The Branches Team would like to acknowledge that McGill University is on land which long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations.

We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

In these exceptional circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many have found themselves in areas outside of Montreal, and we invite you to discover and acknowledge the lands where you are situated.
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Pick Your Path

A learning and mentorship experience for under-represented youth

Overall PYP concept

Pick Your Path (PYP) is a learning experience providing secondary school and CEGEP students with paid professional and educational development. PYP students are paired with a McGill student mentor and attend online workshops and seminars led by professionals and professors. These workshops equip students with the tools needed to make informed and empowered decisions about their education and get an in-depth, personalised, and unique view into university education with the ultimate goal of increasing McGill student enrolment through direct engagement and development opportunities.

PYP 2023: Putting down roots

Building on the success of previous cycles, Pick Your Path was able to deepen existing connections within the Montreal community. The result was the engagement of an overall higher number of students in the program, a diversification of participants coming from different backgrounds, as well as the establishment of new partnerships and an increase in Branches’ and McGill’s networking activities with under-represented communities.

Pick Your Path – Black Youth

A learning and mentorship experience for Black youth

Program Overview

The Pick Your Path for Black Youth program was created responding to McGill University’s Action Plan on Anti-Black Racism, which states that:

- McGill University can and should do more to connect actively with the Montreal Black community, so that our campus can better reflect our city’s strong demographic diversity.

- Our university must develop concrete strategies to enhance Black student access to McGill, notably by working with local high schools and Cégeps that have strong Black representation.

Hence, PYP Black is a paid mentorship experience for Black high school and Cégep students. The program is designed to expose Black youth to various areas of study and equip them with the tools needed to make informed and empowered decisions about their educational path whenever that time comes.

The program pairs Black high school and Cégep students with a Black McGill student or alumni mentor. Throughout the program, participants learn about various areas of study through workshops conducted by students, professors and/or professionals of the Montreal and McGill Black community. Additionally, the
students will work with their mentor on a project of their choice that aims to answer the guiding question, "What are my next steps in my path of education?"

Over the summer meetings took place between the ambassadors and project coordinator to plan the following year. During that time, we reflected on the past and planned for the future, this involved refining the curriculum, onboarding, mentor support, and recruitment strategies. In addition to compiling and analyzing comments from the past cohort, focus groups were conducted with Cégep students. Given that this year would be the inaugural cohort of Cégep students, it was essential to consult with current students in order to better assess the needs, barriers and resources available to Black students.

**Participation**

Building on the successes of the previous cohort which ran from October 2021 to April 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2022, and engaged Black students from grades 9, 10 and 11, the current cohort of PYP launched in October 2022 and expanded to welcome both Cégep and high school students. The current cycle gained widespread attention and received a high volume of applications. The program's previous success was reflected in the 81 student and parent applications, representing 26 high schools and Cégeps, and 48 McGill student and graduate to be mentor applications.

While the number of available spots had more than doubled from the previous cohort's 12 to 25 the high volume of applications called for a careful screening process. Applications were filtered to prioritize students who are experiencing either the transition from high school to Cégep or from Cégep to university. Drawing on the meetings and focus groups that took place over the summer the team re-evaluated and refined the programs' onboarding process with focus on how we selected mentors and mentees, trained mentors and strategized on how to collect feedback from participants throughout the duration of the program.

The 2022 - 2023 cycle of Pick Your Path demonstrated a measurable impact in the life of student participants. Of the 25 participants eight students were at the stage in their educational journey to apply to university. Following their participation in PYP for Black Youth, five student participants were accepted to and chose McGill University. Students applied – and were accepted – to university on their own merit. However, the relationship between the student participants and their mentor was vital in breaking down the walls around McGill University.
Pick Your Path for Black Youth participants

**Partners**

We collaborated with external partners such as, John Abbott Black Student Union, Marianopolis Black Student Union, Houda Nasreddine; a counsellor at Howard Billings, The Strong Hinkson Organization, Ushana Houston; a teacher at Westmount High, Jean-Yves Sylvestre; Ahunsic College, and internal McGill partners including Elijah Aedo Castillo; VP Advocacy with the McGill Black Student Network to create a network of outreach surrounding the call for applications.

We collaborated with internal McGill partners such as the Faculty of Law L.E.X. (Law-Éducation-Connexion) Outreach Program, the Black Law Students’ Association of McGill, McGill’s Black Students Network, and Carrie Hanson; skill development at Teaching and Learning Services, to set up workshops and other group activities. The proceeding months hold further promise for faculty-specific workshops and collaborations.

