

# DISCONNECT TO RECONNECT

Breaking Down Barriers and Enhancing Social  
Connections Amongst the Indigenous  
Communities & Educational Institutions



**GENWELL**  
PROJECT  
*HUMAN CONNECTION MOVEMENT*

Rachel Koski,  
Angelina Lee,  
Kristin Harnoth,  
Margaux Nucup,  
Caroline Rondeau



# Our Mission Statement

This research was conducted for the GenWell Project to bring awareness to the social issues of loneliness and disconnection. The purpose of this report was to better understand how to build stronger and better human connections, inclusive to a marginalized community. Our aim was to help discount people from their day to day lives and help them to reconnect with one and other by bring awareness to a marginalized community and the barriers these people face. We chose the Indigenous community for our marginalized community. We wanted to view the perspectives of post-secondary students, including Indigenous post-secondary students, for this research because students are known for being at risk for loneliness, due to high levels of stress that accompanies their studies (Earl, 2019). Specifically, Indigenous post-secondary students are at a higher risk for loneliness as a result of societal barriers, including racial discrimination, in many educational institutions (Clark et al., 2014). We conducted a preliminary student engagement activity known as the “Graffiti Wall” to discover common strategies that students use in fostering connections and mitigating social isolation. Our literature research found various strategies and solutions that may be useful in tackling the discrimination Indigenous communities experience and enhance their social connection with others (Murrup-Steward et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2021; Employment & Social Development Canada, 2018). To encourage connections, institutions and teachers can use several approaches to prevent racial bias and negative stereotypes (Clark et al., 2014). This report also includes tactics for everyone to better communicate in general, whether it is with friends or strangers (MTD Training, 2010; Sandor & Morin, 2021). At the end of this report, there are several key resources that can benefit Indigenous communities in Canada.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

About GenWell Project

04

Literature Review

08

Racial Discrimination Indigenous Students Experience

09

Building Better Human Connections Inclusive of Members of Indigenous Communities

10

Strategies & Solutions for Indigenous Students & Educational Institutions

11

Strategies to Communicate

13

The Graffiti Wall

14

Resources

15

Key Takeaways

16

References

# GENWELL PROJECT

HUMAN CONNECTION MOVEMENT

The GenWell Project is a Canadian non-profit organization, which was originally inspired by the summer blackout of 2003 on the Eastern Seaboard of North America, when over 50M people found themselves without power for 2-7 days. The blackout gave these people the opportunity to turn off their phones, go out, and get connected with one another face-to-face as there was no power or social distractions. Communities and neighbourhoods came together and supported one another through this hardship.

After a decade, the GenWell Project launched in the fall of 2016, as they wanted to help people generate stronger human connections. In hopes that they can help people, building new and greater connections among communities before a time of crisis. They activate around two weekends a year, one in the spring and the other in the fall. The GenWell Project wants to be the catalyst for people to reach out and connect face-to-face with family, friends, neighbours, classmates and colleagues, etc.

They share information, research, tips, tools and motivation through their social channels and website to help close the growing disconnection in our society.

## Mission:

To be a Canadian led, Global Human Connection Movement that generates a stronger and healthier society by igniting greater social connection

## Goals

### Educate

To educate Canadians and raise greater consciousness about the importance of human connection and its impact on our health and wellbeing.

### Empower

To empower Canadians by revolutionizing our understanding of the importance of human connection through social health research.

### Catalyze

To catalyze policy and intervention development to support governments, business, non-profit organizations, neighbourhoods, families, and individuals.

## Vision

The vision of The GenWell Project is to make the world a happier and healthier place by educating people about the importance of proactive, face-to-face social connection, and catalyzing them to take action.

# Literature Review

## Human Connection

Many individuals are susceptible to social isolation and loneliness in our current society, hence why human connections are critical. Marginalized communities are particularly at risk of facing greater social isolation compared to the general population (Ball & Tepperman, 2021). Social isolation is defined as an objective state of being disconnected from other people, which can negatively impact people's physical and mental health (GenWell Project, 2021). Social disconnection can lead to loneliness which involves the subjective distressing feeling associated with lack of quantity or quality of social and emotional relationship with others (GenWell Project, 2021). To help create stronger human connections and interactions, we must recognize the impact that social isolation can have on individuals and take a step forward in building stronger connections with others around us and live healthier lives.

