth are experiencing when trying to access services is important in order to address the barriers. However, if sectors are willing to be

honest and show humility in finding solutions, Indigenous youth will be able to live longer and healthier lives. The sectors needed to make these changes include the following:



- Youth-serving organizations, which include service organizations providing youth programming, Indigenous organizations and non-Indigenous organizations
 - > those offering housing for youth
 - > those offering employment services for youth
 - > those offering cultural programming for Indigenous youth
 - > those offering educational supports and services for youth
- Funders of youth programs, including private and public funders
 - > federal funders
 - > provincial funders
 - > municipal funders
 - > foundations
- School boards and educational institutions
- Health care providers

Recommendations for youth-serving organizations:

Cultural competency training must be undertaken by ALL service providers and employees with regular feedback from Indigenous youth groups (for example, Indigenous Youth Think Tank).

Cultural activities and programs have to be created and run by community-recognized Elders and knowledge keepers. Self-identifying as Indigenous does not necessarily qualify an employee to run talking circles, drum circles or other Indigenous ceremonies.

Policies must be created to provide consistent and reliable funding for services that Indigenous youth need. (See Indigenous Youth Voices, *A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #66* in Bibliography.)

A final note

Currently, Canada is legally required to provide services for First Nations and Inuit youth through a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling in 2016:

In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) determined the Government of Canada's approach to services for First Nations children was discriminatory. One way we are addressing this is through a renewed approach to Jordan's Principle.

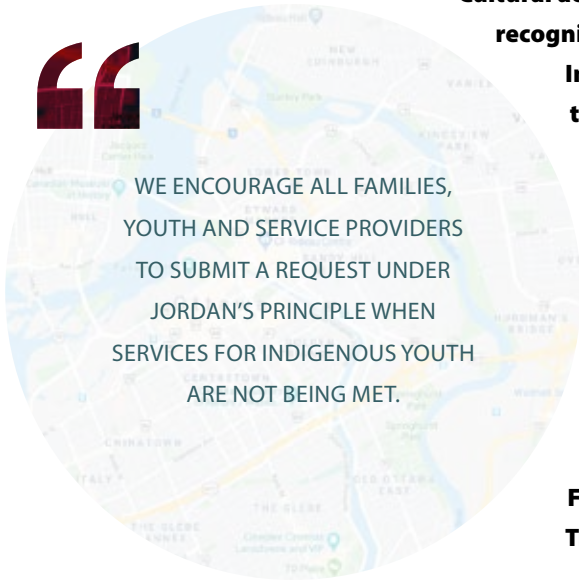
Since the ruling, the CHRT has issued a number of follow-up orders about Jordan's Principle. In May 2017, the CHRT ordered that the needs of each individual child must be considered, to ensure the following is taken into account under Jordan's Principle:

- *substantive equality*
- *providing culturally appropriate services*
- *safeguarding the best interests of the child*

This means giving extra help when it is needed so First Nations children have an equal chance to thrive.

(Government of Canada, Jordan's Principle)

We encourage all families, youth and service providers to submit a request under Jordan's Principle when services for Indigenous youth are not being met.



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