



Inherent Rights Youth Initiative
Storytelling Series 2023

Final Report





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Introduction

The Inherent Rights Youth Initiative (IRYI) is pleased to present this report for the 2022-2023 Storytelling Series. Between September and December 2022, our youth virtually visited Elders in Star Blanket Cree Nation, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Lil'wat Nation, Listuguj Mi'kmaq Nation, and Upper Nicola Nation to hear stories about the Centre for First Nations Governance' Five Pillars of Effective Governance, including the People, the Land, Jurisdiction & Laws, Governing Systems and Resources.



Figure 1: Storytelling Map

This year's initiative was about putting a new memory in the minds of our children and youth through traditional storytelling. Satsan, President of the Centre for First Nations Governance, has said countless times 'It is time to tell our children and youth a story of hope. It's time to tell the story that our long struggle for the right to be self-governing is over, and we have won. And it is time to put it into practice'.

Each storytelling session was organized in a way that allowed for Elders to share their stories in the first half of the session and have the youth participate in an engaging exercise during the second half. Youth participated in several breakout exercises that gave them the opportunity to explore inherent rights governance and think about ways to bring this knowledge back to their communities.

We wrapped up the Storytelling Series journey with a full-day Youth & Elders Gathering in January 2023, where we welcomed back all the Elders who participated



in our series along with the core IRYI team and those who registered to attend the sessions.

This year we opened registration to our core team of Inherent Rights Youth leaders and the public. Using our networks, we had 90+ people register for the Storytelling Series and brought in roughly 20-30 participants for each session.

We secured funding from the Centre for First Nations Governance, Carleton University's Rebuilding First Nations Governance project, Laidlaw Foundation, and in-kind technical support from the Institute of Public Administration Canada. This series would not have been possible without the generous contributions from our funders along with the personal commitments our team has made to deliver this series successfully.

We contracted two young Mi'kmaq graphic harvesters and a journalism student at Carleton University to follow along on our journey to produce graphic harvests and featured articles of our time together. The graphic harvests can be found throughout the report and the articles are provided in Appendix A: Articles.

The IRYI was launched last year by bringing together youth from coast to coast and providing various training opportunities specific to inherent rights governance. The following report provides a synopsis of our second year together, the five storytelling sessions, Youth & Elders Gathering, reflections, and concludes with insight on our plans moving forward.



Storytelling Session 1: The People Pillar



Figure 2: Storytelling Map, The People Pillar

We kicked off the IRYI Storytelling Series in Star Blanket Cree Nation in Treaty 4 Territory, Saskatchewan with 24 people in attendance. We welcomed Elder Ethel Dubois and helper Mike Dubois to our initiative to share stories about the People.

But first, Satsan opened the Storytelling Series by talking to our youth about why we've organized this initiative, why it's important to share stories and what we hope the youth get from our gatherings. To tell stories of hope, of empowerment and to tell stories of love.

Satsan introduced the Centre for First Nations Governance Five Pillars of Effective Governance. Stemming from the knowledge from great leaders of the past, we need to take care of our people, to rebuild the health and wellbeing of our people, to regain our languages, cultures, our traditions, our histories so that our ceremonies can be strong again. We need to take back our place on our sacred homelands so we can fulfill the responsibilities and obligations as given by Creator, to use it in a way that will always be there for future generations, to protect it. We need to put back in place our own governmental authority, our jurisdiction, put back in place our laws, govern our sacred homelands, govern our people, and maintain international relations with those nations around us. We need to get back to governing ourselves under our own traditional systems of government. We know we have our own traditional systems of government, and we need to go back there. Human resources that we need to rebuild our nations and govern our lands and people once again and to have a new government-government-government relationship. We need all our people to do this. The resources on our territories, we need to use our lands and resources to provide for the health and wellbeing of our people and to rebuild our economies so that we can have the necessary resources to govern our territories and resources and provide



essential services for our people. This work, it's not only going to take hard work and dedication, but it may also take several generations to achieve it.

Ethel began her story by acknowledging that every single person had a place and purpose within community. They were part of a clan, family, house, society, or other subgroup. The extended family network connected each person to the whole. Their voice, skills and special gifts contributed to the collective process of community survival and self-determination. Values of reciprocity, respect and collectivism sustained good relations and balance within the community. Power and authority rested within the people as a collective, therefore they collectively were the ones to decide what was right for the community and determine its direction.

When asked how our young people can learn about themselves, about their culture, their background, Ethel encouraged youth to find out what their family system is on both sides of their families, if they were given an Indian name or find an Elder who can help them with their name. All of us are born with spirit and that spirit has a name. It is up to us what that spirit name is and how we honour it. It has a lot to do with our behaviour and growth as a person. It's a connection with Creator and all his helpers. When you have that connection, then you build faith in who you are.

Below is the graphic harvest that was created based on the stories, discussions, and contributions from those in attendance.



Figure 3: People Pillar Graphic Harvest





For the exercise, participants were broken out into several groups to work through the following questions and explore the People pillar for their own nations:

- 1) Tell us about who you are?
- 2) Tell us about who you were as a people/Nation?
- 3) What values did you live by?
- 4) Tell us what you know about family structures, societies, and clans?
- 5) How did people become part of these groups?
- 6) How were people's skills identified?

Youth shared what they believe is their role in community, what they are doing to become the people they believe they are meant to be. They talked about what their roles were in society, who we are, who their people are, what their family structures were, our clan systems and the roles they have. It was all about connecting. We come from different places, but we have similar thoughts, values, and challenges. We talked about having strong connections to the land, and the importance of kinship care. Trying to be progressive in our communities, living in a mixed world but keeping our people in the centre. Youth talked about how they wanted to learn more, immerse themselves in the culture and learn from each other. Youth talked about commonalities, respect for the land, resiliency of our people, the Indian Act and impacts of colonialism, the work that needs to be done, family structures, clans, our responsibilities to our clans, strengthening our identity, upholding our responsibilities, and strengthening our identity.

Ethel wrapped up the session by reminding the youth in attendance that no one is perfect, but our values play an important role in who we are as a people. Values are there for us to live by and we have to learn how to live by them. Value systems were taught in the home fire. Women are the ones who teach value systems to our children. When you live by your clan system there is protection around you, it will guide you in your lifetime. The skills we have are the gifts we are born with, the gifts we have to learn to be in search of so we can help our communities. The gifts come to you in dreams, in ceremony.



Storytelling Session 2: Governing Systems Pillar



Figure 4: Storytelling Map, The Governing Systems Pillar

On October 27, the IRYI virtually travelled to Lil'wat Nation in British Columbia. Twenty youth and other participants were joined by Sawt Martina Pierre, Halaw7 Lloyd Williams, Ha7ya Bert Williams, and Emhalqwem Rosa Andrew to hear stories about the Governing Systems pillar.

The four Elders sat around a table at the local school to share their stories. When they introduced themselves, they talked about the importance of storytelling and the role it had in our communities throughout history. Halaw7 shared with the youth his own experience with education, that he was taught that assimilation meant sure death and believes it to be true. He shared stories about the teachings he received about colonization. He talked about the resilience of our people and how his family fought against the residential school system. Sawt talked about her passion for teaching and how important it was for her to provide a different education than the kind she received in residential school. Emhalqwem talked about the importance of Lil'wat Nation taking over their education system and the importance of educating our children with the knowledge we have been given from our ancestors.

Before hearing stories from our Elders, Satsan spoke to the youth about the Governing Systems pillar. He started by highlighting what the Elders from Lil'wat shared, that we can find our laws, our governance, and our Constitutions in the language. Satsan spoke about how traditional governance systems set out how communities were ordered, and business was conducted. He talked about how our systems were traditionally modeled after elements of the natural world, governance systems involved a series of formal relationships within a community. They helped individuals to fulfill their responsibilities to the community, ensured open discussion, supported wise decision-making, and facilitated consensus-building all while seeking balanced relations. There were often many types of social and political leaders, including



women and leaders with specific purposes like a war chief. Within the system, each subgroup had their own teachings and wisdom to assist their decision making and inform the health of the entire community.

Below is the graphic harvest that was produced by our friends at Patuo'kn for our storytelling session on Governing Systems.



Figure 5: Governing Systems Pillar Graphic Harvest

For the exercise, participants were broken out into several groups to work through the following questions and explore the Governing Systems pillar for their own nations:

- 1) Who were your leaders and how were they selected?
- 2) Tell us what you know about how clans, houses, societies interacted with each other?
- 3) What values were leaders measured against?
- 4) Who were your allies? How were those relationships sustained?
- 5) How are the Governing Systems and People pillar connected?

We wrapped up the storytelling session by asking each of the breakout groups to report a high-level synopsis of their conversations back to the main group. It was so inspiring to hear the youth talk about their traditional systems and what they know about their governing systems. The article that was produced for the Governing Systems pillar can be found in Appendix A: Articles.





Storytelling Session 3: The Land Pillar



Figure 6: Storytelling Map, The Land Pillar

On November 10, 2023, the IRYI Youth and participants visited Elder Jerry Sawanis from Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Twenty-six people attended this workshop. The article that was produced for the Land pillar can be found in Appendix A: Articles.

Satsan opened the session by introducing the Land Pillar, speaking about how the land is our original teacher. He told the youth about the old and sacred stories offer teachings about how we interact with the land, water, sky, and all beings in the world. He emphasized that by careful, respectful, and reciprocal methods, people lived in balance. Satsan spoke to the importance of our homelands, the names and stories that speak of important events that took place on the land, locations for food, and spiritual powers. He reiterated to the youth that everything that came from the land was shared among the citizens of the community, nothing was wasted and anything leftover was used for trade.

With this session, we asked those who registered in advance to submit pictures of the land; where they come from, where they are currently situated, wherever is significant to them. The pictures that were sent in were displayed on the zoom while Elder Jerry Sawanis shared stories about the land. It was a beautiful touch to our virtual session, those in attendance shared their appreciation for it.

The graphic harvest on the following page was produced by our friends at Patuo'kn for our storytelling session on the Land.



Figure 7: Land Pillar Graphic Harvest

For the breakout exercise, participants were divided into groups to discuss the following questions:

- What did it mean to be stewards of the land?
- What spiritual connection was there and how was that important?
- What stories do you have that talk about how you came to be on the land?
- What foods did you rely on?
- What ceremonies were conducted?
- Are there places, locations that have spiritual power?
- How are the Land, Governing Systems and People pillar connected?

We sent participants away with some land-based reflection homework, a self-guided visualization that grounds those doing the exercise in the teachings and knowledge that was gifted throughout the storytelling session. The reflection exercise asks the participant to go for a walk on the land and poses questions that will help them mindfully ground themselves where they are, reflect on their visualizations and build a bundle that can be given back to the land. The IRYI land-based reflection homework can be found in Appendix B: Supporting Documents.





Storytelling Session 4: Jurisdiction & Laws Pillar



Figure 7: Storytelling Map, The Jurisdiction & Laws Pillar

On November 17, we welcomed Dr. Fred Metallic and his daughter, Emma Metallic, from Listuguj Mi'gmaq Nation. Twenty-seven people attended this session and learned so much about the work Listuguj is doing that asserts their jurisdiction through lawmaking regarding fisheries management in their territory. Emma Metallic shared the work she has been doing with language revitalization and the insight she has gained about the importance of storytelling in creating the connection between the land, language, and our culture.