We take socializing for granted in society, since most of us do not stop and think about the actual importance it has on our mental and physical health. Being able to socialize with another human can have a positive impact on our overall health. Human connection can fuel one's sense of belonging, build their confidence, and also improve their overall wellbeing. The GenWell Project is a movement that focuses on building stronger human connections. Their mission is to make the world a happier and healthier place by educating people on the importance of social connection as a proactive step that everyone can take for their health and happiness (GenWell Project, 2021).

Social disconnection can lead to loneliness as it is a lack of social relationships with minimum involvement in social activities. Before the pandemic, between 6 and 12% of Canadians have experienced long-term chronic loneliness (Canadian Social Connection Survey [CSCS], 2021). This means that loneliness, due to a lack of social connection, was an issue before our current times of having to isolate. During the pandemic, the younger generations (i.e. Gen Z and Millennials) reported wanting more social time, as well as wanting more friends (CSCS, 2021). The lack of social connection, by being disconnected from others, may be due to the high levels of stress from university. From the results of the CSCS (2021), loneliness was associated with poorer mental and physical health, lower self-esteem and lesser happiness.

University students are three times more likely to experience psychological distress, compared to the general population. (Earl, 2019)

Research indicates that students and young adults are seeking ways to initiate better and healthier connections. Having strong and healthy relationships can assist students in improving not only their mental and emotional wellbeing but also their confidence and education (Earl, 2019). The University of Queensland did a series on healthy relationships that was held over two hours once a week during the semester. The participants gave positive feedback on their experience, as they enjoyed the face-to-face interaction and hearing real-life examples. The experience of sharing stories allowed the students to move away from a fictional world, created by the negative effects of social media, and to see themselves and the importance of people in their lives (Earl, 2019). This series helped improve the students' self-esteem, communication, and their overall health.

Social connection can enhance happiness.

Some social strategies that were found in the CSCS (2021) to help improve happiness were having at least 3 or more friends that one considers to be close with, along with being able to connect with 5 or more family members/friends/coworkers/neighbours each week. Another strategy was ensuring to find some meaning in the time one spent with their family and friends. Being able to spend at least one day a week connecting with one's loved ones for at least 5 minutes was also important. Other strategies included receiving and giving hugs at least once per week, as well as phoning, writing, or video chatting with friends and family at least once per week. Finally, making sure to take some time out of each week to chat with others about things that are important, such as their family, interests, hobbies, etc. (CSCS, 2021).



# Literature Review

## Indigenous Community

Indigenous culture and identity is reflected through various practices, and their well-being within the community can be increased through Elder guidance and recognition of their Indigenous identity (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021). A key aspect of some Indigenous communities is the focus on interpersonal relationships and the importance of communication between members of the community. For some Indigenous populations, relationships are very personal in nature, and focus on respectful communication amongst all members of the tribe (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Within Indigenous communities, kinship and clans focus on every individual doing their task to make society function as a whole (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Thus, accomplishments of individuals can be seen as success for the family and not attributed to the world around us (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Indigenous populations have a spiritual view of knowledge that is inherent in their culture, with a deep relation to nature, which is different from other cultures (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Their traditional view of knowledge can also help us better see our impact on history as experienced by their community (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

**A key aspect of some Indigenous communities is the focus on interpersonal relationships and the importance of communication between members of the community.**

One important method of communication for Indigenous people is through that of storytelling. It holds the ability to evoke feelings of connectedness, in turn, influencing overall wellbeing (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021). Due to the nature of colonization, there is a real possibility of skewing cultural connections away from that which they were originally intended, minimizing the value these connections hold (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021). Understanding how Indigenous stories are meant to be both told and interpreted by the audience is yet another way in which a bridging of the gap can be achieved between the Indigenous community and those who are not part of it.

