

NOVEMBER 2025

SHAKING THE MOVERS REPORT

EXPLORING FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION THROUGH THE LENS
OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
BGC EASTVIEW



LPC

Landon Pearson Centre
Carleton University

SUMMARY

On Sunday, November 16, 2025, we hosted a Shaking the Movers workshop at Eastview Community Centre with the BGC in Toronto's Leslieville neighbourhood. The workshop ran from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and 13 children ages 4-13 years participated. We collaborated with the BGC Eastview of Toronto to find local participants.

This year's theme, "Exploring Freedom of Expression Through the Lens of Children's Rights," engages with Articles 2, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 30, and 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our workshop featured two in-depth conversations on the theme, focusing on subthemes of religion, personal choice/expression, and gender identity. We played movement games, such as Red Light, Green Light, Musical Chairs, and Simon Says. These games were done to help build relationships with other participants and make them comfortable in the space.

The facilitators performed a skit about the theme. These activities were to build relationships and comfort among participants. At the end of the workshop, participants created a mural demonstrating everything they had learned and wished to express.

Overall, the participants were highly receptive to learning about their rights and eager to explore diverse religious, gender, and identity perspectives. Children expressed a desire to learn more about diverse identities and beliefs, especially at school. They were interested in children's rights and liked sharing their experiences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2. SUMMARY
- 4. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & DEDICATION
- 5. ABOUT SHAKING THE MOVERS
- 6-8. THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
- 9. FACILITATORS AND PLANNING
- 10. WORKSHOP SCHEDULE
- 11. INTRODUCTION & DISCUSSION ONE
- 12. DISCUSSION ONE CONTINUED
- 13. MOVEMENT ACTIVITY
- 14-15. DISCUSSION TWO
- 16-18. SKIT BY FACILITATORS
- 19-22. ART ACTIVITY
- 23. RECOMMENDATIONS TO DECISION-MAKERS
- 24. OUTCOMES & CONCLUSION

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Helix Foundation acknowledges the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. It is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.



DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to the Honourable Landon Carter Pearson, who advocated for children's rights throughout her life as a Canadian Senator.

She opened the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights in November 2006. The Landon Pearson Centre enhances the lives of children and young people by promoting awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Landon Pearson was a dedicated advocate for children and youth, and her legacy has continued through the work of the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights. Because of Hon. Landon Pearson's work, Shaking the Movers as a workshop series can exist.



INTRODUCTION TO SHAKING THE MOVERS

Shaking the Movers (STM) is an annual, youth-driven, youth-led workshop held across Canada. Shaking the Movers workshops educate children and youth to consider the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in their daily lives. In turn, participants share comments and recommendations intended for governments, academia, and civil society.

Shaking the Movers affords children and youth participants a unique opportunity to exercise their rights while participating in critical civil processes, with the assurance that their voices will be heard.

Shaking the Movers is unique in that it allows young people the time, space, and opportunity to share their views on specific rights with youth facilitators, who then share these thoughts with policy-makers, academics, and other adults in positions of power. STM subverts traditional power structures and gives young people's voices real weight.

THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Our discussions connected to the following Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and specifically to the theme of “Exploring Freedom of Expression Through the Lens of Children’s Rights.”

Article 2: No Discrimination

All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason.

Article 8: Identity

Children have the right to their own identity – an official record of who they are which includes their name, nationality and family relations. No one should take this away from them, but if this happens, governments must help children to quickly get their identity back.

Article 12: Respect For Children’s Views

Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.

Article 13: Sharing Thoughts Freely

Children have the right to share freely with others what they learn, think and feel, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms other people.

Article 14: Freedom of Thought and Religion

Children can choose their own thoughts, opinions and religion, but this should not stop other people from enjoying their rights. Parents can guide children so that as they grow up, they learn to properly use this right.

THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Article 15: Setting up or joining groups

Children can join or set up groups or organisations, and they can meet with others, as long as this does not harm other people.

Article 30: Minority culture, language and religion

Children have the right to use their own language, culture and religion - even if these are not shared by most people in the country where they live.

Article 31: Rest, play, culture, arts

Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.



NOVEMBER 2025

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Overall, the broad theme of freedom of expression and identity allowed for interesting and thoughtful discussions, as well as education about these core children's rights.