Satsan introduced the Jurisdiction and Laws Pillar by first highlighting that laws and protocols are the ways in which a Nation conducts themselves within their own territories and among their peoples. He talked about how laws and jurisdiction are grounded in foundational principles and values, how laws can determine land use entitlements, how to care for children and educate them, how to resolve conflict. He told the youth that laws are how communities care for all their relations, that they can be found in protocols, Creation Stories, oral histories, old teachings and through ceremonies. He talked about how names and sacred/ceremonial objects can also hold laws, power, and authority.

The following graphic harvest depicts the stories that were shared.





Figure 8: Laws & Jurisdiction Pillar Graphic Harvest

For this session, the youth were brought through a Constitution-Building Activity based on IRYI foundational values. The youth were brought through a short presentation on what a constitution is, why a constitution is needed, and steps to build a constitution. We then divided participants into small groups and asked them to review the following questions and come up with 3-5 foundational principles/values for each pillar.

The PEOPLE Pillar

- Who are we as a people? Where are we from?
- How do we determine who is a part of us? What behaviour do we expect from each other?
- What do we value?
- How does our origin story inform who we are as a people? What core values and guiding principles does our origin story include?

The RESOURCES Pillar

- What is our purpose?
- What relationships, values, or priorities do we want to protect as we govern ourselves?
- How can our people contribute to our communities?
- How can we identify and nurture gifts, talents, and skills?
- How can we help manage the health of food, water & shelter?





The LAND Pillar

- How should we interact with other beings on this earth (peoples, animals, waters, land)?
- What kinds of relationships do we expect to have with each other, with outsiders, and with the world around us?
- What does it mean to be stewards of the land?

The GOVERNING SYSTEMS Pillar

- How do we deal with disagreements or disputes among us?
- Are we content with our current governing system? What changes would we like to see?
- How did we govern ourselves prior to European contact?
- How can we retain some of our older ways of doing things?
- What roles and responsibilities do youth have in our governing systems?
- What should we expect of our leaders (and citizens) in the way of knowledge, skills, integrity, and behavior?

The JURISDICTION & LAWS Pillar

- What kind of nation do we want to be?
- What are our nation's goals?
- Who has helped define our goals?
- What are the fundamental rules of our nation?
- What are the challenges that we face as a nation as we look to the future?
- What role can we have in addressing those challenges?

We used virtual jam boards to gather information during this exercise; pictures of the jam boards can be found in Appendix B: Supporting Documents.





Storytelling Session 5: The Resources Pillar



Figure 9: Storytelling Map, The Resources Pillar

Our final storytelling session brought us to Upper Nicola Nation on December 8th, 2023. Twenty-three people attended as we welcomed Elders Ira Tom and Tim (Spike) Manuel, along with their young nephew mat swit, to share stories that speak to the Resources Pillar. It was so inspiring have someone so young (12 years old) join us and share stories with our youth.

As with every session we held throughout the Fall/Winter months, Satsan opened the session by first bringing the youth through the Resources Pillar in more detail and discussing the important role it plays in effective governance. He talked about how a community's social and political organization helped to maximize human capacity, how our communities had hunters, fishers, and gatherers that harvested that which sustained our people, we had people with healing gifts that were our medicine people, we had knowledge keepers who helped teach our young. The skills, abilities, talents, and gifts were all harnessed to support a nation. Satsan talked about how communities needed and utilized both human and natural resources to survive and thrive as nations.

The youth heard old stories that carried many teachings. The Elders shared stories about mischievous beings and the importance of managing resources in a way that keeps them going for many generations to come. mat swit shared a story about the four food chiefs, a story about how the animals sacrificed themselves for the first human beings. The stories that were shared by Ira Tom, Spike Manuel and mat swit are reflected in the graphic harvest from our friends at Patuo'kn below.

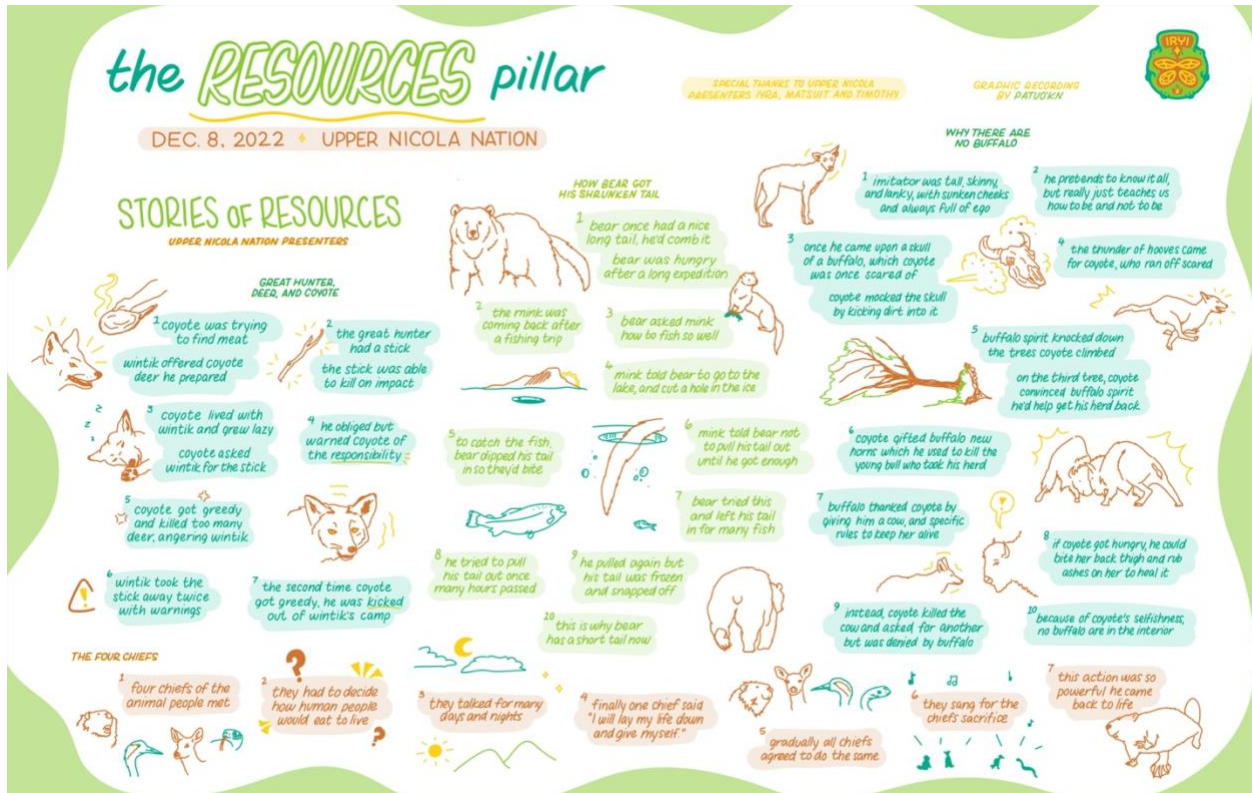


Figure 10: Resources Pillar Graphic Harvest

This time we brought the youth through a collective story harvest exercise. Collective story harvests are used as a facilitation technique to harness active listening and reciprocal sharing between Elders and Youth, as Elders share stories with the youth and the youth then gift back to the Elders by reflecting on what they learned from their stories. We asked the youth to actively listen to our Elders from Upper Nicola Nation and think about the teachings they could draw out of the stories that were shared and what they heard in the stories about each of the five pillars.

We used virtual jam boards to gather information during this exercise; pictures of the jam boards can be found in Appendix B: Supporting Documents. The article that was written by our friend Ben Sylvestre can be found in Appendix A: Articles.





Youth & Elders Storytelling Gathering



Figure 11: Youth & Elders Gathering Pillar Graphic Harvest

We celebrated the 2022/2023 Storytelling Series by hosting a full-day Youth & Elders Gathering in January 2023. We welcomed everyone who joined us along our storytelling journey into our virtual space for a jam-packed day of learning and celebration as we wrapped up our time together.

We began the day by hearing from Elder Darrell Boissoneau from Ketegaunseebee (Garden River First Nation). Darrell provided a ceremonial space for our Inherent Right Youth Initiative’s first Youth & Elders Gathering. It is incredible the way he brings ceremony into virtual spaces and keeps a fire burning on camera for us as we do the work we need to do a create a safe space for us to have difficult conversations about colonialization.

Satsan provided a quick recap of the 2022/2023 Storytelling Series and offered his reflections on what he’s heard and learned from both Youth and Elders as we virtually visited communities from coast to coast to hear stories about effective governance.

We spent the afternoon learning from Aronhiaies Herne, a sub-chief from Akwesasne Mohawk Nation and well-known storyteller, to learn about the Great Law of Peace and the stories of the Mohawk condolence ceremony. Hearing these stories from Aronhiaies helped youth understand how our traditional practices, ceremonies and





teachings can bring us through periods of grief to help us become better citizens of our Nations and better leaders. The Great Law of Peace teachings talked about the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's governance system, leading the youth to understand how decisions were made amongst the five nations to effectively govern the confederacy as a whole.

This led us into our first exercise of the day, a mock governance exercise facilitated by Aronhiaies using the Mohawk clan system. Youth were divided into the three main clans: turtles, bears and wolves. Once all the youth were assigned, Aronhiaies explained to them how issues are raised, and decisions are made in Mohawk longhouse society using consensus-based decision making. He then raised an issue for the three clans to discuss, "What time are we going to meet tomorrow?". He asked the youth to discuss the issue within their respective clans and come back with what they decided. The turtles and bears first discussed the issue. When they initially disagreed, the clans were sent back to their breakout rooms to discuss the issue again and come up with a solution. Once the bears and turtles agreed on a time, it was presented to the wolves for their consideration. If the wolves didn't agree, it would go back to the turtles and bears for discussion within their respective clans. In this case, however, the wolves agreed with the turtles and bears and consensus was reached. It took 40 minutes for the three clans to agree on a time to meet! The youth were surprised that it took that long to make a decision on a simple issue and began to understand how much thought, care and consideration went into making decisions that affected the whole nation. Overall, the youth really enjoyed the mock governance exercise and asked for more activities like the one we brought them through to gain better understandings of how traditional governance systems and decision-making models can be used in today's world.

Before closing the gathering, we gave the youth some time to go into different breakout groups and visit with the Elders from each of the Nations that we visited on our storytelling journey. At the same time, we brought them through a visioning world café exercise to learn about what else they wanted to know about the Five Pillars. We asked the youth to reflect on what they learned about each pillar and how it relates to their nation and then asked what they were curious to continue learning about within each pillar as well. The jam boards that were used for this exercise can be found in Appendix B: Supporting Documents.

The youth ended the event by expressing their gratitude to the Elders for sharing their knowledge with them throughout the initiative. The Elders spoke of the importance of maintaining the connection between Youth and Elders and bridging that gap so that knowledge can continue to be passed down from generation to generation. We asked Satsan and Elder Darrell Boissoneau to provide some closing remarks, in turn they expressed their gratitude to the youth for taking the initiative to learn about inherent rights and the honor it gives them to be able to work with emerging young leaders.

We wished everyone well on their journeys and the series was a wrap.



Reflections

Overall, the 2022/2023 Storytelling Series was a huge success.

There were several successes and challenges throughout the storytelling series. We asked participants to complete a SurveyMonkey after each session and had a draw at the end of the series for ten \$50 gift cards with entries for each submission received throughout the series. This report provides a summary of the responses that we received, however in the future we are looking at creating an evaluation framework that will help develop the necessary tools to use the feedback we receive from the youth to help shape the initiative and the Emerging Leaders Program moving forward.