**Due to the nature of colonization, there is a real possibility of skewing cultural connections away from that which they were originally intended.** (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021)

For starters, visual media today, that is not a part of Indigenous media, can be intended purely for entertainment. While Indigenous storytelling can certainly be entertaining, it is meant to point at something deeper. Stories are purposive; typically demonstrated in early scenes by a figure speaking to an audience about the story that will be told (Hearne, 2017). These opening details are important; it is also through them that they acknowledge the human element of both speaker and listener (Hearne, 2017). More broadly, it underlines that relational component and communal aspect crucial to Indigenous culture. Another connection that is important to storytelling is the location, specifically that of space and time. It not only serves to enrich the plot, but it also demonstrates the formative nature one's tribal lands hold. It is the places and times, in their particularity, that mold identity; both as a person in a community composed of other people and the relationship the individual has with the surrounding environment (Hearne, 2017).

**Indigenous storytelling is meant to point at something deeper.**



# Literature Review

## Indigenous Community

Various studies have been conducted in recent years on the social isolation of the general population and marginalized Indigenous communities. Research done by CSCS (2021), indicates that Indigenous people were just as likely as other populations to be at risk for loneliness, however, lower incomes and mental health disabilities caused greater scores in social isolation. Indigenous populations have experienced various intersecting, such as trauma and stigmatization, which can cause both physical and mental health disabilities (Wallace et al., 2021). Indigenous people are also at an increased risk of greater social anxiety and social phobia compared to others (CSCS, 2021), due to factors such as intergenerational trauma and isolation from living on reserves (Wallace et al., 2021).

Colonization as it is has had a significant impact on Indigenous peoples' feelings of self-worth and it has been damaging to their mental health. (Murrup-Steward et al., 2021)

These barriers can stem from colonization as it has had a significant impact on Indigenous peoples' feelings of self-worth and it has been damaging to their mental health (Murrup-Steward et al., 2021). It is important to recognize the power that intersectionality can have, as it increases the risk of social isolation. Some individuals may be part of two or more marginalized groups, such as being both Indigenous and LGBTQ+, who experience pain as part of their identity (Wallace et al., 2021). We can clearly see that various variables are affecting the risk of social isolation amongst Indigenous people.

A key institution that perpetuates the racialization of Indigenous people is the education system.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has challenged the government and education system to acknowledge the harmful legacies left behind by the residential school system (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020 & 2021). Their goal is to ensure that every student can develop a better understanding of the experiences of Indigenous people, along with acknowledging Indigenous-settler relations in history (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020 & 2021). Over 85% of the respondents agreed that it should be mandatory for schools to teach about Indigenous histories and cultures (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021). The educational reforms are aimed at achieving equitable educational opportunities for Indigenous youths, reducing or eliminating certain gaps (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). Learning more about contemporary circumstances experienced by Indigenous communities may help counter misconceptions and foster better bonds (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021).

Research has found that reconciliation efforts in education are supported, so long as they do not extend beyond the range of minor learning activities. (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021).



# Literature Review

## Indigenous Community

In order to accomplish the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), we must first eliminate hidden messages of colonization found in the curriculum and prevent the use of problematic language in teachings (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). The Western way of teaching may unconsciously transfer troublesome views of dominance and subordination through the educational system's assumptions, norms, and standards (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). It is especially important for the policies to address factors that can cause barriers to education for Indigenous youths (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). Various concerns were highlighted in their research, especially covert racism and victim-blaming (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021). Certain respondents dismissed Indigenous rights, not wanting the education system to undermine other priorities or minority groups (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021). Other respondents argued that Indigenous individuals are working backwards and not integrating themselves in society, reinforcing inherent racist stereotypes (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021).

### The curriculum must go beyond simply discussing Indigenous culture and history of residential schools

(Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020).

The Indigenous perspectives shouldn't only achieve "official state ends", but rather feature components of educational experience (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). Many provinces have made it their objective to include Indigenous communities and Elders in advising policies, allowing their voices to be heard and make great contributions (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). For example, Saskatchewan and Nunavut recognize Inuit worldviews as a foundation for teaching and learning (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). Although objectives have not been completely fulfilled as of yet, they aim to reduce gaps in academic success and graduation rates (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). To achieve greater equality for all Indigenous youth in the education system, teacher training and standards should be focused on a holistic approach to learning (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). Teachers should have a better understanding of Indigenous worldviews, beliefs, and values to apply in classrooms (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020). The learning of Indigenous cultures, languages, and experiences should not be something considered simply "optional" (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020).

