

TAKE 5: Indigenous Youth Voices

by Gabrielle Fayant.

In 2016, Indigenous youth leaders André Bear, Gabrielle Fayant, and Maatalii Okalik established the **Voices of Indigenous Youth Council** to provide implementation recommendations for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Call to Action #66. The council developed *A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #66* to guide the process, based on surveys and consultations with youth across the country. Gabrielle shared an engaging keynote on Indigenous Youth Voices at YouthREX's 2018 Knowledge to Action Exchange. Here are 5 key messages from this talk:

01. Indigenous youth insights matter.

“Our needs are always off to the side, they are not at the forefront. They are labeled as alternative.”

Indigenous youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canada, yet their realities and lived experience are frequently under-valued. Indigenous-led youth organizations are under-funded and Indigenous young people experience tokenization in discussions about reconciliation.

It's also important to recognize that Indigenous youth are not a monolithic group. They are diverse, with varied experiences and concerns. To be meaningful, reconciliation efforts must pay attention to these differences. One-dimensional perspectives are harmful and diminish the work of reconciliation.

02. Reconciliation work is more than a report.

“Reconciliation was never really for Indigenous people. It was for Canadians, it was a chance to right a wrong.”

Indigenous youth continue to express disappointment with instances where limited progress is made beyond developing reports – that sit on shelves, unused. Indigenous youth are expected to provide both data and insights in ways that non-Indigenous youth aren't, yet little seems to come of their efforts. To be meaningful and impactful, reconciliation efforts must move beyond this dynamic – they must require tangible action from non-Indigenous communities.

03. Complicate reconciliation.

“It's disrespectful to label all interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as reconciliation.”

Young people identify problematic trends, in which the label “reconciliation” is indiscriminately applied to collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, yet neither the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action nor Indigenous frameworks are referenced. This undermines reconciliation efforts overall.

04. Document and archive the work!

“We know how important reporting is. If I just tell you, you might not believe me.”

Over 500 Indigenous youth completed surveys and reflected on reconciliation. The *Roadmap* facilitated the collection and documenting of valuable evidence and insights across the country.

05. Trauma is past and present.

“We can't talk about how we feel today without talking about what happened in the past.”

The weight of traumas past affects the present for Indigenous youth. Reconciliation that doesn't address the legacy of trauma due to colonization, residential schools, and inequity fails to meaningfully respond to important issues identified by Indigenous youth.