



# STRONGER TOGETHER:

## STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS YOUTH IDENTITY

**‘Stronger Together: Helping each other to strengthen and sustain Indigenous youth identity and cultural knowledge’** was a three-year research project that explored how Indigenous youth in Canada understand and enact identity through family, community, education and learning experiences. Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, it was led by Dr Anne Marshall of the Centre for Youth and Society at the University of Victoria. Four community and academic partnership pairs formed the core team.

### WHY IS THE PROJECT SO IMPORTANT?

Recent years have seen the proliferation of cultural and language programmes, events and experiences offered to Indigenous children and youth. Yet despite widespread agreement that it is extremely important for children and youth to develop cultural awareness and identity, very little is known about how this actually happens from the perspectives of the youth themselves. Previous research and evaluations have not directly addressed the concept of Indigenous identity development. Thus the Stronger Together project is unique in that it looked at the impact of cultural and educational activities on the way Indigenous youth perceived themselves and what it meant to them to be an Indigenous person.

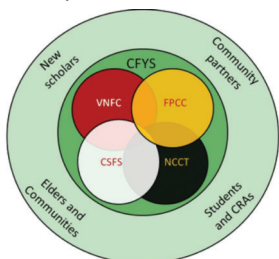
### PARTNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Indigenous worldview is based on relationships – that is, relationships with the land, family, nation, learning and culture, among many others. Consistent with this worldview, a key element of this project was its collaborative and community-engaged approach. Using qualitative and mixed research methods, the researchers built on existing relationships and partnerships that had taken years to establish, allowing them to access unique data.

The project took an Indigenous approach to design, data gathering, analysis and knowledge mobilisation. Most of the research assistants working on this project were Indigenous, and community participants conducted some interviews. The methodology was rooted in traditional values, knowledge and aims of local Indigenous community members.

### FOCUS ON FINDINGS

All four programmes found evidence of enhanced Indigenous cultural identity and increased traditional knowledge among participants. They demonstrated that cultural identity is a key factor affecting Indigenous youths’ sense of pride, self-efficacy and wellbeing. Understanding and enacting cultural identity, then, has a strong positive impact on Indigenous youth in different Indigenous communities and settings.



### PROGRAMME SUMMARIES

#### EAGLE pre-employment training:

**Dr Anne Marshall** (UVic) and **Bruce Parisian** (Cree First Nation) of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre

Many existing vocational and educational counselling programmes and tools fail to recognise Indigenous values and beliefs. Exploring and Acknowledging Guidance and Leadership through Employment (EAGLE), a 12-week job re-entry programme that teaches Indigenous youth pre-employment and life skills, was designed to incorporate traditional teachings and cultural practices relevant to finding and maintaining work. Group and individual narrative interviews described significant work and life changes attributed to participation in this programme.

#### Participation in a canoe journey:

**Dr Chris Lalonde** (UVic) and **Dr Travis Holyk** of Carrier Sekani Family Services

During a five-day traditional canoe journey for Indigenous youth, this study evaluated participants’ ethnic identity and cultural connections. As an experience in which the young men were immersed in First Nations culture, the development of ethnic identity was enhanced by positive role models as well as through the community and social aspects of the journey.

#### Language and cultural camps:

**Dr Lorna Williams** (Wanosts’a7, Lil’wat First Nation – UVic) and **Tracey Herbert** (St’uxwtews First Nation) of First People’s Cultural Council

Focusing on participants and administrators of language and culture camps, interviews highlighted the positive effects of these camps on First Nations identity and their cultural knowledge and practices.

#### Engaging Indigenous urban youth:

**Dr Suzanne Stewart** (Yellowknife Dene First Nation – University of Toronto), and **Larry Frost** (Ojibway First Nation) of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto

Indigenous youth shared their experiences of identity development in a focus group and individual interviews. The influence of family and community – as well as understanding their history and ancestral background – created pride and strengthened Indigenous identity, though racism and negative stereotypes were flagged as major issues for urban Indigenous youth.



## PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING:

Dr Anne Marshall and Bruce Parisian of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre

## PARTICIPATION IN A CANOE JOURNEY:

Dr Chris Lalonde and Dr Travis Holyk of Carrier Sekani Family Services



## LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL CAMPS:

Dr Lorna Williams and Tracey Herbert of First Peoples Cultural Council

## ENGAGING INDIGENOUS URBAN YOUTH:

Dr Suzanne Stewart and Larry Frost of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

**Bruce Parisian** (Cree) is the Executive Director of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) in Victoria, British Columbia. The goal of VNFC is to encourage and promote the wellbeing of urban Aboriginal people, by strengthening individuals, family and community.  
[www.vnfc.ca](http://www.vnfc.ca)

**Dr Travis Holyk** is the Executive Director, Research, Primary Care and Strategic Services at Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS) in Prince George, British Columbia. Guided by Elders, CSFS is committed to the healing and empowerment of Aboriginal families in Carrier and Sekani territory by providing health, social and legal services.  
[www.csfs.org](http://www.csfs.org)

**Tracey Herbert** (St'uxwtews) is the Executive Director of First Peoples Cultural Council (FPCC) in Brentwood Bay, British Columbia. Their mandate is to assist British Columbia First Nations in their efforts to revitalise their languages, arts and cultures. FPCC provides funding and resources to communities and develops policy recommendations.  
[www.fpcc.ca](http://www.fpcc.ca)

**Larry Frost** (Ojibway) is the Executive Director of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT) in Ontario. NCCT is an Aboriginal community cultural centre serving the local community, including guests from across Canada, offering a variety of programmes and services to urban native and non-native people.  
[www.ncct.on.ca](http://www.ncct.on.ca)

**Dr Anne Marshall** is the Director of the Centre for Youth & Society (CFYS), an interdisciplinary research centre at the University of Victoria promoting the wellbeing of youth from diverse social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds, across developmental transitions, and in evolving societal circumstances. CFYS coordinated the project.  
[www.youth.society.uvic.ca](http://www.youth.society.uvic.ca)