

SHAKING THE MOVERS

TORONTO

EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY
THROUGH THE LENS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE SHAKING THE MOVERS TORONTO TEAM RECOGNIZES THAT THIS LAND, ITS RESOURCES, AND ITS HISTORY WERE STOLEN FROM ITS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

THE FOLLOWING LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT WAS SHARED AT THE BEGINNING OF OUR WORKSHOP SERIES AS AN ENTRY POINT TO CONSIDERING OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION:



As individuals gathering in Canada, whether as settlers, newcomers, or Indigenous peoples themselves, it is crucial for us to recognize and never forget that this land, along with its resources and intricate history, was unjustly taken from its Indigenous inhabitants.

We must acknowledge that our presence here today and our ability to coexist in this space are direct outcomes of a long history of colonialism. This historical legacy continues to profoundly impact the lives of countless Indigenous individuals and communities across Canada.

Land acknowledgments can be unsettling, as they encourage us to reflect and critically examine our shared Canadian history. However, land acknowledgments, alone, are merely an invitation. An invitation to reflect on this history; an invitation to recognize how we, collectively, perpetuate its effects; and an invitation to consider how we can contribute to a changing narrative. It also invites us to embark on a personal journey through the importance of connecting with the earth, its creatures, and its teachings.

In recognition that we are virtually gathering from the lands of numerous Indigenous communities, [click here](#) for further information.

EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY THROUGH THE LENS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Introducing the 2025 Shaking the Movers (STM) Workshop Series:
“EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY THROUGH THE LENS
OF CHILDREN’S RIGHTS .” An excerpt from Stefania Maggi:

I am honoured to share the theme for the 2025/2026 Shaking the Movers Workshop Series: “Exploring Freedom of Expression and Identity Through the Lens of Children’s Rights.” Personally, I find this theme exciting and full of possibilities. It invites young people to share how—and whether—they experience the rights to freedom of expression and identity that are essential to who they are and how they participate in society, all through the foundational principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). But this theme also invites us, the adult allies, to think creatively about how we seek young people’s participation, and how we ask them to express themselves.

The concepts of expression and identity are deeply personal, context dependent, and universally significant. In this year’s workshop series, we are eager to explore the profound entanglement between these rights and the overall health and wellbeing of young people by asking a fundamental question: in what situations and under what conditions do young people feel free to be their authentic selves? The answer is inextricably linked to their mental, emotional, and physical health.

For instance, we might consider:

- How do school environments—through their climate, relationships, and practices—fulfill the aims of Article 29 by nurturing students' mental health and identity formation, or conversely, hinder it? Specifically, how do the relationships between students and educators, as well as peer-to-peer interactions, serve as the cornerstone for either creating a safe space for self-expression or presenting a significant barrier to it?
- How do healthy relationships with peers, families, and communities provide the foundation for young people to explore their identity without fear, and how can the implementation of Article 15's right to associate strengthen this foundation by ensuring access to supportive groups and organizations? Furthermore, what is the impact of these relationships—both in-person and within digital groups—on young people's health, particularly in navigating the line between healthy social media use and the risky online behaviors that can emerge from a search for belonging?
- In an increasingly digital world, how can we leverage Article 17's right to access information that promotes wellbeing to transform social media from a potential source of harm into a platform for positive self-expression? What does fulfilling this right look like in practice for creating healthy online spaces?
- How do our healthcare practices uphold these rights, ensuring young people are heard, believed, and involved in decisions about their own bodies and minds? How can Article 3 help enlighten responsibilities of parents, care givers, healthcare professionals to provide guidance, direction, and space for young people to explore their identity?

SHAKING THE MOVERS TORONTO 2025 OVERVIEW

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- USED EMAIL, INSTAGRAM, TIKTOK, AND LINKTREE FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUTH FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY
- KEPT PAST & PRESENT PARTICIPANTS UPDATED (SEE APPENDIX)

INTRODUCTION TO STUDENT FACILITATORS

- TMU CHILD AND YOUTH CARE STUDENTS ALSO FACILITATED SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES.
- PART OF THEIR ADVANCED GROUP WORK COURSE FOCUSES ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND FACILITATION.
- DEVELOPED TWO THEMES AND LED DISCUSSIONS ON EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY THROUGH THE LENS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

CHILD & YOUTH CARE (CYC) CHILDREN'S RIGHTS CLASS

- TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY (TMU) CYC STUDENTS ARE KEY CONTRIBUTORS.
- SMALL GROUPS CREATED 5-MINUTE THEMATIC VIDEOS THAT PROVIDED A FOUNDATION FOR DISCUSSIONS:
- INTRODUCTORY VIDEO ON UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD; AND
- THEMATIC VIDEOS SUPPORTED BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSIONS.