FACILITATORS & PLANNING

There were eight youth facilitators, ages 14 to 26 years, five of whom had previously participated in Helix's inaugural Youth Advisory Team. This team has previously worked to build a digital platform connecting Toronto youth with housing, mental health, and employment services. They also delivered a presentation at the National Conference on Ending Homelessness. Each facilitator had experience leading activities with children.

The team met three times virtually before the workshop to discuss how best to introduce the concept of freedom of expression and identity to participants. Topics at these pre-session meetings included children's rights, engaging facilitation methods, problem-solving and conflict resolution.



WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Time	Activity
11 am - 11:05 am	Welcome
11:05 am - 11:35 am	Icebreaker
11:35 am - 12:00 pm	Lunch
12 pm - 12:45 pm	Intro Discussion on Freedom of Expression and Identity
12:45 pm - 1:15 pm	Movement Activity
1:15 pm - 2 pm	Freedom of Expression and Identity Scenarios & Discussion
2 pm - 2:30 pm	Skit by Facilitators
2:30 pm - 3:10 pm	Art Activity
3:10-4pm	Wrap-Up

WORKSHOP INTRODUCTION

To encourage participants to express themselves and engage with the workshop's theme of freedom of expression, one facilitator led an icebreaker activity in which kids shared one thing they loved. This was to prompt thinking about expression and identity. Responses included playing video games like *Roblox* and *Minecraft*, solving puzzles, watching Netflix and TV, the colour black, Hot Wheels, dogs, presents, playing soccer, penguins, family, American football, Hello Kitty, ducks, pillow bugs, ice cream, and sloths.

DISCUSSION ONE: WHAT IS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION?

One facilitator led a focused group discussion to introduce the concept of freedom of expression and identity. She prompted participants to provide examples of freedom of expression. One participant said, "Freedom of expression means expressing yourself." Another participant said, "It means you can express your opinions, rather than letting others assume." Words like 'preferences' and 'thoughts' came up repeatedly. The youth also discussed sharing opinions and protecting other people's speech. Protection means to express speech without punishment. Examples of freedom of speech include speaking, taking action, drawing, advertising, dancing, music, protesting, advocating, and creating art. Another participant said there should be no hatred of other people. Hatred means restricting or ignoring identity. One participant noted that we are allowed to disagree in Canada, and that freedom of expression includes the right to change one's mind. The participants were thoughtful in their discussion of freedom of expression during our first activity, a large-group discussion. Facilitators gave prompts, but the kids were encouraged to share their opinions on freedom of expression. Discussions were focused on a few significant issues, including religion, gender expression, and personal choice/expression.

DISCUSSION ONE:

WHAT IS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION?

Religious Freedom:

- One boy said he had a classmate who said that being Muslim was bad, but he didn't understand why he thought that way.
- Another said, "I have classmates saying God isn't real but my family doesn't believe that."
- One girl mentioned, "I don't practice religion because it doesn't feel right."

Gender Expression:

- One participant said that they don't like it when people think boys cannot play with dolls. The other participants agreed.
- One participant said: "I have a male friend who likes ballet and not soccer, but that's okay."

Personal Choice:

- Freedom of expression was also tied closely to identity. For instance, one participant said: "I like this one particular song, even though most of my friends do not."
- One participant talked about not fitting into the norm and how hard that was.
- A participant said "it's fine to believe in whatever you want." The other participants nodded in agreement.
- Participants discussed that freedom of speech comes from giving up control and letting other people guide their lives, while allowing what you know to guide yours.

MOVEMENT ACTIVITY

We also encouraged the kids to engage in movement activities, such as Red Light, Green Light, Musical Chairs, and Simon Says. The kids enjoyed musical chairs the most. These activities were meant to reinforce the message about freedom of expression through movement, dance, and music. Integrating physical expression into the workshop supported participants' understanding of the theme. Meaningful participant quotations include:

- “It feels good to move around.”
- “Music is important in my culture.”



DISCUSSION TWO: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION & INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES

The next activity was another focused group discussion on how freedom of expression is reflected in our individual identities. Prompts included asking what is freedom of expression? How do we practice it? How do you feel about expressing yourself? Participants defined individual identities as matters to them, such as a holiday unrecognized by the public school system, gender expression, or something else they are proud of. Facilitators wrote scenarios for participants to perform. The participants enjoyed acting and brought their own dramatic flair to each scenario. Facilitators prompted participants to reflect on each conflict in relation to freedom of expression and identity.

