

Shaking the Movers

A WORLD FIT FOR US

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April 2023



**First Nations Child &
Family Caring Society**



**Landon Pearson Resource Centre
for the Study of Childhood
and Children's Rights**



**National Collaborating Centre
for Indigenous Health**
Centre de collaboration nationale
de la santé autochtone

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Honouring Landon Pearson

The Honourable Landon Pearson was a champion of children's rights who dedicated her life to ensuring that all children are heard as rights-holders, especially by their respective governments. Shaking the Movers is an impactful way of ensuring that children and youth can learn about and exercise the power of their voices while also relationally honouring Landon's life-long commitment to children and young people. Upholding Landon's legacy is integral to the creation of a world fit for all children, one where all children's voices are heard.



Introduction

On February 10, 2023, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (Caring Society) facilitated its first-ever half-day mini Shaking the Movers workshop with two Grade 5/6 classes from St. Anne School on unceded and unsundered Algonquin territory (Kanata, ON).

Shaking the Movers (STM) is an annual youth-driven workshop designed by the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights at Carleton University. The workshops are designed to offer young people a chance to participate in the matters that affect them and consider elements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the context of their lived experience. Participants can speak freely about topics that resonate with them, chosen ahead of time without adult interference, and the Landon Pearson Centre shares their words (in the form of a report written by participants themselves) with key Canadian decision-makers with the intention that they will *shake up the movers* who have the power to implement positive change.

What is different about this mini-workshop?

In typical STM programming, adult involvement is kept to a minimum, with their roles limited to assisting with laying the groundwork for the event (booking a venue, assisting with logistics, ensuring timely remuneration of participants, etc.) and otherwise facilitating a youth-driven, youth-led environment that is open, respectful, and safe for youth to voice their opinions amongst themselves. Youth facilitate the workshop, including the plenaries and small group discussions, and recruit participants voluntarily through word of mouth and other avenues.

For this first-ever iteration of the Caring Society's STM involvement, youth recruitment was more targeted due to time constraints and staff capacity. Two Caring Society team members, Molly Rasmussen and Madelaine McCracken ("the facilitators"), worked with the

Indigenous Education Team from the Ottawa Catholic School Board to identify specific educators whose students would be willing to participate in a half-day workshop as a class. It was decided that the workshop would be held at St. Anne School during the morning of Friday, February 10, 2023, and while adults would be present for safety reasons, they would maintain their distance and give the students the floor without interruption.

The Caring Society facilitators then compiled the students' written responses into this report. Findings are broken down according to the sub-themes identified by the students with an emphasis on direct quotes from the students. Each sub-theme also includes a word cloud that identifies some of the keywords the students used when discussing each sub-theme to offer a visual alternative to a written analysis.

About the Caring Society

The Caring Society works to ensure the safety and wellbeing of First Nations youth and their families through education initiatives, public policy campaigns, and providing quality resources to support communities.

Using a reconciliation framework that addresses contemporary issues for Indigenous families in ways that uplift all Canadians, the Caring Society champions culturally-based equity for First Nations children and their families so they can grow up safely at home, be healthy, achieve their dreams, celebrate their languages and cultures and be proud of who they are.



The Mini-Workshop

This section of the report will provide an overview of this year's theme, the demographic of participants, how they chose the sub-themes, and the overall structure of the mini-workshop.

This year's theme: A world fit for us

"We can't save the whole world but with this intergenerational effort, I think we can make it a little bit better for a new generation of children."

—Landon Pearson, 2022

In August 2022, Landon Pearson wrote a special statement to STM organizers which outlined how 2022 marked 20 years since world leaders met at the United Nations Headquarters to adopt a resolution called, *"A World Fit For Children."* In January 2002, children prepared their own response, at their own forum, about what a world that was truly fit for them looked like. Their message outlined calls for decision-makers to answer to ensure that their rights as children are respected.

Landon noted that while progress has certainly been made to make the world better for kids, unprecedented changes in the last twenty years have created a remarkably different landscape for young people today. Such changes include the rise of technology, climate change, and the collective work taking place to address racism, discrimination, and other forms of inequities and injustices. This theme offers organizers important insight into children and youth's views and feelings on these changing landscapes, both in relation to their lived experiences as well as what they are exposed to through social media, the news, and conversations with their peers.