ZOOM & GRAPHIC FACILITATION

- TO MAXIMIZE PARTICIPATION ACROSS TORONTO, ONTARIO, AND THE COUNTRY, THE EVENT WAS CONVENED VIA ZOOM, ENSURING BROADER ACCESSIBILITY.
- A GRAPHIC FACILITATOR JOINED TO VISUALLY CAPTURE STM TORONTO PARTICIPANTS' IDEAS IN REAL TIME:
- ACTIVELY LISTENED TO CONTRIBUTIONS.
- VISUALLY ARTICULATED IDEAS AS THEY WERE SHARED.
- THE FINAL ARTWORK CREATED BY THE GRAPHIC FACILITATOR IS FEATURED ON THIS REPORT'S TITLE PAGE.
- PARTICIPANTS IN THIS YEAR'S EVENT REPRESENTED A WIDE AGE RANGE, REFLECTING THE DIVERSE DEMOGRAPHICS OF STM EVENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

AGENDA

NOVEMBER 15 2025, 1:00 PM - 4:30 PM (EST)

ACTIVITY

TIME

INTRODUCTION & WELCOME TO SHAKING THE MOVERS

- **TEST OUT YOUR CAMERA AND MICROPHONE**

1:00PM - 1:10PM

ICEBREAKER ACTIVITY

- **OPENING ACTIVITY & GETTING TO KNOW YOUR PEERS**

1:10 PM - 1:30 PM

THEME INTRODUCTIONS

- **OVERVIEW OF SUBTHEMES & PARTICIPANT SELECTION**

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1:50 PM - 2:35 PM

BREAK

2:35 PM - 2:50 PM

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

- **PARTICIPANTS SHARE IDEAS, PERSPECTIVES AND UNDERSTANDINGS**

2:50 PM - 3:10 PM

BREAKOUT GROUPS

3:10 PM - 3:50 PM

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

- **SHARED IDEAS, PERSPECTIVES AND UNDERSTANDING**

3:50 PM - 4:10 PM

DEBRIEF + CLOSING

- **FEEDBACK FOR PRESENTATIONS**
- **CLOSING ACTIVITY**

4:10PM - 4:30 PM

STM 2025

THEMATIC BREAKOUT GROUPS



Breakout groups were created around different topics to facilitate STM participants' engagement in this year's theme, "Exploring freedom of expression and identity through the lens of children's rights."

Participants were invited to reflect on what freedom of expression and identity through the lens of children's rights looks like in relation to these topics and how they are relevant in their lived experience. They explored the connections between rights, responsibilities, and freedom to understand how movers can ensure that all children's rights are respected. The two thematic breakout groups are listed on the right-hand side of this page.

Breakout Group Objectives:

- Introduction to the theme, identifying issues/challenges/barriers to change
- Discussing opportunities, strategies, and ways to facilitate positive change and the realization of rights to expression and identity; and
- Encourage meaningful discussions and reflections on personal experiences within the theme.

The following pages of the report will share contributions from STM participants.

**RESPECTING
DIVERSE
RELIGIOUS AND
CULTURAL
IDENTITIES**

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND
OTHER TECHNOLOGIES
TO SUPPORT
FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION**

STM 2025 - YOUTH INSIGHTS

RESPECTING DIVERSE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Quotes from Diverse Religious and Cultural Identities:

- "Religions should be used to bring unity and not division"
- "Cultural food shaming is a major issue in schools"
- "Schools should be more open to acknowledging and observing religious practices and cultural holidays. There needs to be space for discussion, education, and learning."
- "We are diverse but not united."
- "It is crucial to make spaces in public areas such as schools that are specifically for prayers, so individuals have a safe space to pray."
- "Standing up for your peers and advocating for them to get non-discriminatory treatment is helpful."
- "Policies in places where there are young people should ensure to listen to their voices and act upon them."

Focus Areas:

- Safe Communities: Providing a safe space for young people to discuss their differences
- Mental Health Support: Acknowledging the need for the presence of adults who can listen to young people and provide care.
- Cultural and Family Influences: Understanding how immigration, refugee experiences and intergenerational trauma can have an effect on mental health.
- Diversity and Inclusion: Encouraging cooperation and trust across people from different backgrounds.
- Working Together for a Positive Environment: Encouraging and helping student-led initiatives that encourage cultural understanding.
- Convention on the Rights of the Child: Aimed to connect this with situations young people face in their lives



STM 2025 - YOUTH INSIGHTS

SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER TECHNOLOGIES TO SUPPORT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Quotes from Social media and other technologies to support freedom of expression:

- “Barriers often come from a lack of education and the influence of social media. Social media can spread biased or negative content about cultures and religions, which younger generations absorb more easily compared to older generations who rely on tradition, respect, and real-world understanding.”
- “Social media can spread biased or negative content about cultures and religions, which younger generations absorb more easily compared to older generations who rely on tradition, respect, and real-world understanding.”
- “Seeing people like me on social media makes me feel normal and not distinct.”
- “Social media made me think that I am not alone for being discriminated against.”
- “I learned a lot about different religions and cultures from social media as compared to from school.”
- “Having freedom to express should not be freedom to discriminate.”
- “Social media at many times can be harmful”

Focus Areas:

- Student Voice and Self-Expression: Using online spaces to express different identities
- Digital Safety and Respect: Teaching safe and respectful communication and boundaries
- Mental Health and Online Support: Acknowledging the impacts of online discrimination
- Cultural and Religious Representation: Making sure that marginalized voices are valued and respected
- Digital Citizenship and Responsibility: Knowing the difference between expression and damage
- School-Student-Family Collaboration: Promoting shared responsibility for respectful online behavior
- Equity and Access: Encouraging inclusive technology policies



SHAKING THE MOVERS

POST INTERVIEWS

QUESTION TO STM PARTICIPANTS: AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THIS YEAR'S SHAKING THE MOVERS CONFERENCE, WHAT IDEAS ABOUT EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY STOOD OUT TO YOU?

"Expressing identity can be an act of resistance."

"Adults have a major role in either helping or limiting young people's freedom of expression."

"Young people's voices matter a lot in decision making, and expressing identities supports in establishing change"

SHAKING THE MOVERS

POST INTERVIEWS

Q: HOW HAS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY EVOLVED FROM THE BEGINNING OF THIS SESSION TO NOW?

“Freedom of expression does not mean there are no limits; it means to also have respect in your expression towards others”

“ I thought freedom of expression was only about certain things, such as clothes, but now I know it also includes other things, such as emotions.”

“I am more open to individuals who are distinct from me .”

SHAKING THE MOVERS

POST INTERVIEWS

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE CURRENTLY THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY IN YOUR CONTEXT, OR IN CANADA? WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REMOVING THESE BARRIERS?



“Discrimination makes people hide who they are and that is why governments need to do more to protect people”

“Many young people do not feel safe speaking up; therefore, schools should establish safe and inclusive spaces”

“Rules and structures are unfortunately not for many people; therefore, communities need to challenge this.”

SHAKING THE MOVERS

POST INTERVIEWS

Q: HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO MAKING PEOPLE FEEL SAFE WITH THEIR DIFFERENT CULTURES AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS? WHAT ARE YOUR NEXT STEPS TO FOLLOW-UP ON THIS INSPIRATION?

“Advocate for private spaces for prayer”

“Organize an event that helps the community”

“Acknowledging curiosity as more respectful than judgment when approaching unfamiliar foods”

SHAKING THE MOVERS

POST INTERVIEWS

Q: HOW DO YOU THINK ADULTS, CHILDREN, AND YOUNG PEOPLE CAN WORK TOGETHER TOWARDS ENHANCING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ALLOWING YOUNG PEOPLE TO FEEL SAFE WITH THEIR IDENTITIES ?

“Shaking The Movers is a great place to begin as a space for young people to share what matters to them! We learn and share what we all want to work on”

“Respecting each other and learning about each other's identities is crucial”

“Adults can make young people feel safe so that young people can speak up so that adults can then advocate for them and create change”

SHAKING THE MOVERS

POST INTERVIEWS

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT YEAR'S SHAKING THE MOVERS, INCLUDING ITS THEME?

"Adults should ensure children's voices are acted upon and ensured in policies"

"More sessions should focus on structural discrimination and how this impacts young people's lives"

"Pathways for young people's ideas to come into policies"

GRAPHIC FACILITATION



ISABELLE ESPALDON (SHE/HER) IS AN ARTIST BASED IN TORONTO, CANADA. SHE MAKES ART TO PRESERVE MEMORIES AS THEY WERE MADE.

FOLLOW HER ON @MANGROVEVISUALS ON INSTAGRAM, YOUTUBE AND TIKTOK.

MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANTS

We are grateful to the School of Child and Youth Care at Toronto Metropolitan University for their generous sponsorship of the conference. We also extend our deepest thanks to the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights, as well as the Public Health Agency of Canada, for making this event possible.

We eagerly anticipate another fantastic conference next year and can't wait to see the meaningful action that unfolds in the meantime.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report—we hope it has inspired you!

Sincerely,
STM Organizing Team:
Annabelle De Jesus, Sara D'Urzo, Steven Gibson, and
Fauzan Syed