Scenario 1: Neela isn't allowed to celebrate Diwali at her school. She wants to bring in lights & sweets & art for her class, but the teacher says no.

Guiding Point: Everyone's culture matters. Schools should try to include a variety of celebrations so kids feel seen and respected.

Participant Reactions: One suggested that the teacher say he respects Neela's tradition, as long as she doesn't bother anyone. He also indicated that the teacher should've been kinder.

Scenario 2: Aaron is upset because his teacher won't use his chosen name and his pronouns, he/him. Also, the teacher says he will tell Aaron's parents about Aaron's change of pronouns.

Guiding Point: Names and pronouns are part of who we are. Kids should be listened to and respected, and teachers should create safe spaces.

Participant Reactions: One suggested that the teacher should respect Aaron's pronouns and gender identity.

Scenario 3: Alana, who is Indigenous, wants her school to invite a Cree Elder to do a smudging ceremony, but is told that there is no smudging at school.

Guiding Point: Indigenous traditions deserve respect and space. Schools should find safe ways to include these practices.

Participant Reactions: One suggested there should be room to understand everyone's beliefs at school.

DISCUSSION TWO: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION & INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES

Scenario 4: Yusuf is fasting for part of the day because of his religion. His class is having a cooking activity, and he feels awkward because he can't eat what the others are making. He wants to join without feeling uncomfortable.

Guiding Point: Teachers can offer roles that don't involve eating so everyone can participate and feel respected.

Participant Reactions: One suggested that the class could include food that Yusuf is allowed to eat so he can feel included in the activity.

Scenario 5: Jacob wants to decorate the classroom for Christmas, but his teacher says no holiday decorations are allowed.

Guiding Point: Freedom of expression includes sharing important traditions; schools can choose fair ways to allow many holidays to be represented.

Participant Reactions: One participant said the teacher should include everyone's traditions at school.



SKIT & DISCUSSION

The facilitators performed a skit entitled “Free Choice” to demonstrate freedom of expression and identity.

Summary: Maya feels her best friend, Jayne, has abandoned her for new classmates, Leo and Zane. Maya accuses Jayne of choosing them over her longtime friends. A teacher steps in and reframes the situation, explaining that people can have multiple friend groups and that making new friends doesn’t mean rejecting old ones. Maya realizes she overreacted, apologizes, and admits she just misses Jayne. The groups reconcile.

The script follows and was highly received by the participants. One participant said, “I like having different friend groups for different games.”

(Jayne, Leo, and Zane together, silently chatting/laughing)

(Ava, Maya, and Daniel together)

Ava: She’s eating with them again. I thought you two were best friends.

Maya: I thought we were. But now she’s always with Leo and Zane. It’s like we don’t exist anymore.

Ava: You should say something. She was YOUR best friend.

Daniel: Do we really need to start something right now? Wasn’t she just at your house yesterday?

Maya: So what? It’s not okay. She practically abandoned us! Do you not care?

Daniel: I care...I just don’t think we need to fight over this.

(Maya walks over to Jayne. Ava and Daniel follow)

SKIT & DISCUSSION

Maya: Hey... are we just not friends anymore? Ever since Leo joined our class, all you've wanted to do is help him get elected to the student council.

Jayne: Of course we are, what do you mean? I literally came over yesterday. Yeah, I've been hanging out with Leo and Zane more, but you know we're all working on the campaign together.

Ava: So you just ditched us? For people you don't even know? That's not fair.

Leo: We didn't steal her.

Zane: It's not about picking sides. People can have more than one friend group, you know.

Maya: Daniel? Nothing to add?

Daniel: I told you I already have nothing to add.

Maya: (to Daniel) She's choosing them over us! We have been best friends since we were 5! How do you not care? (to Zane and Leo) Now all she does is design posters for YOU and help YOU practice YOUR debates. And watch you play YOUR stupid video games!

(Teacher enters)

Teacher: Is everything okay here?

Jayne: We're just talking about how I've been spending time with new people recently and not doing so much of the stuff I used to anymore. I don't know.

Teacher: That's an important conversation to have. We all change, and sometimes that means making new friends or being into new things, but that doesn't mean we have to yell at our friends or that they have left us. We can all coexist.

SKIT & DISCUSSION

Leo: We're not trying to replace you. We just have shared interests. At my old school, tons of kids were into elections, and everyone helped on the campaigns. Everyone played sports. It's different here. Everyone plays instruments or does theatre. It kinda sucks not having my old friends. Jayne has just been really nice. I'm sure you guys could join us if you'd like?