Demographic of participants and chosen sub-themes

Facilitators planned to engage with two split classes of Grade 5/6 students (ages 10 to 12), for a rough total of 50 students. However, February 10, 2023, was a snow day for the Ottawa Catholic School Board, and as a result, there were approximately 30 students in attendance. While this may appear to be a slight limitation at first glance, upon further reflection, had there not been a snow day, the total number of students may have actually been too large to properly engage in the mini-workshop without distractions.

Prior to starting the workshop, students were asked to read the *A World Fit for Us* document from 2002,¹ and to decide whether the concerns the young people addressed in 2002 are reflective of what it's like to be a young person today. Did they feel there were new considerations that hadn't been included in the original document? Were some items no longer relevant? What changes needed to be made in order for the world to be fit for young people in 2022-23?

Educators shared the sub-themes that their classes had decided on two weeks prior to the workshop. Students identified sub-themes in smaller groups, then voted on the topics as a class. **War**, **poverty**, and **climate change/environment** received the most votes and were identified as the sub-themes.

The students wanted to address these topics for various reasons. They chose **war** because "People are losing jobs, homes, and people they love. Peace can be obtained without fighting because if no one was fighting family members wouldn't have to be sent away for something that can happen with no one getting hurt."² They felt strongly about **poverty** because "lots of people don't have the money

¹ A World Fit for Us statement: <https://sites.unicef.org/specialsession/documentation/childrens-statement.htm>

² These quotations are taken directly from the students' notes in which they identified and voted on the sub-themes.

for basic needs like not having money for food or shelter.” Lastly, they chose **climate change/environment** because “there are lots of problems with the environment and we want to fix them.”

Facilitators also considered that it was relevant to see what students were feeling and thinking toward **Truth and Reconciliation**. As such, with the classes’ collective consent, this topic was also included as a fourth sub-theme.

It is imperative to note a limitation³ within their selections. The students’ rationale for choosing each sub-theme had less to do with their lived experiences as children, but instead focused on why it is important to raise awareness of each sub-theme in order to bring change. This reflection will be unpacked in the findings section of this report.

Workshop structure

The mini-workshop was designed with the attention spans of young people in mind. Facilitators were cautious to limit the amount of lecture-style discussion (where facilitators explained the tasks and clarified any questions) to a minimum, and instead emphasized that this workshop would be driven by the students themselves. At the same time, facilitators felt it necessary to spend time reminding the students of how the STM process works, and that their ideas and suggestions will be shared with decision-makers in Canada.

To begin the day in a good way, the students were shown a video message from Dr. Cindy Blackstock, who encouraged them to approach the workshop with confidence and with purpose and reminded them that their voices matter and ought to be listened to.

The workshop facilitators then spent some time commemorating the Honourable Landon Pearson, who is fondly remembered as “the

children’s Senator.” The students honoured Landon by participating in the mini-workshop and they can continue to contribute to her legacy by expressing their voices in matters that apply to them, invoking their rights as children and youth.

Additionally, the students learned about the very first STM workshop which was held back in 2007, before many of them were born. This helped to situate the students within the movement’s history, now in its sixteenth year. It also reinforces the idea that these workshops can truly make a difference.

At this point, facilitators reminded the students why they were in their classroom that day and what the goal of the workshop was. The facilitators asked students if they recalled reading the document called “A world fit for us,” and if they remembered identifying the three sub-themes that they felt compelled to delve into through the lens of creating a world fit for all children in 2022-23. While the students took some time to recall having done this work, with a bit of prompting they were able to remember reading the report as a class and identifying the sub-themes. Facilitators then explained that the students would also discuss a fourth sub-theme, which they were happy to include.

Students were then separated into groups of three to five people each. Students chose their groups freely, with adults only intervening to ensure that every student was part of a group. All groups remained the same throughout each 20-minute session, with the exception of one group of five students who were separated to prevent further class disruptions.

Students were given 20 minutes to spend time discussing each sub-theme, with a 20-minute recess and snack break after the first 40 minutes.⁴ Each group received a sheet of paper for each theme,

³ We use the term limitation in this context simply to note the impacts that this different interpretation of the workshop’s purpose had on the student’s discussions and overall experience.

⁴ Please note that the agenda created by facilitators did not account for the school’s daily recess break. The 20 minute break taken after completion of the first two themes coincided with the regularly scheduled recess but is not reflected on the original agenda.

which asked them to summarize highlights, significant quotes, and key take-aways from their discussions. Groups could assign one note-taker for the full duration of the mini-workshop, or the group members could take turns taking notes. Their sheets were then collected by the facilitators at the end of the workshop. The students included their first names on the documents, but no last names were collected.