### Indigenous students face several barriers when it comes to education which can put them at risk for social isolation.

Indigenous students and youth from low-income families may not have access to stable internet or technology necessary for their education, which can cause discrimination and stigmatization (Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC], 2020). This can trigger a growing digital divide for marginalized youth, as certain individuals are limited to their access to communicating through the internet (MHCC, 2020). Therefore, this can increase the risk of social isolation among individuals who do not have access to the internet and necessitates in-person contact. Another barrier can be the lack of understanding of Indigenous culture and racism which can prevent Indigenous students from gaining self-confidence and motivation to change (Ottmann, 2017). As well due to the impact of residential schools, less than 10% of Indigenous individuals in Canada have a university credential as residential schools were not designed to prepare these individuals for university (Clark et al., 2014). Indigenous students may feel a barrier that they cannot overcome when it comes to social relationships with peers outside their communities. Furthermore, there is a separation of the definition of knowledge as Indigenous communities share different definitions. The separation of knowledge in modern Canadian education can cause emotional problems for Indigenous students (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Therefore, social relationships from family and friends is crucial for Indigenous students and youth in order to overcome these barriers and make positive changes toward themselves and their communities. It is important to note that human connection can be beneficial to reduce the risk of social isolation.



# Racial Discrimination Indigenous Students Experience

Education is one of the main institutions that perpetuates racialization. Indigenous faculty and students experience racial discrimination in Canadian universities (Clark et al., 2014). A racial microaggressions framework provides meaning for interpreting racial discrimination that Indigenous undergraduates face. Racial microaggressions are contemporary forms of racial discrimination, which can be subtle, unintentional, and be invisible to the perpetrators (Clark et al., 2014). These racial microaggressions are similar to unconscious racism which focus on everyday active manifestations. Using the racial microaggressions framework can be beneficial as a way to document the encounters that Indigenous students experience. This information can then be used to combat social inequalities and promote positive learning experiences for all students (Clark et al., 2014).

Some racial microaggressions that Indigenous students encounter are:

---

- **Withstanding jealous accusations**
  - These are microaggressive acts that originate from misinformation about Canadian history and modern law and policy.
- **Encountering expectations of primitiveness**
  - Individuals who are non-Indigenous use caricatured representations of Indigenous people, for example, teepees, as alternatives for actual human beings and their living cultures.
- **Living with day-to-day cultural and social isolation**
  - Indigenous students experience feelings of loneliness due to institutionalized racism that manifests throughout campus institutions.

(Clark et al., 2014)

---

Indigenous students have reported that issues important to their communities have been overlooked, underrepresented and/or misrepresented across various disciplines. Furthermore, they have articulated willingness to share information about their cultures and identities but have expressed reluctance in taking on institutional roles of cultural educators responsible for explaining and clarifying to non-Indigenous seeking this information (Clark et al., 2014).

# Building Better Human Connections Inclusive of Members of Indigenous Communities

## Strategies and Solutions

---

There are various strategies and solutions that can be put in place to enhance the social connection inclusive of Indigenous communities. Strategies to create stronger connections and reduce social isolation and stigmatization include:

- Stronger Indigenous education, not feeling the blame for colonization, and passing on culture.
- Building safe environments while participating in community activities and events.
- Building positive relationships and learning more about their tribe.
- Fostering trusting relationships to build awareness of past trauma and violence.
- Promoting engagement in decision-making by word of mouth referrals and network of contacts.
- Recognizing historical trauma and cultural traditions.
- Securing funding for programs and activities, mutual respect, outreach programs, along with providing cultural awareness training.

(Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2021; Employment & Social Development Canada, 2018)

---

In order to find solutions to build better human connections inclusive of members of the Indigenous community, it is paramount that we **recognize aspects of their culture**. Indigenous culture is experienced through connections, which influences the health and well-being of the community as a whole (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021). The feelings of self-worth of Indigenous people are heavily influenced by sharing stories of colonization, relationships, cultural knowledge, community support, and agency (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021). In other words, **connections can be built by better understanding their cultural share of knowledge** and the impact of interpersonal connections. Initiatives that improve Indigenous livelihood and educational success through quality of living are important to increase their well-being and social health (Ottmann, 2017).

# Strategies & Solutions for Indigenous Students & Educational Institutions

Canadian Indigenous students have reported ongoing experiences of negative perceptions of them held by faculty and graduate teaching assistants, their non-Indigenous peers, and university staff (Clark et al., 2014). These experiences suggest a systemic climate of racial bias and discrimination, which requires immediate attention.

There are several ways in which racial bias and negative stereotypes can be addressed:

- Campus teaching and learning service could improve instructors' cultural competence.
  - These campus services could direct awareness toward discussion groups, seminars, and/or workshops for instructors who seek direction on how to engage with Indigenous students more effectively.
- Formal support for all non-Indigenous graduate teaching assistants and new assistant professors during their first year in teaching in Canada's multicultural classrooms, which includes Indigenous undergraduates.
- Using strategic planning to address racial discrimination in student affairs and human resources.
  - Research shows that Indigenous students report unanimously and passionately that Indigenous student service centres are a strong source of support in an otherwise isolating environment (Clark et al., 2014).
- Universities could implement cultural awareness workshops for new student orientations and intergroup dialogues.
  - This can give non-Indigenous students the opportunity to think about how they may inadvertently be bias or racial towards Indigenous students.
- Universities should forge partnerships with Indigenous communities in order to determine where resources are needed.
- Campus resources could be allocated to building Indigenous graduate student cohorts and hiring postdoctoral fellows who could form the next generation of Indigenous scholars.

(Clark et al., 2014)

To improve the quality of education amongst the education institutions, **collaborative dialogue between educators and educational leaders must be made.**

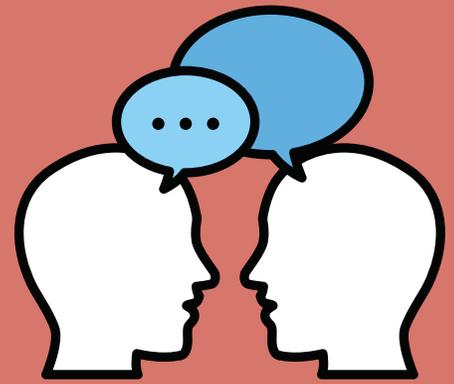
This can be done in various different ways:

- Respectful dialogue and communication
- Respectful reciprocal relationships between all individuals
- Reconciliation efforts and creating an inclusive educational system

This will not only increase the social bond between individuals, but also give them better equality in other areas of life.

(Ottmann, 2017)

# Strategies to Communicate



There are three different types of face-to-face communication:

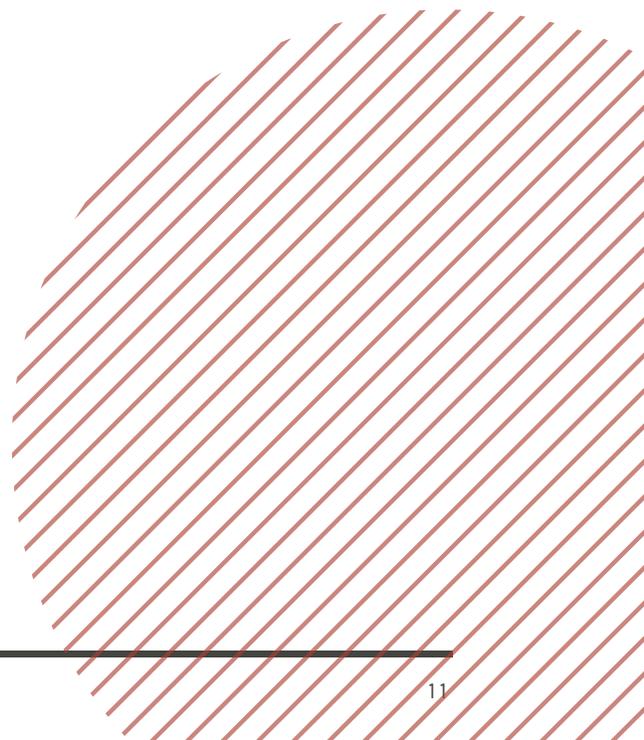
- Tone of voice
- Words
- Body language

(MTD Training, 2010)

When all three elements of face-to-face communication are present, one can deliver the most comprehensive message. Furthermore, when verbal and non-verbal communication do not match, people are likely to believe non-verbal more (MTD Training, 2010).