Teacher: It's okay to feel left out, but we all get to make our own choices. Jayne is making her own, and you are making your own. Everyone has that right. And it doesn't mean she doesn't care about you. We all have the freedom to choose who we want to hang out with and what we want to do, right?

Maya: I guess I didn't think of it like that. I'm sorry. I just really miss you.

Jayne: You guys can join us if you want. We're just trying to come up with a good subject for a zine we want to give out.

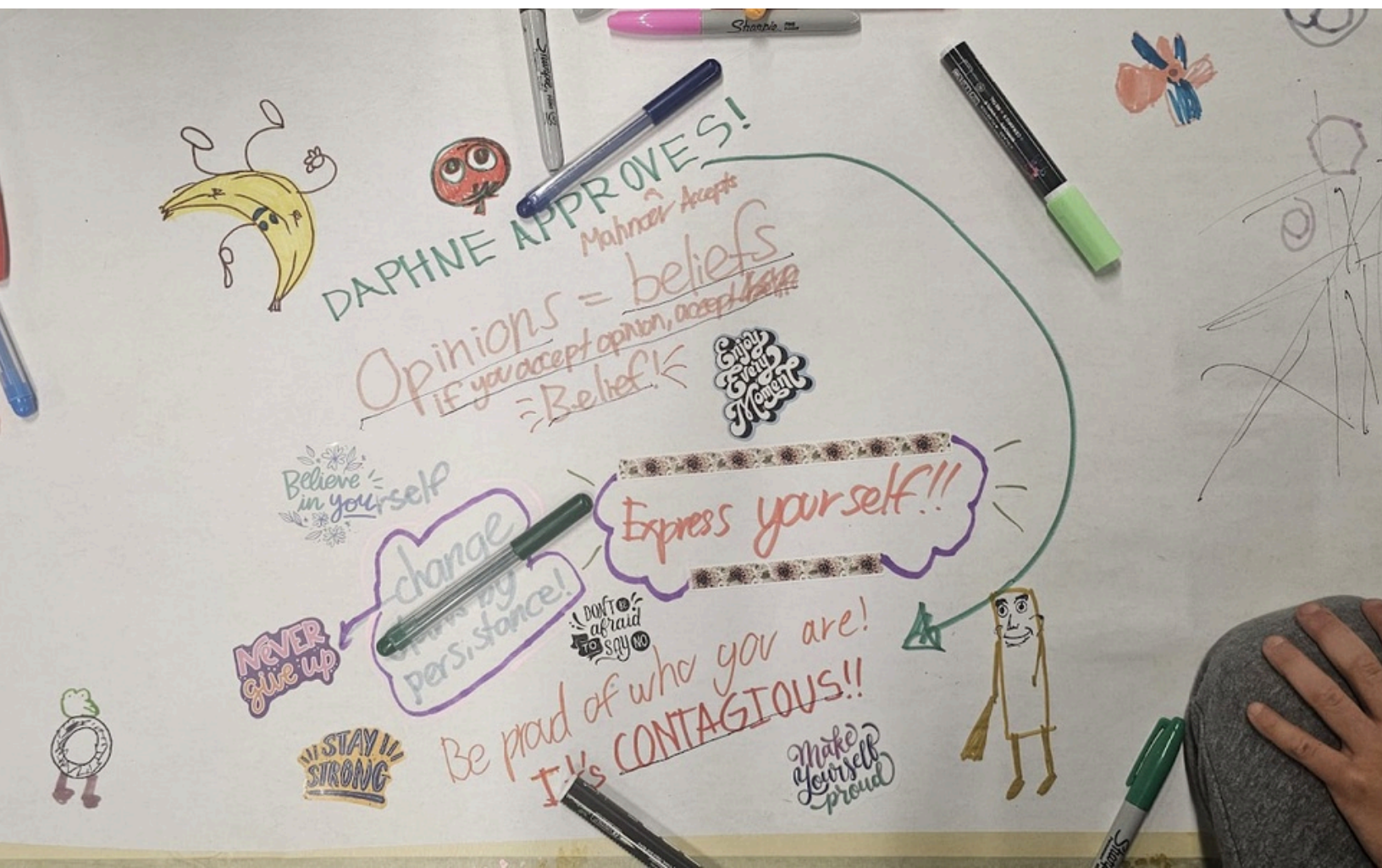
Ava: Okay... that actually sounds awesome. What's it about? Daniel? You want to do this with us?