Youth felt comfortable in the space that was created for them through this initiative, and noted it was an outlet for them to reconnect with like-minded people and ground themselves in the work they do in their own lives. Youth left our sessions feeling more inspired and mentioned that our sessions helped them think differently about the system we currently live in and noted the importance of pooling together our efforts for change to happen in our communities. This is exactly why the Inherent Rights Youth Initiative was created, to bring together youth in a network and space that gets them working together to think beyond the Indian Act and realize their place within their Nations. Youth appreciated the opportunity to learn from Elders from their Nations and felt pride having their stories shared with other youth. The feedback we received spoke to many successes this year and have inspired us in our planning for next year's initiative, the positive impacts we witnessed throughout this year's initiative are highlighted later.

Challenges, of course, include the expected things that come up with virtual events. Some of our sessions needed to be rescheduled at the last minute as we ran into internet connection issues and unexpected commitments that needed to be taken care of at home. It was a challenge finding a time that worked for all of our youth, and often attendance was lower than expected due to our daily schedules, etc. We adjusted and tried our best to go with the flow and, as expected, it went exactly how it was supposed to go and each session was a huge success. Other challenges include the constant hustle to secure funding each year and unfortunately the time it takes away from the planning, coordination, and delivery of each year's initiative. The IRYI continue to look for secured funding opportunities that would ensure the delivery of an emerging leaders program from year to year. A part-time coordinator position is needed so that one person can fully dedicate their time to this initiative with unwavering support from the rest of the team at the Centre for First Nations Governance, and we hope it will be one of our youth who will take on this role and lead us through next year's plans. Each year, we look for additional funding to bring on more youth as the CFNG connects with more communities across Turtle Island and more communities partner with the Rebuilding First Nations Governance research project. Youth and Leadership express interest in taking part in our initiative so we are working on building capacity within the IRYI and CFNG to ensure its continuity. We





witnessed the positive impact of meeting in person and the difference it makes in community building and knowledge retention. We are currently working on our plans for the next year, which includes an in-person gathering that is described further in the next section of this report.

The positive impacts from this initiative are immeasurable. Youth told us that they left our storytelling sessions feeling more confident, that we helped strengthen their voice and the knowledge that was shared with them enables them to pass it on to others. Youth liked the various tools (i.e., jam boards) and facilitation methods that were used during the breakout activities. Youth noted that the opportunity to connect with Elders uplifted their spirits. They want to keep learning about traditional governance systems, the history, the culture, the stories. Some expressed interest in running for leadership positions within their communities to bring this work forward in their nations. The youth told us that our sessions inspired them to seek additional resources and opportunities to learn their language and stories. The youth made it clear in their evaluations that they believe the success of this initiative is dependent on bringing on more youth, educating more youth about our history and inherent rights. Youth want to dive deeper into strategies to actively apply the knowledge we share with them to be able to strengthen our nations and peoples. The youth realize that they have so much more to learn about inherent rights and they asked for opportunities to further their knowledge of governance. Many of the youth expressed interest in continuing to attend gatherings, sharing events with their networks, attending future webinars, and learning opportunities outside of the IRYI, recruiting new members, and supporting youth.

The IRYI planning team continues to express their gratitude for the opportunity to work with the youth and continually reflects on the importance of the work that we do with our emerging young leaders. We have personally witnessed the youth grow in our initiative, gain confidence in themselves, speak louder, more confidently, and carry themselves with pride knowing who they are and where they come from. We continue to maintain relationships with youth outside of the planned events and often offer mentorship opportunities, references and other support that helps them in their own lives.

As always, the biggest takeaway is hope. And hope is big medicine for our people.



Conclusion

This year's Inherent Rights Youth Initiative storytelling series was a huge success.

After the Youth & Elders Gathering, we gave the IRYI youth some time to reflect on their virtual storytelling journey and the gathering and then brought them together for a debrief session to hear their thoughts and recommendations for the initiative moving forward.

We wrapped up this year's initiative by inviting our youth to Ottawa, Ontario for the Rebuilding First Nations Governance research project's Rekindling the Fire Gathering in June 2023, five joined us and met with the project's partners and collaborators over the two-day gathering and learned from Elders, community leaders, practitioners and more. This was the first time our youth met in person after two years of working together virtually. It meant so much to be able to connect with their peers in person and laugh together. The youth presented their journey with the IRYI to date to those in attendance, and it brought tears to our eyes. The Elders especially were blown away with the knowledge the youth have taken away from this initiative. Our youth are hungry for more.



Moving forward, we have some exciting plans for the IRYI youth and hope to bring on more youth as we continue to expand our networks and access more funding. We have been in touch with other communities and will be inviting youth to join our initiative in the coming months. We have also made several connections with various





organizations that provide similar youth programming to determine whether there are opportunities to connect and collaborate on some of our projects.

This year marked the 50th anniversary of the Indian Ecumenical Conferences that Satsan often speaks very highly of as a pivotal moment in his life that brought together Youth, Elders and Medicine People. While we were hoping to plan something to commemorate this important anniversary, we have shifted our plans to bring together our youth in Fall 2023 for a design retreat and hope to deliver a similar gathering in Spring 2024 led and organized by youth. The hopes for this gathering will be to envision the next 50 years and what we hope to achieve moving forward.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this report. We are extremely grateful for the financial support we received for our 2022/2023 Inherent Rights Youth Initiative Storytelling Series, and we hope to continue building partnerships in the future as we continue to work with our emerging leaders and rebuild our nations.



Appendix A: Articles

THE PEOPLE PILLAR: FIRST NATIONS YOUTH AND ELDERS GATHER FOR FIRST INHERENT RIGHTS YOUTH INITIATIVE STORYTELLING SESSION

Written by Ben Sylvestre

A thin trail of smoke streamed into the frame of Elder Jerry Fontaine’s video feed. An unseen bundle of medicines burned in the smudge bowl on the table before him. Two-dozen people videoing-in from First Nations across Turtle Island listened closely as he offered an opening prayer in Anishinaabemowin. Fontaine’s words opened the first in a series of online storytelling sessions for Indigenous youth and Elders hosted by the Inherent Rights Youth Initiative (IRYI). Each of the sessions will equip young Indigenous leaders with knowledge and skills to lead the future of self-determining First Nations governments in Canada.

“We need to train a new generation of inherent rights leaders. And that’s what this is all about,” said Satsan (Herb George), founder of the [Centre for First Nations Governance \(CFNG\)](#). “Because what we’re up against in terms of rebuilding our nations is not only going to take hard work and discipline and commitment, it may take several generations to do.”

IRYI is a joint project spearheaded by CFNG in collaboration with [The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project](#), [Laidlaw Foundation](#), and [The Institute of Public Administration of Canada \(IPAC\)](#).

The initiative began in 2021 with a series of successful events connecting Indigenous youth with Elders with a vision to reclaim and rebuild Indigenous identities by strengthening connections to lands, languages, ceremonies and histories. This year, IRYI is hosting five virtual storytelling sessions in the fall and early winter 2022, leading up to a virtual [Youth and Elders Gathering](#) on December 15th.

First Nations youth and Elders can still register to join the half-day virtual sessions: as Satsan explained to attendees, First Nations are in dire need of more self-government leaders with skills and information to guide their communities.

“I’m really honored that you’re with us today and through the course of these six sessions that we’re going to do,” said Satsan “And I hope that you will bring others with you because we desperately need you all.”

The People Pillar

Each of the five storytelling sessions connects youth with Elders to explore one of [The Five Pillars of Effective Governance](#), how it played a role in their lives, and how it will play a role in First Nations’ futures. The inaugural session spotlighted “The People,” the first of the five pillars.

CFNG created the pillars with the help of First Nations citizens, leaders, Elders, and academics. “The People” and the other pillars—The Land, Jurisdiction and Laws,

Governing Systems, and Resources—are the five essential aspects of all First Nations' past and present self-governments.

As the leaders of the future, Indigenous youth will need to understand how to govern their communities and protect their rights. The storytelling sessions aim to prepare them to build upon the legacy of First Nation-self government since time immemorial and rebuild what their communities lost to colonialism.

“We can come together and learn together—learn to rebuild our nations—because our young people deserve it now,” said Satsan. “And we need to put this in place forever into the future.”

Who we are

“When I was eight years old—when my father was chief for many, many years—growing up, I begged him to teach me the way he was teaching my older brothers,” said Elder Ethel Dubois of Star Blanket Cree Nation. “And he did.”

Now decades later, having used this knowledge to build an over 25-year career in social work supporting First Nations communities, Dubois appeared on-screen at the ceremonial gathering as its guide and storyteller. She wore a bright yellow t-shirt in a white-walled meeting room on Star Blanket territory.

Dubois explained how the power of the people is rooted in their understanding of their identity—who they are and where they come from. The Elder recalled when she first learned this lesson herself.

“When I was five years old, the old grandmothers sat in a circle. And they kissed me on the forehead and said a prayer,” she said. “And by the time I got to my paternal grandmother, she said ‘Do you know who you are?’ in Cree.”

“She instilled in me my identity—my Indigenous roots I was never ever to forget.”

Dubois says knowing who you are as a First Nations person means thinking beyond your community and the boundaries set out by the Indian Act. All Indigenous people come from Turtle Island, and all Indigenous nations are in relation to one another as communities sharing the land.

The People Pillar is about creating action through the power of people coming together. Dubois's role at the gathering was to share her experiences, build collective identity, and ignite collective action.

“When you gather the people, gather the community in a nonthreatening way, you will get the answers for change,” she said. “A lot of our mindset right now is having to ask permission—we don't have to do that anymore. We don't have to ask permission for anything. We have to take action.”

And... action.

That's where the youth come in. After hearing Elder Dubois' stories, participants broke into small groups to parse out how what had been shared connected with their own past, present, and future.

"We were talking about how there's different aspects of the People Pillar that Indigenous people uphold...one of the main things that stood out was our different roles that we play in our communities and then our nations," said Haida Nation representative, Gaawee Jaad (Serena Smith). "Each of us have a role to play in our communities. And it's important for us to find them."

Youth reported finding common ground with other youth from different nations and highlighted that their peers shared the same struggles, histories, responsibility, or drive for change.

"We were talking about how we want...learn more, learn more about ourselves, you know, through immersing ourselves within culture and even learning from one another like in the sessions here," said Cowessess Nation representative Darian âcikahtê (Agecoutay).

And as Elder Dubois explained, knowing yourself and your people is the first action towards rebuilding First Nations governance.

"The first thing is to try and get to your identity, know who you are, where you come from, and how you're going to make things happen," she said.

THE LAND PILLAR: ELDER JERRY SAWANIS EXPLAINS CREATOR'S CURIOUS SYSTEMS OF RELATIONS

Written by Ben Sylvestre

“The land is our original teacher,” said Satsan (Herb George),

The co-founder and President of the Centre for First Nations Governance (CFNG) introduced the third Inherent Rights Youth Initiative (IRYI) storytelling session, drawing on his experience as a Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chief.

“Old and sacred stories offer teachings about how to interact with the land, water, sky, and all beings of the world. By careful, respectful, and reciprocal methods, people lived in balance,” he added, addressing the First Nations youth and Elders joining the virtual gathering.

Satsan and CFNG, with the help of partner organizations including [The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project \(RFNG\)](#), [Laidlaw Foundation](#), and [The Institute of Public Administration of Canada \(IPAC\)](#), are bridging generations of First Nations people across Turtle Island in a series of online storytelling sessions leading up to the end of 2022.