A positive social cue that someone can both use and look out for is mirroring someone's body language. When mirroring someone's body language, this sends subconscious signals to the other individual that you are engaged in the conversation as our automatic response is to pick up their body language (MTD Training, 2010). When having an enthusiastic conversation, with a friend for example, your body may mimic their body language. For instance, when they lean forward or cross their feet, your body will follow and do the same. One can use this to their advantage in forming a positive connection with a stranger or an acquaintance.

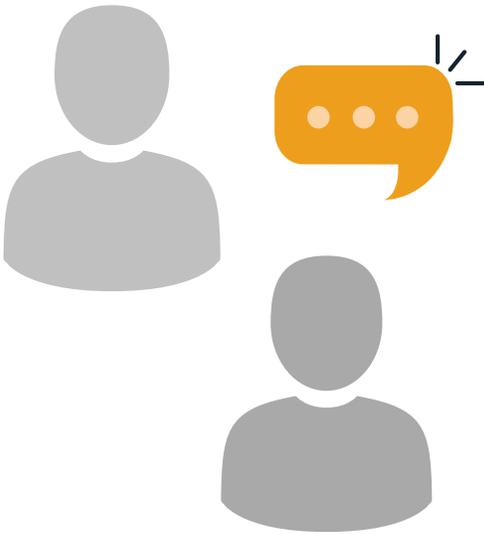
Another strategy that can help establish positive communication is being able to express one's emotions. Research suggests that talking about one's feelings can help with emotional regulation (Torre & Lieberman, 2018). In order to effectively communicate one's feelings, they first need to be self-conscious of their emotions. One may ask themselves how they are feeling and look out for potential sensation cues in their body (Dyke, 2021). By taking deep breaths, it will help pause and ground the feelings before letting them out (Dyke, 2021). It is crucial for the individual communicating about their emotions to choose the right listener and open up at the right time for a more meaningful and effective connection (Dyke, 2021).



# Connecting with a Stranger

Connecting with acquaintances or strangers can be challenging. However, one can follow these tips from doctors and psychologists to practice their social and communication skills daily (Sandor & Morin, 2021).

Here are some useful strategies and tips for communicating with strangers or anyone who is not too familiar:



- Treat them like a friend.
  - Tip: be friendly and casual with a smile.
- Make spur-of-the-moment comments.
  - Tip: use your surroundings for topic inspiration.
- Pay attention to their feet and gaze.
  - Tip: if the person's feet and gaze are toward you, it means the person is engaged in the conversation.
- Talk about a positive topic.
  - Tip: try and find commonalities.
- Share things about yourself.
  - Tip: the conversation can be slightly personal, but try not to overshare personal information all at once to avoid making the other person uncomfortable.

## Just Keep in Mind

You do not have to make the best or the most remarkable impression. As long as you stay friendly and polite, you will be able to make positive connections.

# The Graffiti Wall:

## Common Strategies Students Use to Foster Connections and Combat Isolation

This project coordinated a student initiative to explore the perspectives and strategies among the student population at MacEwan University. The aim was to discover common strategies that students use when it comes to fostering connections and mitigating social isolation. This initiative was done through a Graffiti Wall. The Graffiti Wall simply involved the set-up of two whiteboards in a couple areas inside the school. Each board had a different prompt, one question was: “What do you do to feel less isolated?” and the other was “What helps you feel connected to those around you?”. For four days, students had the opportunity to think about these questions and give their responses. It was noted that by acknowledging the student presence and highlighting each contribution as valuable, more people seemed to be compelled to add their own comments. This means that we were able to get significantly more respondents to participate by initiating a small talk with the individuals. Most of the answers from the questions were focused on connecting with others such as friends, families and sometimes even strangers. We found that people like to spend time together to stay connected.