Daniel: You know, I think I'm good. I gotta study soon anyway, so I'll just see you guys later. Thanks for the invite, though. (leaves)

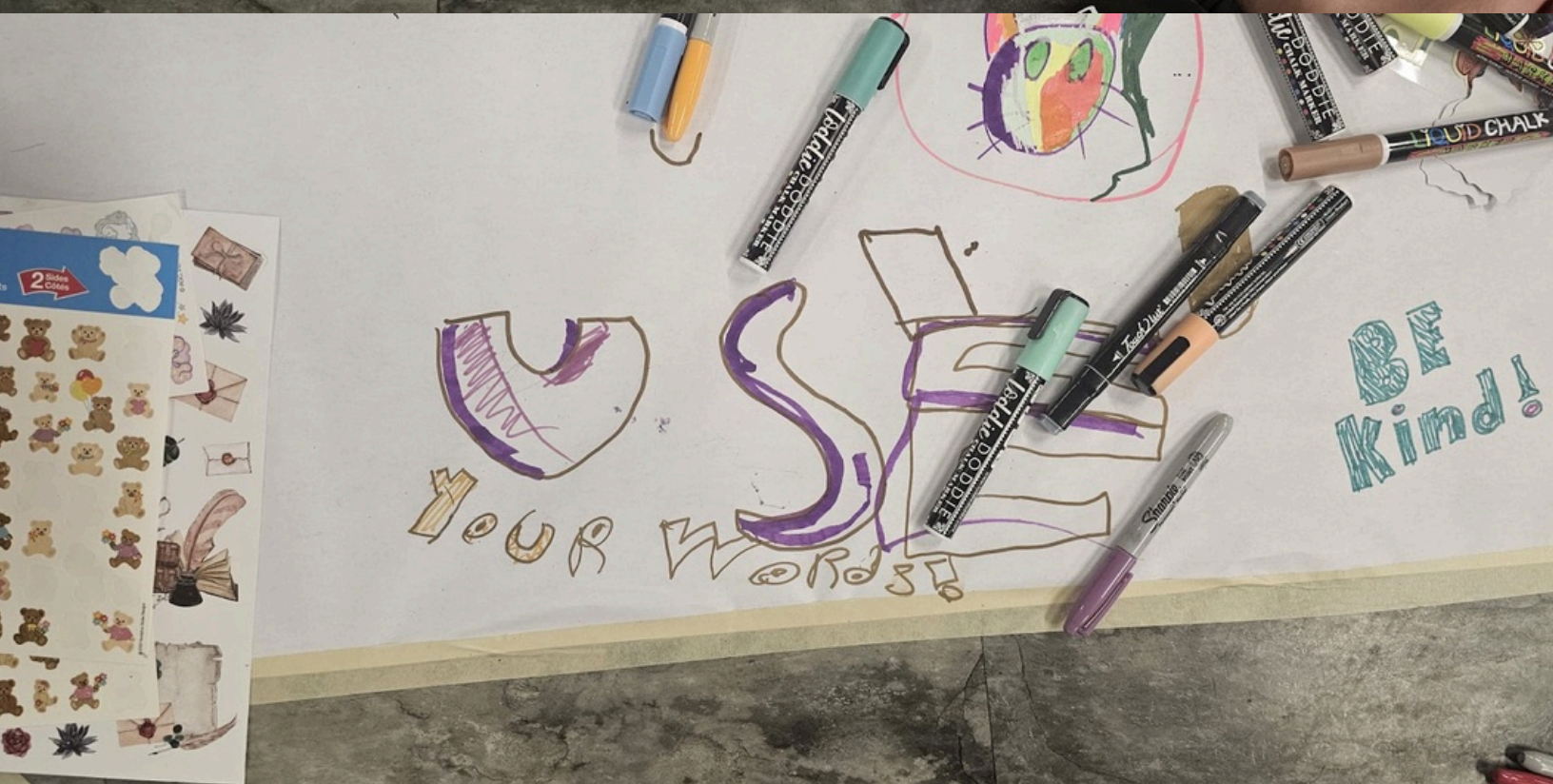
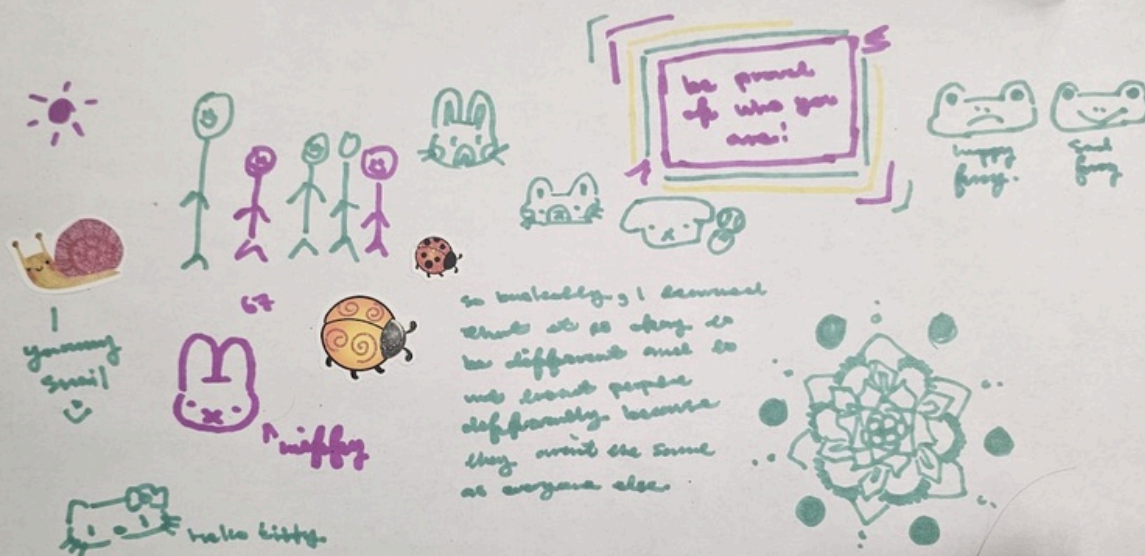
Teacher: See? Everyone is free to make their own choices about who to be around, what to say, and what to do. It works. We respect others, and they respect us back.