The series aims to educate young First Nations people how to become inherent rights leaders and support Indigenous self-government. Each session features a virtual visit with Elders from communities across Turtle Island who have partnered with the RFNG research project to explain one of [The Five Pillars of Effective Governance](#).

The Five Pillars were created by the Centre for First Nations Governance with help from First Nations leaders, elders, and scholars. They’re a tool for First Nations communities exercising their right to self-government to bring their traditional governance practices into the present day.

“The Five Pillars come from the voices and the vision of our great leaders of the past and today who were fighting for the recognition of Aboriginal Title, treaty rights and our inherent right to self-government under Section 35 of the Constitution,” said Satsan.

This session focused on The Land Pillar and highlighted how First Nations people have a right and responsibility to govern their land.

‘Something we can always count on’

The gathering’s featured guest, Elder Jerry Sawanis of Nishnawbi Aski Nation, says First Nations have a sacred relationship with the land. Thanks to Creator, everything, including First Nations people, their spirits, laws, and governance is in relation to the land.

First Nations' creation stories explain how this important relationship first began. Elder Sawanis started his conversation with the youth and attendees by retelling one such story shared by countless Indigenous communities—the story of Turtle Island.

“We need to find out where we got the land from, where our land came from,” said Elder Sawanis. “We all have creation stories. So that’s what I would like to share with you.”

The Elder told the story of a determined muskrat, who sacrificed his life to swim to the depths of the world, on which Creator unleashed a purifying flood, to bring up a tiny pawful of dirt.

One of the muskrat’s animal friends, a turtle, volunteered to rest the soil on his back. Blown in directions by the four winds, the piece of earth grew to become Turtle Island, also known as North America.

“The first thing that I heard when I read that story was when they talked about the four winds and the Creator, which tells us that there’s spirituality here in our lives,” said Elder Sawanis. “And that is something that we can always call on. If we can’t do something, just by ourselves, we have the spirit of our Creator with us.”

In other words, Creator imbued First Nations’ laws, governance, and knowledge into the land, he explained.

‘The story about our spirit’

Elder Sawanis’ second story, The Legend of the Mole, explains how the sacred knowledge First Nations people need to lead isn’t just in the land. Thanks to Creator and the land’s insightful animals, it’s inside First Nations peoples’ spirits too.

“Creator is talking to the animals about where to put man’s spirit so that he doesn’t find it so easily,” the Elder began. “Idea after idea was suggested. But there was no safe place they could think of and the animals started to get discouraged.”

It wasn’t until a mole made a clever suggestion—to place people’s spirit inside them—that Creator and the animals cheered, knowing they had found the perfect hiding place.

“This story always reminds me of when I was growing up”, said Elder Sawanis. “You know, as young people, as we grow, we wonder: why am I here? Who made me? What am I supposed to do? And this is where that question leads to the story about our spirit.”

Both stories, Elder Sawanis added, also show the important relationship between Creator, animals, and the land.

‘Be curious’

Curiosity, the Elder explained, is the key to accessing the knowledge Creator stored in First Nations peoples' land and spirits.

"Be curious. Chances are, as your curiosity comes out, that knowledge you want—that's coming. That's coming towards you. That's how Creator's system works," he said.

Every First Nations person is born with the inherent right and responsibility to the land. Elder Sawanis says leadership tools are inherent too—finding them is as simple as looking inwards.

"By golly, we've got tools there that you haven't seen yet. To be a leader, you need to look in there and say, 'okay, what did my Creator leave me to be a leader?'" Elder Sawanis said. "To want to know our Creator—that's the most important thing."

Now, it's up to the youth to ask those important questions.

THE GOVERNING SYSTEMS PILLAR: FIRST NATIONS ELDERS TEACH HOW TO “TRAIN” TO SELF-GOVERN

Written by Ben Sylvestre

Elders from Lílwat gathered to teach First Nations youth both inside and outside their territory as the featured guests of the second 2022 Inherent Rights Youth Initiative (IRYI) storytelling session.

Each online session brings together First Nations Elders, youth, and friends from across Turtle Island to discuss one of the [Five Pillars of Effective Governance](#) developed by The Centre For First Nations Governance (CFNG). Every gathering, Elders help guide young First Nations people on their journey to becoming the inherent rights leaders of the future.

In this session, Elders shared their wisdom and stories relating to The Governing Systems Pillar.

“The way we’ve structured the sessions is around the Five Pillars of our inherent right to self-government that comes from our great leaders of the past, right across this great land of ours,” said Satsan (Herb George), CFNG’s co-founder.

He and his team at the national non-profit coordinate each IRYI session with support from [The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project](#), [Laidlaw Foundation](#), and [The Institute of Public Administration of Canada \(IPAC\)](#).

This gathering was the second of six events in the series. Youth and Elders can still sign up for the remaining gatherings through [IRYI's signup form](#).

Learning from the community

The group of Lílwat Elders assembled at a table in a room filled with books and learning materials at Xetólacw Community School. Sitting in the middle of the group, brothers Elder Hálaw7 (Lloyd Williams) and Elder Ha7ya (Burt Williams) drew out memories of the everyday lessons on governing systems they learned from decades of life at Lílwat.

Elder Hálaw7 recalled he and Elder Ha7ya’s several-times great grandfather was responsible for assembling the different Lílwat Clans once or twice a year. These gatherings were just one aspect of Lílwat’s past governing systems.

“His only job on the whole nation was to get the people together and feed everybody,” Elder Hálaw7 said.

“All the different Clans would come, and they (would) feast and eat,” he added. “They talked about the rules and laws of the whole nation.”

Governing systems have always reached both far and wide into Lílwat life. As Elder Ha7ya recounted, he and Elder Hálaw7’s education in Lílwat governance wasn’t on pause when nation-wide meetings weren’t being held.

When their cousin Roger and his friends were caught stealing strawberries, Elder Ha7ya explained, the brothers learned another lesson on Lílwat's governing systems.

"They had to go to cítilqam' (Lílwat traditional court)," he said. "The way they conducted the meeting tells us kind of how they governed."

"A group of well, I guess you could call them family heads or counselors, were sitting up on the stage," he explained. "Roger was saying that they really debated back and forth forever."

After a group consensus, Elder Ha7ya said, the Chief made no announcements of a punishment, but Roger would soon find out a means of reprimanding him and his trouble-making friends had still been conferred.

"What boys used to do, like young boys, is they (would) go to an Elder's place, and they would chop wood, help out, feed the animals or do different kinds of chores," said Elder Ha7ya. "When they went to help, (the Elders) would always welcome them and give them snacks and stuff like that. When Roger went to help out, they didn't. They wouldn't even acknowledge him."

Learning from the land

According to Elder Sawt (Martina Pierre), being allowed back into the community after being shunned would have required one thing—training.

"What did he do when he got abandoned? He had to go and find the truth on the land and train," she said.

Going out on the land is necessary for First Nations' reconnection with their traditional governing systems, explained Elder Sawt. This act of personal training allows individuals to learn who they are as a being and as a leader.

"Understand and walk the land. Train. Be humble. Learn all the different principles of life—the purpose of why we are here on this land," she said.

Elder Sawt, looking down at her notes from her spot at the table, explained understanding land, culture, and practices helps individuals in a community come together and unite in purpose. Communities need a clear vision to fulfill their sacred responsibilities.

"We're not placed on this earth to be selfish. We're here to protect the gifts of the land for the next generations. That is what we need to pass on," she said.

Passing knowledge across generations

After the Elders' teachings, attendees took to discussing and reflecting on self-governments in their own communities and the future of First Nations' governing systems.

Darian Agecoutay, representing Cowessess First Nation, was one youth to point out the variety of governing systems in First Nations on across Turtle Island.

"It seems like everywhere except for on the plains, (First Nations) had clans. In our culture, we didn't have Clans. We lost our Clan system," he said. "We had our House system, where depending on different parts of where you lived in the territory, you were like sectioned off into a different House."

"So that's what I thought was interesting."

Others, such as Emhàlqwem (Rosa Andrew), discussed the laws and practices making up their present-day governing systems, including those for protecting animals and nature.

"We live right in front of our river that goes by our house. I looked out the window, and there was this man in hip waders walking in the river and fly fishing," she said. "So I went down there. I said, 'Come here, come on! Get out of the water.'"

"I had to explain it to him that we don't allow anybody in the river right now, because we need to respect that the salmon are spawning. I really liked that idea."

The future of self-government

Preserving and building upon the rules, customs, and practices that make up First Nations governing systems will take will demand youth take the reigns of leadership from older generations.

As the gathering reached its end, Satsan reminded the youth of their important position as the inherent rights leaders of tomorrow.

"I mean, the Elders have said it—how important you are to our future and how much we need your leadership in this inherent rights way, not in the Indian colonial system that's been imposed on us," he said.

The decades-long activist and inherent rights advocate didn't let the youth in attendance leave without thanks for their commitment throughout the event.

"It really lifted up my spirits and my heart. I want to thank you all for that," said Satsan.

THE LAWS AND JURISDICTION PILLAR: IT'S TIME TO TALK ABOUT "STEP ONE" OF FIRST NATIONS SELF-GOVERNMENT

Written by Ben Sylvestre

Reconciliation between Canada and First Nations hinges on one ever-important concept—the law.

Across Turtle Island, First Nations are creating their own laws, under their own inherent right. Section 35 of Canada's Constitution and a growing number of court rulings have [recognised that colonization never swept away Indigenous peoples' jurisdiction over their land and communities](#).

"The first step in rebuilding our nations and our governments is to begin to put back in place our own law," said Satsan (Herb George), President of [The Centre for First Nations Governance \(CFNG\)](#).

The inherent rights thought leader has spent a lifetime teaching people of all ages and backgrounds that Indigenous peoples have the right to govern themselves while demonstrating how First Nations can leave behind the Indian Act and govern as unique nations in Canada's Confederation.

"The reconciliation between our pre-existing sovereignty and the assumed sovereignty of the crown can't happen unless we move out from section [91.24](#) and the Indian Act to our inherent right to self-government under Section 35, under our own governance structures, our own governing institutions, our own jurisdiction, and our own laws," he said.

In their latest effort to support First Nations self-government, Satsan and CFNG bridged geography and generations, inviting youth and Elders from across Turtle Island to discuss First Nations laws and jurisdiction with the help of a present-day tool for connecting to the past.

The fourth virtual gathering of the Inherent Rights Youth Initiative (IRYI) taught attendees about the Laws and Jurisdiction Pillar: one of the [Five Pillars of Effective Governance](#) created by CFNG to encompass the essential aspects of First Nations traditional governance.

IRYI is a joint effort spearheaded by CFNG with support from [The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project](#), [The Institute of Public Administration of Canada \(IPAC\)](#), and [Laidlaw Foundation](#). Youth and Elders can still sign up for the initiative's remaining gatherings through [IRYI's signup form](#).

The event's youth and Elders learned the ways of the Laws and Jurisdiction Pillar from the session's featured storytellers. Multigenerational duo, Dr. Fred Metallic and his daughter Emma Metallic of Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation highlighted the role of First Nations Laws and Jurisdiction in touchstone moments of their lives to educate attendees on the presence of law and jurisdiction in their own.

Indigenous law v. Canada

Dr. Fred Metallic, Listuguj Mi'gmaq Government's Director of Natural Resources, is one of the leaders behind the coastal Quebec community's fishing laws. Through a [decades-long series of negotiation and court cases](#) with the Quebec Ministry of Natural Resources and Canadian governments, Listuguj has passed its own laws for fishing, harvesting lobster, and fisheries law enforcement.