The following are common strategies that the students wrote down:

### What helps you feel connected to those around you?

- Saying hello to people when going on walks
- Having a meal shared among friends
- Exchanges of smiles or nods when passing strangers
- Someone holds the door open for [the respondent]
- When drivers let me merge
- Shared moments and small conversations with strangers
- Coffee and tea dates
- Hugs
- Laughter
- When a friend reaches out to ask how [the respondent is] doing

### What do you do to feel less Isolated?

- Talk to family or friends
- Video games (alone or with friends)
- Go for walks (alone or with friends)
- Taking naps, sleeping
- Netflix sessions
- Reading books
- Movie night with family or friends
- Joining clubs
- Dance
- Cuddling with a pet
- Group workouts

# Resources

Here are a few resources that work to support Indigenous Communities and their wellness

## GENWELL PROJECT

The GenWell Project is a non-profit organization that share information, research, tips, and tools to promote human connections and the importance of social health.



[Genwellproject.org](http://Genwellproject.org)



[TheGenWellProject](https://www.facebook.com/TheGenWellProject)



[@GenWellProject](https://twitter.com/GenWellProject)

## GUIDE TO Indigenous Organizations and Services in Alberta

This guide was produced by the Ministry of Indigenous Relations in order to provide contact info for these Indigenous organizations and services. This guide provides a list of Indigenous Organizations and services in Alberta, and it also includes national organizations located elsewhere in Canada.



[www.indigenous.alberta.ca](http://www.indigenous.alberta.ca)



This is a national framework that addresses mental wellness among First Nations in Canada. This framework identifies ways to improve service coordination among various systems and supports culturally safe delivery of services.



[thunderbirdpf.org/first-nations-mental-wellness-continuum-framework/](http://thunderbirdpf.org/first-nations-mental-wellness-continuum-framework/)



The We Matter Campaign is to help Indigenous youth get through hard times. It is a multi-media campaign in which Indigenous role models, youth and community members from across Canada come together to share their own experiences of overcoming hardships, communicating with Indigenous youth that no matter how hopeless life can feel, there is always a way forward.



[wemattercampaign.org](http://wemattercampaign.org)



[WeMatterCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/WeMatterCampaign)



[@WeMatterOrg](https://twitter.com/WeMatterOrg)

# Key Takeaways

- University students are three times more likely to experience psychological distress and loneliness, compared to the general population (Earl, 2019).
- A key aspect found within Indigenous communities is the focus on interpersonal relationships and communication with those around them (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).
- The education system unknowingly perpetuates racialization and discrimination against Indigenous people (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021).
- Indigenous students and communities often feel they have been overlooked or misrepresented in the educational system (Clark et al., 2014).
- Some strategies include: not pushing the blame of colonization on Indigenous communities, building safe environments and positive relationships, fostering trusting relationships, recognizing historical trauma, and mutual respect (Murrup-Steward et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2021; Employment & Social Development Canada, 2018).
- It is important to recognize aspects of their culture, building connection by better understanding their cultural share of knowledge (Murrup-Steward et al., 2021; Ottmann, 2017).
- Some ways to reduce racial bias and negative stereotypes include: improving teachers' cultural competence, supporting Indigenous students in classrooms, address racial discrimination, implement cultural awareness workshops, forging partnerships with Indigenous communities, and more (Clark et al., 2014).
- Strategies to communicate with others include: the three aspects important for face-to-face communication which are: tone of voice, wording, and body language (MTD Training, 2010).
- To better communicate with strangers, some strategies would be to treat them in a friendly manner with a smile, using surroundings for topic inspiration, finding commonalities, etc. (Sandor & Morin, 2021).