For the full agenda of the mini-workshop, please see [Appendix A](#) on page 11.



Findings

Environment / Climate Change:

"... we're inheriting a cruel world."

When tasked with coming up with their sub-themes, the students overwhelmingly agreed on **environment / climate change** as an important issue facing young people in 2022-2023, and what must change in order to create a world that is truly fit for them. It is clear that this is something that is at the forefront of young peoples' minds in 2023.

The students' discussions overlapped through the following four themes:

1. Inheriting the mess of adults
2. Existential doom
3. Government solutions
4. Individual responsibility

Students overwhelmingly noted the injustice of inheriting a mess they did not create, and wanting adults to do the right thing and fix the problem:

- *"Adults should help us because it was their fault in the first place."*
- *"Adults are older than us, they should know better than us."*
- *"We need to protect the world because when we inherit it, we don't want it to be broken."*
- *"We have to fix what the older generations did."*

It was also clear that students understood the severity of climate change and worried about its implications on sustaining life. The scarcity of natural resources and clean air was discussed often as well, and there was a clear sense of dread and overwhelm to the discussion:

- *"If we don't stop polluting the world, we could die."*
- *"The land is already polluted; if it gets worse, all humans and animals could have a high death rate."*
- *"How is the world going to look when we're older?"*
- *"It impacts us because without it, we wouldn't have lots of food or clean oxygen."*

But alongside the issues they raised, the students also noted various solutions at both the individual level and the level of various governments. Individual accountability for taking care of the planet was discussed in both aspirational and concrete terms:

- *"I'd like to see less waste and litter."*
- *"People need to be more respectful of the environment."*
- *"We want to see a stronger push against plastic."*
- *"We want to see more sustainable products."*

Further, students demonstrated a clear understanding of the fact that large-scale issues like climate change cannot be remedied by individual actions alone and will require governments to take action. This was voiced in the following examples:

- *"We want to see better city design."*
- *"I want to tell them to stop cutting rain forests down."*
- *"Adults should take action and give children a voice."*
- *"We need better public transportation."*

The following picture displays key words from the students' conversations.



Figure 1. Word cloud for sub-theme 1: Environment / climate change

War:

"... people don't realize that war is horrifying."

When tasked with coming up with their sub-themes, the students also identified **war** as an important issue taking place at this time, and one that must change in order to create a world that is truly fit for them.

The students' discussions overlapped across the following three areas:

1. Communication
2. Responsibility and power
3. Sadness, trauma, and the role of media

The students were able to bring the importance of communication between adults to the forefront of their conversations, as evidenced in the following quotations:

- *"Adults need to negotiate better."*
- *"We should just talk it out."*
- *"Talk to the adults about the problems the kids want solved."*

The students also alluded to the power these decision-makers hold and in the same breath, the responsibilities that these decision-makers have toward others, including the students themselves. Students conceptualized this finding in the following statements:

- *"Lots of people have power that they don't deserve."*
- *"War affects every single living thing on the earth. World peace is needed on the earth rather than fighting over land affecting families, animals, and everyone's home."*
- *"World peace is essential to everyone and everything."*

Lastly, it was clear that the students felt very sad when discussing this topic, and rightly so. Their emotions and feelings of anxiety are reflective of these current realities, as well as how they are consumed through the media. This is what the students had to say about how they were feeling, and how much they wanted to stop feeling this way:

- *"It is important to acknowledge the people in the war. It makes us sad."*
- *"Kids lose their parents and are scared."*
- *"This starts generational trauma and PTSD."*
- *"The news, when it's on, it makes us sad."*
- *"Help to stop the war or help the war end. Change means more allyship."*

Keywords taken from their discussion notes are displayed in the following image:

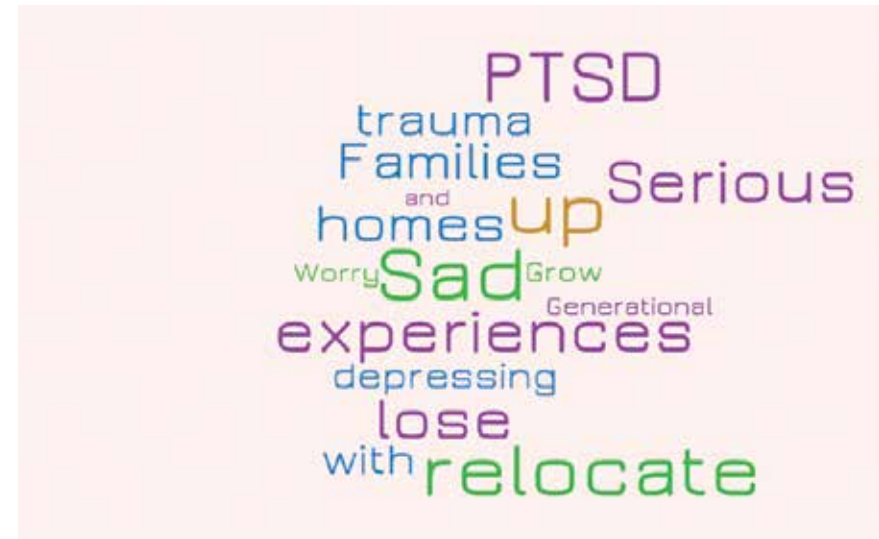


Figure 2. Word cloud for sub-theme 2: War

Poverty:

"... everyone deserves a roof over their head."

When tasked with coming up with their sub-themes, the students further agreed on **poverty** as an important issue that impacts many and one that must be remedied in order to create a world that is truly fit for them.

The students' discussions overlapped across the following four areas:

1. Human dignity
2. Intergenerational poverty
3. Internalization of solutions
4. Government inaction

The students were able to make clear connections between the impacts that poverty has on one's ability to live in dignity, and how it even poses restrictions on the full exercise of particular human

rights. The idea of universal human dignity was prominent, and one student in particular applied a more intersectional lens to their discussion:

- *"People with disabilities need to be able to afford to get to their appointments; if they can't, this can impact their health."*
- *"Everyone deserves basic human essentials."*
- *"Everyone is lovable."*

The students also appeared to be interested in the concept of intergenerational poverty, or the cycle of poverty, which points to their recognition of the fact that poverty is more often than not due to factors beyond individual control:

- *"If children are in poverty, then they will likely grow up to be in poverty; the cycle continues."*
- *"People born into poverty tend to remain in poverty."*
- *"Women need good education so families can break the cycle of poverty."⁵*
- *"If you're poor, it's hard to get out."*

This sub-theme appears to have offered students the opportunity to talk more about their feelings with regards to poverty, which included apathy, a sense of hopelessness, and fear for their own futures. These sentiments are revealing and point to the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual weight that events and issues such as this have on children's overall holistic wellbeing.

- *"Us kids can't help end poverty."*
- *"I feel like I need to start saving money now to make sure I'm okay later on."*
- *"I want to do a lemonade stand or shovel driveways to save money."*
- *"We should make donations to charity."*

⁵ The reason behind the specific focus on women in this case is unclear.

Finally, students recognized and discussed the various steps that governments must take to help address the crisis of poverty. Many recognized that Ottawa is in the middle of a homelessness crisis and that shelters are at capacity.

- *"The government needs to stop the cycle of horrible living conditions."*
- *"We need to build new homeless shelters."*
- *"It is not fair that people with addictions end up on the street when they just need help."*
- *"There is not enough support for people in poverty."*

In the image below, keywords from the student's written notes are displayed:



Figure 3: Word cloud for sub-theme 3: Poverty

Truth and Reconciliation: “

... the government of Canada should really listen to Indigenous peoples instead of ignoring them.”

Although the topic of **truth and reconciliation** was not among the sub-themes that the students came up with, workshop facilitators sought the students' collective consent to incorporate it to round out the discussion.

The students' discussions overlapped across the following three areas:

1. Government funding for education
2. Awareness / taking action
3. Language revitalization

The students were aware of the underfunding of First Nations education on reserves across Canada and knew that the federal government has a responsibility to equitably fund education for all children. The students clearly identified the issues of inequitable funding as is demonstrated in the quotations below:

- *“We would like to help them get as much funding as us so they can thrive and fulfill their dreams.”*
- *“We want to see adults equally fund all people.”*
- *“The government gives no or little money to these schools.”*

Another clear finding is the students' belief in the importance of raising awareness and taking action with regards to truth and reconciliation. The students outlined ways the federal government can make a difference as well as their own perceptions of accountability for remedying relations between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