Listuguj's unwillingness to surrender its fishing rights has long been a point of contention between the community and Canada. Dr. Fred Metallic says he recalls Canada's legal system and law enforcement encroaching on his community's right to fish since early childhood.

"When I was a young kid, I often fished on the river with my dad and my uncle and my family," he said. "We fished at night, and I was always told to keep an eye out for little lights on the water. What those little lights were was actually flashlights or lights that game wardens used to use in search of Indigenous fishers."

Dr. Fred Metallic chronicled the history of Listuguj's right to fish, beginning with the Mi'gmaq creation story: the basis for the community's legal tradition. He traced the timeline of his community's laws and jurisdiction while recognising the role of the oral tradition, land, and Listuguj's philosophy in its law- and treaty-making.

He says when settlers arrived and began taking control, they didn't honour the jurisdiction Listuguj possessed via the existence of its people and stories since time immemorial.

"It's important to understand the way Canada assumes sovereignty, the way Canada exercises jurisdiction, and how Canada thinks they can delegate that authority to Indigenous people, which is its way of trying to solve the Indian problem," Dr. Fred Metallic said. "But that's a Canadian problem. We don't have an Indian problem." Canada's constitution recognises Indigenous people's jurisdiction—their power to create law. But Dr. Fred Metallic says Canada still doesn't practically accept that jurisdiction nor Indigenous laws and legal traditions. It's the reason for his fight for Indigenous legal rights and why the Listuguj's present-day fisheries couldn't come to full fruition until the community signed an agreement with Canada in 2021.

But regardless of Canada's opinion, First Nations have an inherent right to make their own laws as nations thriving on Turtle Island long before Europeans set foot on its shores. Listuguj now has its fishery and is working towards reducing Canada's efforts to stifle of the community's jurisdiction.

There's still work to be done, but Listuguj now fishes for lobster and salmon in the daylight.

“We really need to work with our knowledge systems. And we really need to work with our Elders, our ceremonialists, and push out that vision of what it means to a human being living in peace and harmony with the natural world,” said Dr. Fred Metallic.

A gallery of laws

Nature itself can be a teacher of First Nations law: that’s one key message in Emma Metallic’s short-story-turned-gallery-experience, [Nipugtug](#). The storyteller and education assistant at Listuguj’s Mi’gmaq immersion program presented excerpts of her story connecting law and language to the gathering’s attendees.

“Listening and learning from our Indigenous stories, we can start to understand Indigenous laws and ways of governing. Another source of Indigenous law is looking to our language,” she said.

Nipugtug is a story about the relationship between nature, language, and law expressed through a First Nation’s worldview. Emma Metallic says the story was inspired by going snowshoeing in the woods when she was learning the Mi’gmaq language full-time over the last year.

“Every other day, I’d spend a couple of hours in the woods, and I connected the words I was learning with the things around me. I built a relationship with the trees, animals and rivers—all that surrounded me,” she said. “So in a way, I introduced myself to the forest and it introduced itself back to me.”

Nipugtug (meaning “In the Forest” in English) is the story of A’le’s, a young Mi’gmaq woman who is herself learning to speak the Mi’gmaq language. She meets animals and trees who act as guides and friends along her learning journey.

While the story was originally a written piece, Emma Metallic joined forces with Métis designer Natalie Laurin to transform Nipugtug into a gallery experience in Spring 2022.

The narrative confronts a reality for many present-day Mi’gmaq people learning their language to connect with their worldview, history, and laws.

“Mi’gmaq speakers are now tasked with having to remember old words they heard growing up in order to pass them down to the next generation. While Mi’gmaq language resources exist now, challenges still remain between bridging Mi’gmaq speakers and learners,” Emma Metallic said, “Nipugtug was my way of exploring these challenges to help safely bridge speakers and learners and to shed light on how nourishing our languages is.”

For Emma Metallic, creating and sharing Nipugtug has been an experience about becoming closer to her community’s worldviews. Thinking about Indigenous worldviews, she says, helps frame the ideas behind Indigenous laws.

“In my own experience, learning Mi’gmaq has allowed me to connect and understand Mi’gmaq worldviews more deeply. I understand how we live in relation to one another, because it’s described within our language,” she said.

Connecting with law

Worldview, language, histories, and stories are all in relation to First Nations Law and Jurisdiction, just like the Laws and Jurisdiction Pillar is in relation to the Land Pillar, the People Pillar, the Governing Systems Pillar, and the Resources Pillar as the five essential components of each First Nations governing system.

Elders—the knowledge keepers—and youth—the leaders of the future—have tools within them to rebuild First Nations laws and governance. By coming together to learn and share, they’re laying the groundwork for a future filled with Indigenous lawmaking.

“The power that we need to rebuild our nations is held by our youth and our Elders,” said Satsan. “And if we can pull that together, everything in between that will come together.”

“Every time we do this, that’s the overwhelming feeling that I get.”

THE RESOURCES PILLAR: TRICKSTERS AND TRANSFORMERS TEACH THE TOOLS FOR NURTURING HUMAN ABILITY

Written by Ben Sylvestre

“We're on our last stop today,” said IRYI Coordinator Amsey Maracle. “Wow, it's been a long journey.”

Maracle introduced the fifth storytelling session in the Inherent Rights Youth Initiative (IRYI) event series. Over nearly four months, the IRYI team assembled First Nations youth and Elders to delve into self-government through [the Five Pillars of Effective Governance](#) and traditional storytelling from different nations across the country.

In this fifth and final event before the celebratory gathering in the new year, IRYI participants virtually visited Upper Nicola Band to learn about the Resources Pillar through the Nation's *captikwł*, the sacred oral histories which are the basis for their laws.

Upper Nicola's Elders-in-Training, *ǂ'aǂ'a?yuł* (King/Chief of Blue Grouse) Ira Tom and *Petk^wulax* (Nailed to the Earth) Tim “Spike” Manuel took participants on a journey through the Nation's stories pertaining to the Resources Pillar. *mat swit*, a young Storyteller-in-Training and nephew to Tom and cousin to Manuel accompanied the duo with a story of his own.

The IRYI event series is bringing Elders and youth together thanks to a coalition of national governance organizations and funders including [The Centre for First Nations Governance](#), [The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project \(RFNG\)](#), [Laidlaw Foundation](#), and [The Institute of Public Administration of Canada \(IPAC\)](#).

The Resources Pillar

According to Maracle, the Resource Pillar encapsulates more than natural resources. The Pillar is about human capacity just as much as it's about what we receive from the land.

“It's everybody's gifts—all our gifts that we have. Those are the resources that we bring to our communities and to our people,” she said. “The Resource Pillar is really about the way a community's social and political organization helps to maximize human capacity.”

Since time immemorial, First Nations' stories have taught their peoples to value and nurture their individual and collective gifts. As both national histories and laws, traditional stories set guidelines on how Nations should manage their capabilities.

“The knowledge and wisdom of stories often taught about putting boundaries on human action and the use of that which sustained them,” said Maracle.

'He told us how to live'

For many First Nations, this resource management know-how has come from the example of the always-charming but often-devious Coyote.

Coyote appears as a central character in countless traditional stories. Many of Tim Manuel's and Ira Tom's lessons on the Resource Pillar feature the Trickster and his (mis)adventures.

According to Manuel, Coyote is a character that sits atop a pendulum between good and bad. His personality is a mirror of humanity, which makes him our perfect teacher.

"He's a reflection of who we are. He's our ancestor," Manuel said, "He taught us the laws. Through the places that he visited, he told us how to live and showed us how to live."

Tom's first story featured the canine swindler galivanting with the magic stick of the great hunter Wood-tick. Coyote uses the stick, which kills anything at which it's thrown, to amass a mountainous pile of deer too big for the Trickster to possibly eat on his own.

"Holy smokes Coyote! What do you think you're doing?" Tom said, in the voice of the great hunter.

"Well, I'm getting tired of just fixing the one deer, and I think I just want to kill a whole bunch and fix it all up," he replied, now as Coyote.

Beside a pile of rotting deer, the great hunter reclaimed his powerful stick, and so the story ends, says Tom. The narrative explains the difference in character between Coyote and Wood-tick. It teaches us lessons about over-abundance and the important law of only taking what we need.

The story is a showcase for each of the duo's different individual resources. Wood-tick is an excellent hunter, Tom says, while Coyote is a resourceful provider—lazy as he may be.

'Everything will have its own song'

The idea that each person has something of their own to offer their community is hardly something unique to only a few Syilx stories. Storyteller-in-training mat swit, shared the captikwł of the Four Food Chiefs:

"All creation was talking about the changes that would come for Mother Earth. They were told that a new kind of being would soon be on this Earth," mat swit began. "The four Chiefs of the animal people were Skemxist (Black Bear), Síya? (Saskatoon Berry), N'tyiyix (King Salmon), and spíłm' (Bitter Root)."

After much debate on how to provide for humanity, three of the Chiefs decided to defer to the oldest of the leaders, Skemxist, to come to the decision for them.

"I will give myself and all the animals that I am Chief of to provide food for the People-to-Be," said **mat swit** in the voice of the ancient Chief.

One by one, the other Food Chiefs followed suit and pledged their lives to feed humanity. Skemxist laid his life down but was brought back to life after Fly and the animal people sang a healing song.

“Skemxist spoke for all the Chiefs,” said mat swit, “From now on, when the People-to-Be come, everything will have its own song. The People-to-Be will use these songs to help each other as you have helped me.”

Together, both the animal people and Chiefs used their resources to not only provide for the People-to-Be and themselves but establish a way of helping one another, acknowledging relations, and giving thanks.

‘The importance of ceremony’

Syilx stories also inform how citizens use their resources in the present day. Manuel recounted how the traditional history of nearby Nicola Lake helped him see the need for a recent ceremony.

“In our captíkʷł—in all of our Indigenous stories all across Turtle Island—we know that we had transformers and tricksters come through and make the land livable. And at this time, there was no lake there. It was just flat,” he said. “There were four brothers who were transformers that were coming through the land.”

On the then-flat tract of earth was a cave home to a people-eating monster disguised as a beautiful woman. She lived with an equally monstrous guard dog who had the head of a snake and the head of a bear.

When the woman killed the youngest brother, Manuel says, the elder siblings wised up to her true nature and decided to transform her.

“The woman had a brother that she was having sexual relations with, so they transformed the man into the north side of the mountain. They called him Sqwəmálst on the north side, and the woman on the south side was called Lehecínek,” said Manuel.

The four brothers put Nicola Lake between the two and set the monstrous guard dog loose inside it, where it remains today. Ever since, locals have known to stay away from the lake, which has become the site of several drownings.

In recent years, the story prompted Manuel's family to intervene.

“We brought a medicine man up to do a ceremony that hadn't been done for a long time to appease the supernatural power of the of the lake,” he said. “We had to make an offering at sunrise with all our traditional foods that a grizzly bear would eat, and the foods that a snake would eat.”

“The men stopped drowning and dying in this lake,” he added. “Our ancestors had taught us about this: the importance of ceremony and to pray for the safety of our people and of our men.”

Reviving ceremonies and the lessons of the past won't just guide First Nations in the present, it will help ensure a brighter outcome for nations' futures, says Manuel.

Plus, there's one gift that's guaranteed to make the effort worthwhile.

“We have our children as our greatest resource to motivate us to do this work,” he said.

With the final storytelling session over, IRYI youth and Elders now look forward to a day-long gathering in the new year, where they'll meet the series' previous speakers, apply their newfound knowledge, and celebrate this chapter of their learning journeys.