# References

- Ball, J., & Tepperman, L. (2021). *The stacked deck: An introduction to social inequality*. (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Canadian Social Connection Survey. (2021). Social Connection in Canada [Survey]. *Social Bubble Project*.  
<https://genwellproject.org/research/>
- Clark, D. A., Kleiman, S., Spanierman, L. B., Issac, P., & Poolokasingbam, G. (2014). "Do You Live in a Teepee?" Aboriginal Students' Experiences with Racial Microaggressions in Canada. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 7(2), 112-125. Doi: 10.3777/a0036573
- Deloria, J. V., & Wildcat, D. R. (2001). *Power and place: Indian education in america*. Fulcrum Publishing.
- Design de Plume Inc. (n.d.). *We Matter*. <http://wemattercampaign.org/>
- Dyke, K. V. (2021, June 16). Feeling stuck? How to express your feelings. Psych Central. <https://psychcentral.com/lib/feeling-stuck-how-to-express-your-feelings>
- Earl, D. (2019) The healthy relationships series: An untapped potential for human connection. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 27(2), 231-235. Doi: 10.30688/janzssa.2019.11
- Employment and Social Development Canada (2018). Social isolation of seniors: A focus on Indigenous seniors in Canada. *Government of Canada*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/10f725c0-c8b2-49a2-b35d-f9594a90410a/resource/42305332-6307-41b6-abad-cc3029b1f830/download/social-isolation-indigenous-seniors.pdf>
- GenWell Project - Human Connection Movement. (2021, November 9). *The GenWell Project*. <https://genwellproject.org/>
- Government of Alberta. (2018, March). *Guide to indigenous organizations and services in alberta*. <http://open.alberta.ca/dataset/1e38502a-550b-4351-86cf-10cc5f39f93/resource/3bae701e-0e72-49bf-ba16-2a3901bf6534/download/guide-indigenous-organizations-services-ablerta.pdf>
- Hearne, Joanna. (2017). "I Am Not a Fairy Tale": Indigenous storytelling on Canadian television. *Marvels & Tales*, 31(1), 126-146.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13110/marvelstales.31.1.0126>
- Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2020). Lockdown life: Mental health impacts of COVID-19 on youth in Canada. *Health Canada*.  
[https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2021-02/lockdown\\_life\\_eng.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2021-02/lockdown_life_eng.pdf)
- MTD Training. (2010). *Effective Communication Skills*. Ventus Publishing ApS.  
<https://thuvienso.bvu.edu.vn/bitstream/TVDHBRVT/15271/1/Effective-Communication-Skills.pdf>
- Murrup-Stewart, C., Whyman, T., Jobson, L., & Adams, K. (2021). "Connection to Culture Is Like a Massive Lifeline"; Yarning With aboriginal Young People about Culture and Social and Emotional Wellbeing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 31(10), 1833-1846. Doi: 10.1177/10497323211009475
- Ottmann, J., (2017). Canada's indigenous peoples' access to post-secondary education: The spirit of the 'New Buffalo'. *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education*, 95-117. Doi: 10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7\_7
- Sandor, V., & Morin, D. A. (2021, July 21). *How to talk to strangers (without being awkward)*. SocialPro.  
<https://socialpronow.com/blog/talk-to-strangers/>
- Torre, J. B., & Lieberman, M. D. (2018). Putting Feelings into Words: Affect Labeling as Implicit Emotion Regulation. *Emotion Review*, 10(2), 116-124. Doi: 10.1177/1754073917742706
- Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. (2021). *First nations mental wellness continuum framework*. <http://thunderbirdpf.org/first-nations-mental-wellness-continuum-framework/>
- Wallace, B., Varcoe, C., Holmes, C., Moosa-Mitha, M., Moor, G., Hudspith, M., & Craig, K. D. (2021). Towards health equity for people experiencing chronic pain and social marginalization. *International Journal for Equity and Health*, 20(1), 1-13. Doi: 10.1186/s12939-021-01394-6
- Wotherspoon, T., & Milne, E. (2021). "Errors Were Made": Public Attitudes Regarding Reconciliation and Education in Canada. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, 58(3), 306-326. Doi: 10.1111/cars.12351
- Wotherspoon, T., & Milne, E. (2020). What do Indigenous Education Policy Frameworks Reveal About Commitments to Reconciliation in Canadian School Systems? *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 11(1), 1-29. Doi: 10.18584/iipj.2020.11.1.10215