ART ACTIVITY

Participants then engaged in an activity to create a Freedom Mural, a large collaborative artwork. The purpose was for everyone to show their ideas about freedom through drawings, words, symbols, or colours. Using a long, rolled-up sheet of paper, we provided the kids with markers, pens, and stickers, so they could all sit and draw on the joined wall. Participants had a half hour to create something. We displayed the final work in the community centre for people to appreciate and enjoy. Common messages include “use your words” and “be proud of who you are.” One meaningful participant quotation was: “The art activity was my favourite part.”



ART ACTIVITY



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NOVEMBER 2025

ART ACTIVITY



RECOMMENDATIONS TO DECISION-MAKERS

- Participants wanted greater opportunities for non-binary gender expression in schools, such as encouraging boys to participate in non-traditional activities.
- Participants wanted to practice their faith in safety. expressed a strong interest in learning more about religious rights and freedoms.
- Participants indicated a desire for great digital safety and awareness. Integrating social media simulations or debates on online rights would allow youth to apply rights-based thinking to modern digital challenges.



WRAP-UP

We moved on to the closing wrap-up discussion, summarizing everything the participants learned. Meaningful participant quotations demonstrating a successful workshop include:

- “We listen and don’t judge.”
- “You don’t judge by how others express themselves.”
- “We should be considerate of others’ identities, pronouns, and every component of their individuality.”
- “It’s okay to be different, and you should express yourselves.”

For next year, participants expressed interest in learning more about religious rights and freedoms, digital rights, and cultural rights. Overall, our Shaking the Movers workshop was successful in providing young people with opportunities to discuss rights. Participants told us that they “had fun,” “liked all the activities,” and “learned a lot.”

OUTCOMES & CONCLUSION

Through hosting this Shaking the Movers workshop, we learned that the participant children were highly receptive to learning about their rights, especially if presented in a fun way. Participants were open about their experiences, such as how a participant talked about his Islamophobic classmate or how another talked about a peer who did not conform to traditional male gender roles. Participants were accepting of each other’s identities and expressions of opinions. Most crucially for decision-makers, participants wished to have their privacy protected online, be able to express their religion freely, and to express their gender identity as they saw fit.

Thank you to Shaking the Movers, the Landon Pearson Centre, and Carleton University for the support in hosting this workshop.