INHERENT RIGHTS YOUTH INITIATIVE YOUTH & ELDERS GATHERING 2022

Written by Ben Sylvestre



Darrell Boissoneau (right), sitting beside his helper Jackson (left), shares teaching from his lifetime experience in leading First Nations towards governing themselves under their own inherent right as the original people of Turtle Island.

Around a sacred fire on Ketegaunseebee (Garden River First Nation) territory, Darrell Boissoneau and Jackson made a tobacco offering and held a smudge for those attending the 2023 Inherent Rights Youth Initiative's Youth & Elders Gathering. These were the first of many ceremonies which set off the final gathering for this year's initiative in a good way.

“Cleansing our mind, our body, our spirits and our emotions, is going to really encourage us to listen to what is going to be shared today,” said Boissoneau.

Since September 2022, the IRYI event series has instructed youth on each of the Five Pillars of Effective Governance through virtual storytelling sessions with Elders across Turtle Island. The Pillars, a learning tool developed by the Centre for First Nations Governance (CFNG), highlight the essential aspects of all First Nation governments both past and present: People, Land, Jurisdiction & Laws, Governing Systems, and Resources. In this final event, Youth and Elders who participated in the virtual series gathered to build upon the knowledge they gained, celebrate their learning, and continue to advance their skills in First Nations’ self-government.

“We’re so happy to welcome everybody and finally wrap up our storytelling journey here, bringing together everyone who has joined us along the way,” said IRYI Coordinator Amsey Maracle. “It’s been so nice listening to the Elders over the last few months share their stories with us.”

The IRYI participants successfully completed their five-month learning journey with the support from a grassroots coalition of organizations including The Centre for First Nations Governance (CFNG), The Rebuilding First Nations Governance Project (RFNG), Laidlaw Foundation, and The Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC).

50 Years ago: Elders Reflect on their Youth Leadership Journey

“I want to talk about transformative times,” said Boissoneau—the gathering’s first speaker. “We all go through a period of time where the energy and the spirit will tell us this is the time to do certain things. Sometimes we refer to it as a gut feeling.”

“Mine came to me around 1973.”

It was then, the former Chief and lifelong leader from Garden River First Nation became involved with The American Indian Movement or “A.I.M”: A spiritual and political campaign founded in the late 1960s and taken up by thousands of Indigenous people across Turtle Island.

A.I.M. united countless young First Nations, Metis, Inuk, and Native American individuals who together discovered a sense of belonging and purpose as protectors of their own rights, communities, and shared land.

“It was at that particular time where many of us as young people such as you today (were) searching for a sense of belonging, and purpose,” said Boissoneau. “That effort led to many of us going out to Morley, Alberta, and attending the Indian Ecumenical Conference.”

There, Boissoneau connected with not just other youth but Elders, medicine people, spiritual leaders, and knowledge keepers from a variety of life experiences. Though a Christian event, Boissoneau says the conference was a watershed moment in his journey with First Nations spirituality and self-determination.

“It had a profound impact on me, because it gave me a sense of identity (and) purpose. It really led me to the work they did for the next stages of my life,” he said.

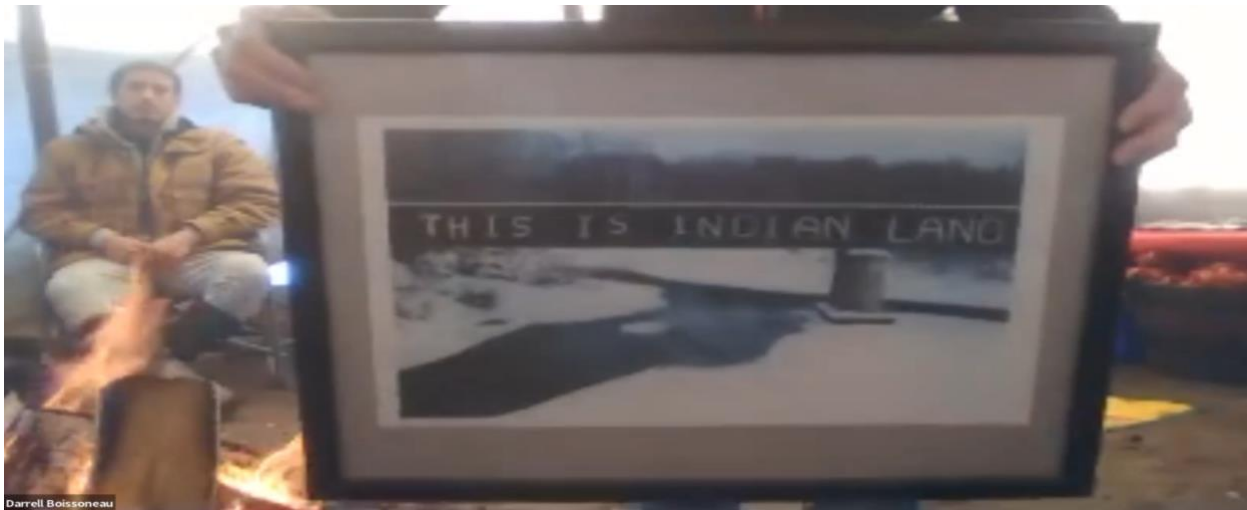
50 years ago, his involvement in both youth gatherings and generation-bridging events built a strong foundation of skills to protect the Indigenous peoples and their inherent rights as the stewards and original people of this land.

“For me, that was my moment in time as a young teenager, searching for something that I gravitated to,” Darrell said. “I really felt safe as well. Because I knew that this was the work of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit was going to protect me.”

Now an Elder, he looks back proudly on the powerful acts of resistance he performed in his youth. One such act, the words “THIS IS INDIAN LAND”, painted in big white letters on a red, rusty train bridge on Ketegaunseebee territory, looks back on him today.

“Long ago, our people would do pictographs and leave messages on the rocks. It was a story, right? It was a message, telling our people to stand up, there's more work we got to do,” he said. “Back in 1973, we needed to tell a story as well. We needed to inspire the next generation.”

Now, much like the paint which he and fellow land defenders repeatedly refreshed despite several attempts at its removal, Boissoneau and his encouraging message for First Nations youth aren't fading away.



Boissoneau's message at Grand River still remains today and is featured on [Garden River First Nation's webpage](#).

5 months ago: Elders pass the torch

Boissoneau isn't the only one whose experience at the Indian Ecumenical Conference 50 years ago was a significant moment in their journey to reassert First Nations' rights.

“I met Boissoneau at the Canadian Indian youth workshop in 1973. And I went there searching for the same thing,” said Satsan (Herb George). “All of those medicine

people that Boissoneau mentioned, I have a picture (of them) on my back wall. This work that we're doing, the way I see it, is just carrying on their vision.”

Since then, the now founder of the CFNG and Wet’suwet’en Frog Clan Hereditary Chief has dedicated his life to helping First Nations across Turtle Island reassert their inherent right to self-government. He’s been behind countless grassroots gatherings like this one and highly public, historic moments like the Delgamuukw-Gisday’way court case, which recognized Aboriginal Title.

In his final address to the IRYI participants with whom he shared the five-month learning journey, Satsan stopped to pay tribute to both those who had gathered and the many First Nations people who have moved on from our world.

Among those no longer with us, Satsan said, are the children whose unmarked graves were recently discovered at a residential school in Starblanket Cree Nation (one of the communities we visited on our storytelling journey).

“The Five Pillars that we talked about and the spirit of those young people: we have to keep (them) in our minds, and we have to honor (them),” he said.”

“The work that we're doing is the best way to do it. Because in all that they tried to take away from us they were not successful. Because we're still here,” he said. “We need to honor those that have gone before us so that we bring back what they tried to take away and destroy.”

While the IRYI’s youth are now prepared with the knowledge and stories behind each of the Five Pillars of Effective Governance, there is still incredibly challenging work ahead of them.

“When we're doing this, I'm always reminded of the words of Gisday’way, one of our greatest leaders of the Wet’suwet’en Nation in our history,” said Satsan. “When we’re speaking to a group of youth, he said, if it’s self-government that you want, then you better know and remember that it’s hard work.”



Satsan says both youth and Elders across Turtle Island are reaching out to one another in support of reclaiming their nations' right to govern itself and the preservation of traditional knowledge.

But today's youth aren't without help. The Elders who paved the way for present-day self-government, including those who joined the IRYI gathering, are ready to provide support as the youth become leaders. Together, both generations can build upon the change made by those before them to better the futures of those yet to come.

Satsan says the importance of this relationship was further crystalized for him on a recent visit home in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Delgamuukw-Gisday'way decision.

"When I went home, and I first went to one of my communities, to the community center, one of my nieces was waiting for me on the top step. And she was very, very emotional" said Satsan. "We get into the hall and a couple of my clan members, young clan members, come forward. And what they all said was, we need to learn. We need to learn from you."

"In our way, according to our law, it's the uncles and aunties who teach young ones in our families, today's young clan members. I said the same thing to them. In our way, I'm your uncle. If you asked me to teach you, then that's my responsibility," he added.

"What I'm getting at here is that we need to be doing this all across the country. This whole storytelling initiative began at the request of the young people who joined us in ceremony a year ago."

Hundreds of years ago: Haudenosaunee histories are modern medicine

With the drive to lead and the knowledge of the Five Pillars, youth will need the skills to support one another and come to peaceful decisions on the issues that matter most to them.

Aronhiaies Herne, a Haudenosaunee subchief, storyteller, and ceremonial conductor from Akwesasne Mohawk (Kanyen'kehà) Nation offered IRYI youth some of the knowledge and practice to take on challenges of supporting each other as members of a united movement.

“I think every one of us, every one of our people, have a piece of the puzzle,” Herne said. “If we were to one day put all those pieces together, we (would) have a really beautiful thing to be able to share not just with Native people, but even with the whole world.”

Herne has spent close to the last 20 years sorting through Haudenosaunee histories and speaking with his people to retrace the stories of one of the history’s strongest confederacies and democracies.

He says First Nation’s stories and the teaching they provide are more than a beginning, middle, and end. Reclaiming a story is an act of reviving a living piece of a Nation’s spirituality, culture, and way of life.

“I want you to remember through all of this teaching today, no matter what nation you're from, or what teaching you're being given, it's up to us to give life to those teachings. We have to give it life—otherwise, they're just stories like Hansel and Gretel, right?” said Herne.

First Nation’s stories can provide powerful medicines—even if they’re hundreds of years old. Herne recounted the story of how the Peacemaker Tekanawi:ta united the Haudenosaunee Confederacy starting by showing respect to the most despised person in the then frequently warring nations—the cannibal Onke Ra’w:raks.

In the story of the 14 String of Sympathy, Herne recounted how the messenger Aionwatha tied 14 wampum strings representing 14 methods for processing grief when his three daughters were killed by the person-eater.

“Those aren't stories, those are real, living, breathing things. The more that we share those things, the more that we understand them and the more that we apply it to our own lives,” said Herne.

Now: Youth and Elders learn how to decide the future together, in one mind

One lesson from the Haudenosaunee stories still readily applied today is the confederacy’s national council system, used to come to a consensus about issues in the nation. Herne walked the IRYI’s participants through a mock council to show how they too can use the decision-making systems of their own nations.

There are three families in Mohawk Nation Council who decide on issues together: the Turtle Clan, the Wolf Clan, and the Bear Clan.