- *“It is not enough to just apologize for what we did; we should actually do it not with words, but with actions.”*
- *“We know the mistakes we made so we don't repeat them. Now we know what happened and we realize that it's really bad.”*

- *“It impacts us because it keeps going like a cycle, so it affects our community.”*
- *“Nobody should be ignored.”*

Lastly, the students made a significant connection to the role of education and language. They outlined how they would like to know more about First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and how much they also need to safeguard their cultures and languages, displayed in the following quotations:

- *“More Indigenous curriculum.”*
- *“Languages are being extinct.”*
- *“Things needed to teach their languages.”*

The image below displays keywords taken from the students' written notes about this sub-theme:



Figure 4: Word cloud for sub-theme 4: Truth and reconciliation

Limitations of our approach

As with any research process, this mini-workshop presented a few limitations regarding the process and findings.

First, as has been mentioned, the Caring Society facilitators were required to plan and execute the workshop within a period of roughly six weeks, which had impacts on the recruitment of participants as well as how clearly the intentions of the workshop were conveyed to the students. Had the recruitment process begun sooner and adhered to an approach where the workshop is promoted and interested students sign up on their own, we believe there would have been less classroom management needed. While the majority of students were engaged and focused, there were instances where some students engaged in distracting behaviours that impacted the others' focus.

As facilitators, we also observed a distance between the students and their chosen sub-themes that was apparent in their small group discussions. While students were asked to identify the sub-themes that they felt were most significant in the context of their own lived experiences as young people in 2022-23, it appeared that they identified general *causes* that they believed they should raise awareness about.

The identification of causes impacted the way their conversations were structured and the level of action they felt it possible to suggest. For instance, during their discussions about the sub-theme of **war**, they frequently deliberated what they could possibly do or say, as a young person in Ottawa that could “end” war(s) taking place abroad. Most of the student's findings were not shared in rights-based language, with the exception of sub-theme 3, **poverty**, and they did not speak explicitly to particular articles in the UNCRC.

Students often had to be reminded that their discussion points would be shared with key decision-makers who care to know what

young people were thinking and experiencing in 2022-23. It was not otherwise clear that they grasped the purpose of why they were participating in the workshop.

As a way to close out the workshop, the Caring Society facilitators attempted to take stock of how the students felt after the experience. Prior to the workshop, the expectation was that it would leave students feeling empowered to use their voices for change and inspired to take action. However, due to the limitations identified above, the responses received from the group took a different direction. Students noted that their discussions felt “heavy” or “sad” and left them feeling down. This was surprising to facilitators, as these were topics that the students themselves had identified prior to the workshop.



Moving Forward

Shaking the Movers, when implemented properly, is a meaningful and effective way of ensuring that young people are empowered to participate in the matters that affect them and have the opportunities to use their voices for change. Since 2007, the workshops have yielded significant findings that can be used to make strong policy recommendations, and we believe that it is a great exercise in youth civic participation when implemented according to standard procedures.

Instead, what we experienced was a collective sense of dejection among students, due in part to discussing 'heavy' topics with a great degree of removal from their actual lived experiences. This finding can perhaps be interpreted as a lack of empowerment, where young people as a whole feel as though their voices are not important enough to enact change. This is perhaps the most significant finding with implications for educators, curricula developers, researchers, and policymakers, as well as anybody who regularly engages with young people.

If we truly believe that youth are the future, it is imperative that we make sure that they do too.

Appendix A: Agenda

Shaking the Movers: A World Fit for Us

February 10, 2023

Introductions	9:00 AM–9:15 AM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land acknowledgement What do we do at the Caring Society? 	
Honouring Landon Pearson	9:15 AM–9:20 AM
Remarks from Cindy Blackstock	9:20 AM–9:25 AM
Objectives	9:25 AM–9:45 AM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of "A World Fit for Us" Go through the sub-themes! Get ready to break into groups 	
Small group discussions:	9:50 AM–11:20 AM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-theme 1: Environment Sub-theme 2: War BREAK Sub-theme 3: Poverty Sub-theme 4: Truth and Reconciliation 	9:50 AM–10:10 AM 10:10 AM–10:30 AM 10:30 AM–10:40 AM 10:40 AM–11:00 AM 11:00 AM–11:20 AM
Group re-cap and goodbyes	11:30 AM–12:00 PM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about what your group identified How do you feel about what you learned? 	



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