“Firstly, it goes back and forth between the Turtles and Bears. Once they come to one mind between Turtles and Bears, then the issue, whatever it was, gets sent over to the Wolf Clan,” he said. “They can either agree with the Turtles and the Bears, or they can disagree.

“And once the Wolves disagree, then it goes back to the Turtles and Bears again, back and forth, back and forth. And it goes through this process over and over until they reach a consensus, which means all parties agree to the decision that's going to be made.”

In Herne’s mock council, attendees became the trio of families deciding on a future meeting time for imaginary gathering the next day. They returned from a 40-minute decision-making session with one mind on the decision and comments just how effective consensus building can be.

“Even just speaking within our groups, you can see how we can think about each other,” said IRYI youth representing Cowessess First Nation, Darian Agecutay, “The Bears are thinking about what the Turtles are thinking and vice versa. You know, even though we weren't discussing the issue directly to each other, we still have a sort of consensus.”

“I was thinking that it brought us together and that we were all smiling and laughing and talking about our thinking afterwards. And that it felt good to be able to make that decision together and that we all agreed,” added Maracle.

With decision-making skills, medicines to support one-another, and knowledge of all Five Pillars of Effective Governance, the IRYI youth are moving forward in their efforts to lead the future of First Nations Self-Government on Turtle Island.

For now, IRYI youth and Elders can look forward to more events in the future. “And that's a wrap,” Maracle said, “We'll be in touch with our next initiative.”

Appendix B: Supporting Documents

Land-based Reflection Homework

Inherent Rights Storytelling Series
The Land Pillar

This is a self-guided visualization and land-based reflection exercise that is being offered as a way to ground you in the teachings and knowledge you have been gifted throughout this gathering, and to also allow you to go back to the land and release and let go of the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and/or memories that may hold you back from going forward in a good way to do this work in your communities. Further, this visualization is a way of reflecting on how you (and we as Indigenous Peoples) can carry and hold on to difficult and often painful experiences, thoughts, memories, and feelings (for example: grief, sadness, anger, loss) for ourselves, our families, our children, our communities, and our ancestors due to the ongoing influence of colonization of our bodies, our lands, and our inherent rights.

Before we begin the self-guided visualization exercise, we ask you to deeply think about, and ask yourself: What do you hold on to (and for whom do you hold this: for yourself, your ancestors, your family, your community)? And what does holding-on to these experiences do to our bodies and spirits? To transform and let go we can use medicine, ceremony, prayer, and go to the land. But we cannot transform these energies on our own – this is not an individual practice but rather a collective one – we need each other – we need the land – we need the body, the spirit, the ancestors, and this happens not in a single moment, but rather continuously.

Read the following directions before you begin. If you feel comfortable remembering them, close your eyes and begin the visualization exercise when ready or you may prefer to use an audio recording (use your phone to record yourself reading this exercise aloud this may help you as you can return to this exercise any time you need to).

To begin, find a place/space that you can get comfortable, whether that is sitting in a chair, or laying down resting your body. Once you're comfortable, close your eyes, relax your body, and start by taking some deep breaths (in through your nose and out through your mouth), take slow long breaths without holding them and continue to breathe smoothly for the rest of this visualization. Now with your eyes closed, visualize in your minds' eye what you are holding and carrying with you – is it feelings, memories, thoughts, experiences - do you hold and carry it for yourself? For your family? for your community? For your ancestors? Now think of what you are holding on to and carrying – and I want you to take a moment and think about what these feel like for you?

With your imaginary sense of sight, smell, and touch can you take these (thoughts, feeling, emotions, memories) and think of them as an object or a material? what would it look like? Is it shiny or dull? Is it hard or soft? Does it feel smooth or rough?

Does it have a colour – one or many? Does it edges? Is it wet, dry, sticky? Does it have a smell? Is it small or large? Does it have weight – if so, is it heavy or light?

Now take a few moments and focus on this object that you have visualized in your mind as representing that which you hold and carry – and use all your imaginary senses to see it for what it is, and what it symbolizes for you; how does this make you feel thinking of and visualizing this object and what it means to you?

Now keep your eyes closed and return your focus back to your breath and to your body – again take a few slow deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Then when you feel ready, open your eyes and return to the place and space you are in.

For the land-based reflection assignment, you are being asked to find these objects that you visualized from the land. Create a bundle of natural materials in whichever form speaks to you. Then, return your bundle back to the land in a place that calls to you on the land or near the water. For those of us who received the medicines in the gift bundle, please remember to take those with you when you go on the land to do this work.

Instructions

- 1) **Go for a walk on to the land** – near your home, community or perhaps another place that calls to you. While you walk, think mindfully and ground yourself in the place you are in. Start by asking yourself:
 - a. what can I see with my eyes?
 - b. What can I feel in and on my body?
 - c. What can I hear with my ears?
 - d. What can I feel in my spirit?
 - e. What does my spirit see?
 - f. What does my spirit hear?

Think of where you are on the land, think of your ancestors and reflect on what it is (emotions, feelings, thoughts, and/or memories) that you are holding on to and carrying and that you need to let go of and give back to the land...

- 2) As you walk, **reflect on the characteristics of the object(s) you visualized** (i.e., soft, spiky, sharp, blunt, hard, sticky, dark, light, etc.). Do you see anything on the land that you are drawn to, that reminds you of what you visualized? As you walk the land, gather items and leave medicine in that place where you take from if that, is part of your teachings. You can leave tobacco or a strand of your hair. Create a bundle; a medicine bundle made of natural materials found only on the land.
- 3) **The bundle is to be given back to the land or to the water.** Choose a place that you think and feel in your spirit is the right place to make this offering to the land

– for the land (and creator) to hold and carry for you. Release this to the land as a gift for all the land has given you. Take a moment to give thanks and gratitude to the land and to let go and give back what you have been holding on to and carrying for so long. For those who use smudging and/or medicines this may also be a time to cleanse the bundle and/or yourself and/or leave medicine with the bundle.

- 4) After you have placed this bundle in the spot it is to be transformed and given back to the land – **please take a picture of the bundle to share with the group by emailing it to Amsey Maracle at amseymaracle@cunet.carleton.ca.**

The Jurisdiction & Laws Pillar Storytelling Session Constitution Building Exercise

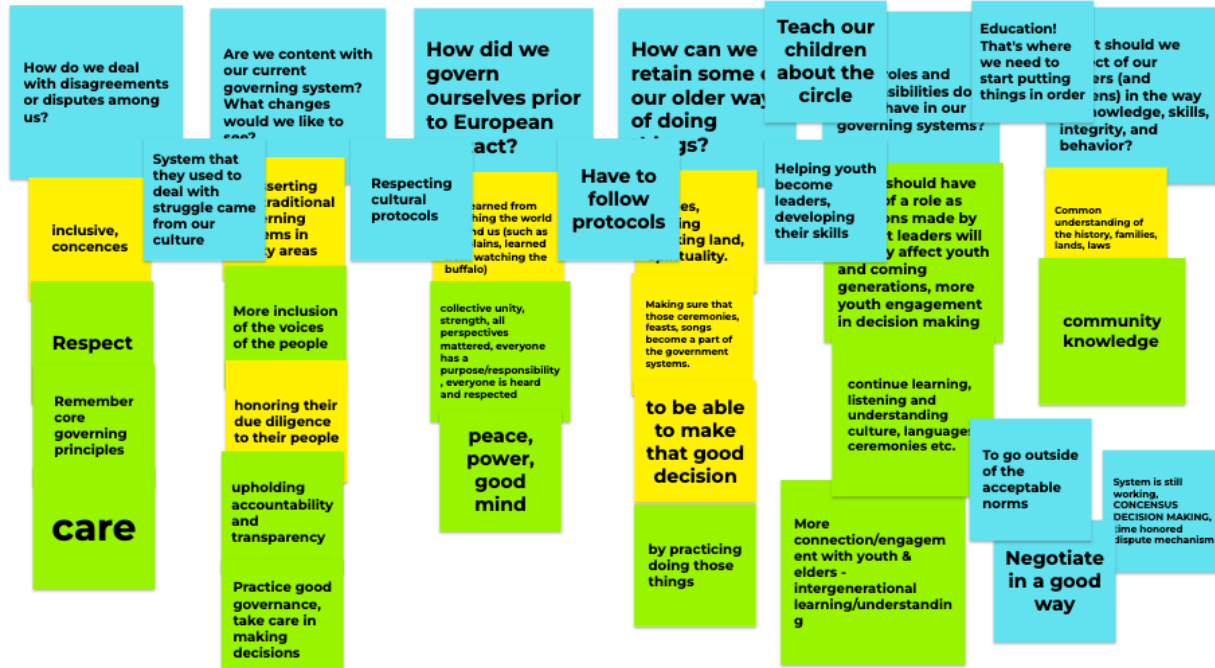
People Pillar



Land Pillar



Governing Systems Pillar



Jurisdiction & Laws Pillar

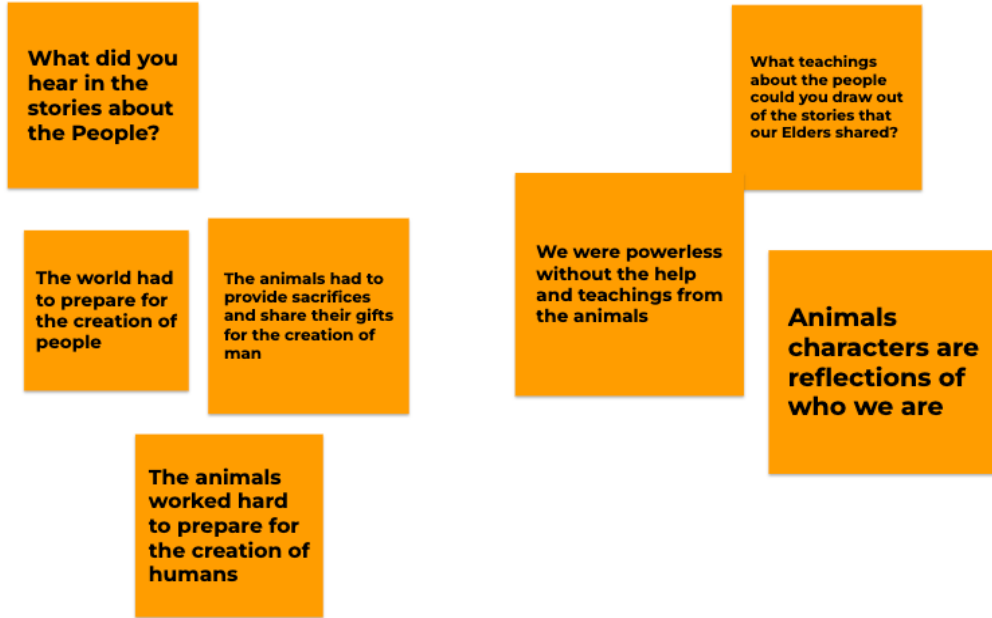


Resources Pillar

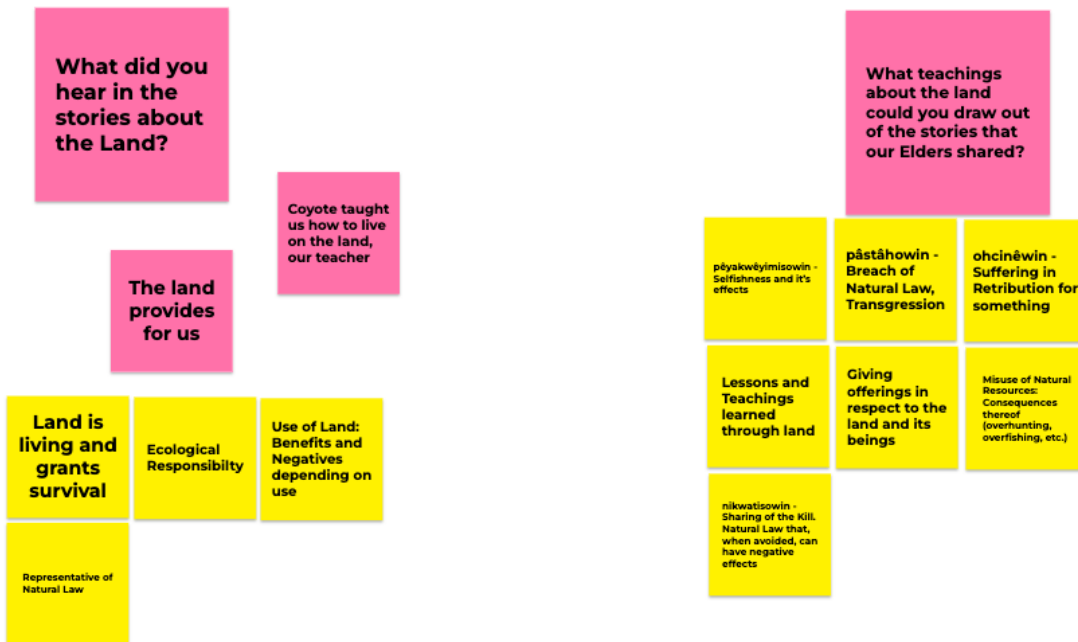


The Resources Pillar Storytelling Session Collective Harvesting Exercise

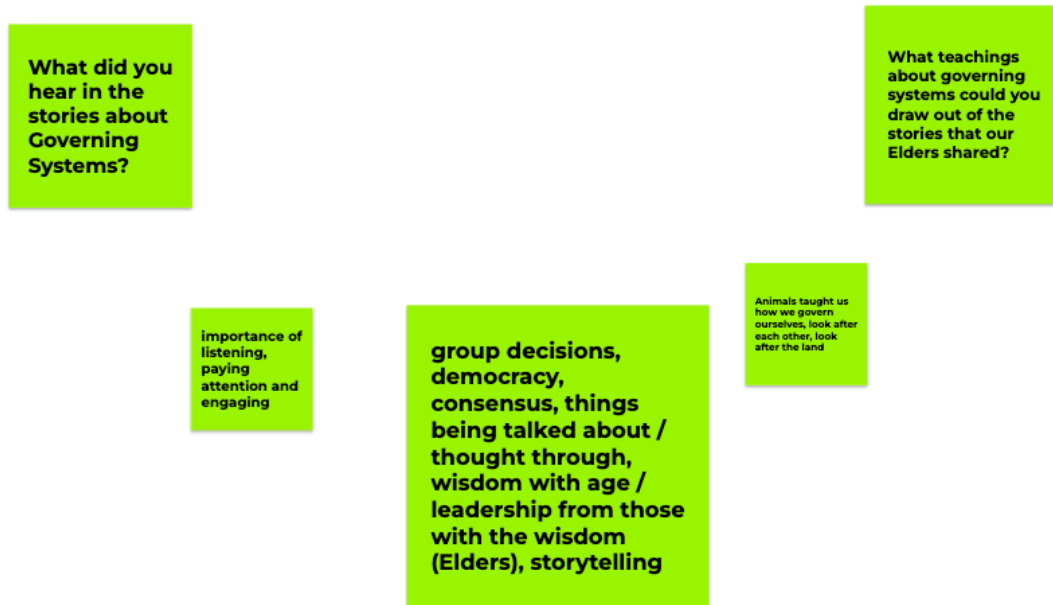
People Pillar



Land Pillar



Governing Systems Pillar



Jurisdiction & Laws



Resources Pillar

What teachings about the resources could you draw out of the stories that our Elders shared?

over consumption

greediness

different animals have different gifts

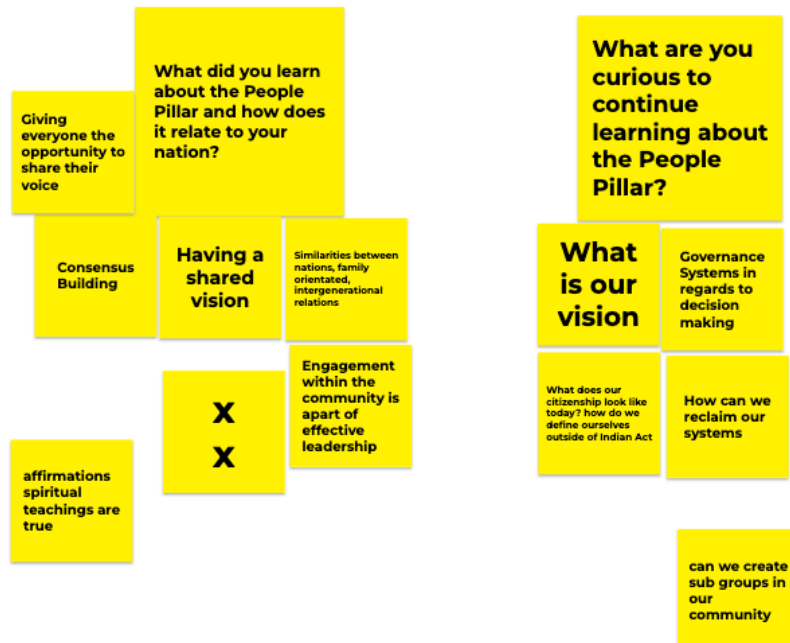
What did you hear in the stories about Resources?

wood ashes-medicine

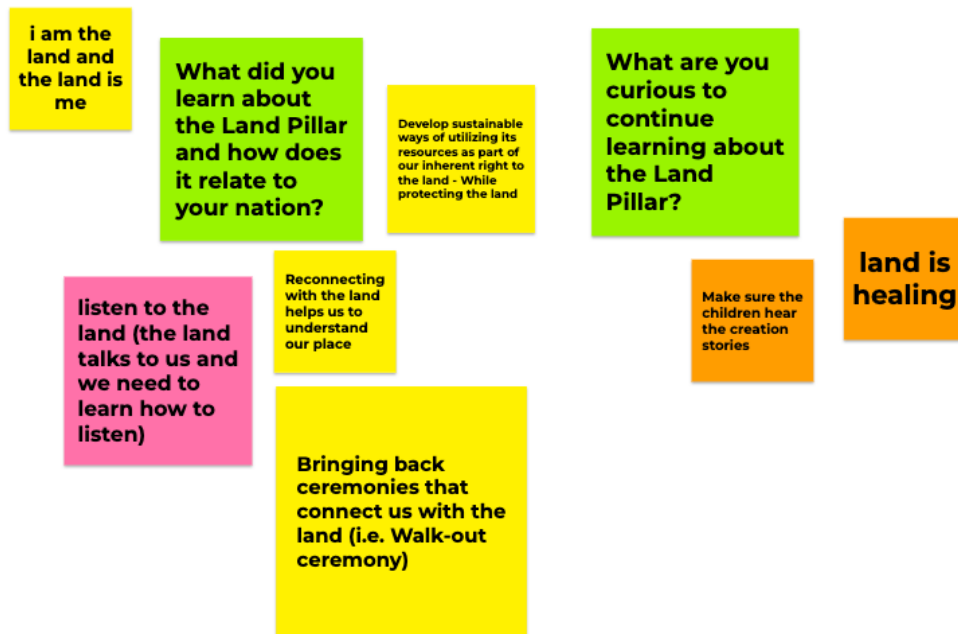
You can't always do what other people do

Youth & Elders Gathering Visioning World Café Exercise

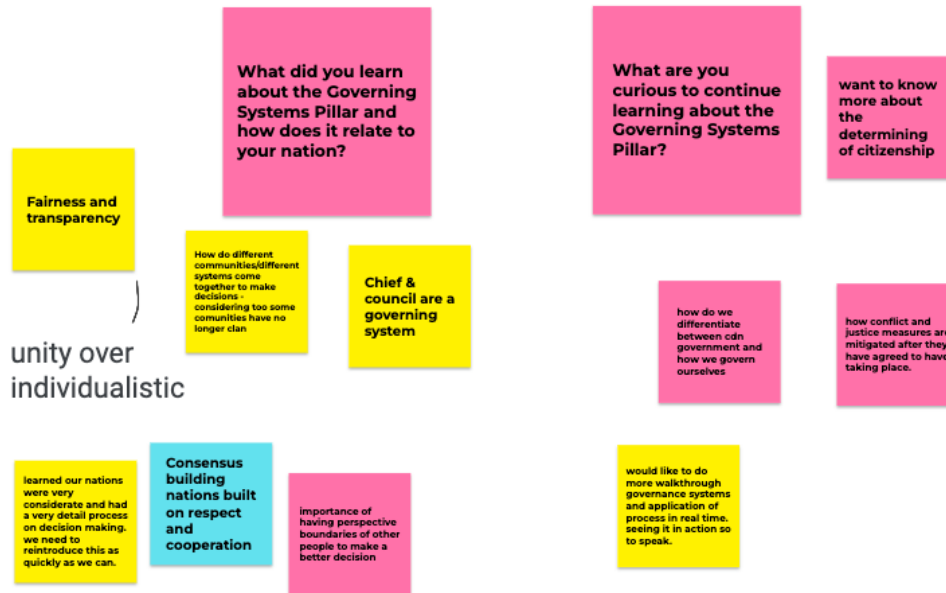
People Pillar



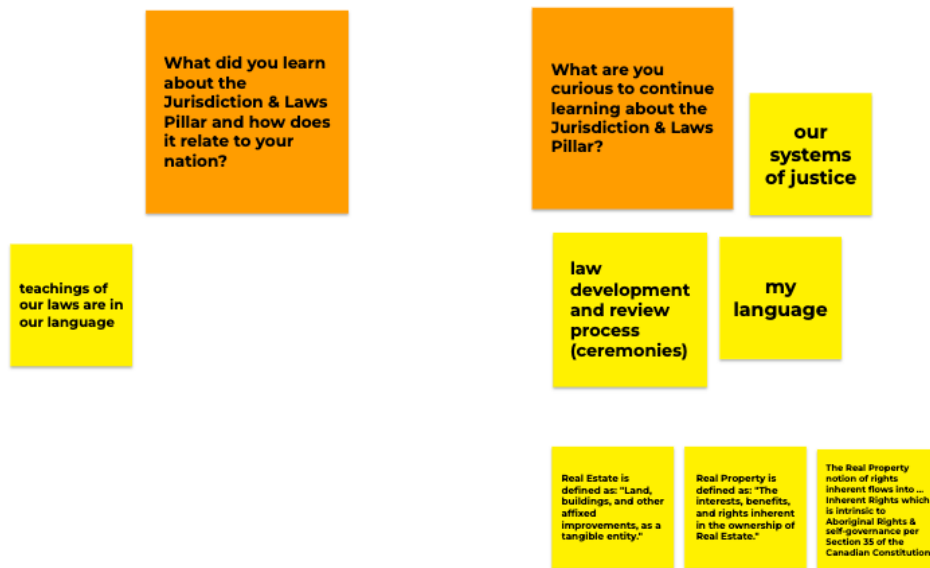
Land Pillar



Governing Systems Pillar



Jurisdiction & Laws Pillar



Resources Pillar