**Mentors, mentees and parents**

Mentees have the opportunity to connect one-on-one with their mentors throughout the program to share knowledge, experiences, and concerns and to have their questions answered. Mentees work with their mentors on a final project which will be presented at the programs warp-up session. At the mid-point of the program one mentee reflected on their experiences, sharing that they felt the “Mentor match is a match made in heaven.”
Parents will engage in a reflection session on their dreams & interests for their child, and already look forward to the opportunity to reflect on this subject, as well as the opportunity to connect with other parents. During the welcome diner, one parent expressed that it’s great to involve parents because there are a lot of initiatives for youth but very little resources for their parents.

Mentor feedback will be collected at the end of the cycle, allowing them to reflect on the program in its entirety.

Additional feedback from all parties involved will be collected over the course of the cycle and documented in order to make improvements on the next cycle.

In the News

On November 9, 2022 Camille Georges and Khan Bouba Dalambye gave an interview to the CBC evening news. They discussed how Khan Bouba Dalambye designed Pick Your Path to combine McGill’s outreach to the Black community with leadership development for Black McGill students and Camille Georges’ plans for the future of the program.

An upcoming article in the McGill Reporter will highlight the program’s success and the five students who have committed to McGill for their undergraduate studies.

Impact

During the consultation phase of building the program, community partners identified that Black youth in Montreal don’t see themselves or feel that they would not belong at McGill as it is perceived as a prestigious and elite institution that is out of their reach. The survey given at the end of the prior cycle shows that after participating in PYP, participants have a better attitude towards McGill and see it as a good fit for them.

“It was so refreshing to meet such inspiring individuals who went through what I went through. Being able to exchange with them alleviated so many worries of mine. They all had different paths, and it allowed to find mine! Also, [my mentor] reassured me many times, hyped me up, shared her experience, gave me her tips and way more. Even beyond the application process, I knew I could go to
her for any advice, and she'd be there. Also, Camille was such a great help. When we talked to her about the admission fees, the first thing she did was set up a program where they could guide us through admissions, and the university ended up paying for our fees. Her dedication to helping us did not go unnoticed!” - Emma Sheryl Nana

“I loved the experience to meet someone in the field of interest that I was fascinated by. I developed a sisterhood with my mentor which is a relationship I cherish and will cherish for the rest of my life. It was more than finding a career path but also finding purpose and finding community. I am very grateful to have done this program.” - Aïsha Nsiempba

PYP gives parents the opportunity to meet other parents that are facing similar issues as them. It provides a safe space for them to have conversation around racism and discrimination that impacts their child’s educational experience. The program also helped increase parents’ confidence in supporting their child through their education and increase their knowledge of post-secondary education.

“This program had a huge impact on my son. He applied for the program on his own after he heard about it at CGEP. We the parents attended the sessions once he was accepted into the program. All the sessions were welcoming, helpful and professional. More importantly, my son found a mentor in his area of interest who really guided him, and my son was very motivated and energized to see that someone who looks like him has succeeded to be a medical student and happens to enjoy sport at the same time. The program is unique in that it reached out to candidates in high school and CGEP and assists the students in the process of application and what the process for funding looks like.” - Pick Your Path parent

“The entire program was such a positive experience for Danica. I can see that she feels better informed about what to expect when she pursues her post-secondary education. She struggles with ADHD and social anxiety, so I really was not sure how it was going to go. However, her mentor was so kind and encouraging and that made all the difference in the world! I found the parent workshops informative. The space you created for our dialogues was comfortable. It was encouraging to be with a group of other black families who were also seeking similar experiences for their children.” - Celia Daley, Pick Your Path parent

Pick Your Path for Black Youth would not be possible without the work of Black McGill student and graduate mentors. Many of the mentors will remain in contact with their mentees post PYP and have expressed a strong interest in continuing to participate in the program in future years. They are open to mentoring more than one student and expressed they felt a stronger sense of identification with the McGill community with being involved in PYP. By meeting other mentors and speakers, they created a sense of community, making their student experience less isolated at McGill.
“One of the things I liked most about my PYP experience was the connection I developed with my mentee. She expressed wanting to have someone in her life that was there for her without imposing expectations, and it felt like we built a relationship beyond mentoring for Cegep decisions. I also really liked all the PYP events where I got to connect with other mentors. The program was so well organized, had the right amount of events/trainings, and also very generous in feeding us every time! The social aspect of group meetings was one of the best parts of the program in my opinion.”

Continuing to build on the success of the first cycle, PYP has demonstrated the program’s ability to change how McGill is perceived amongst Black students. It has made McGill more approachable and introduced the students to a more positive image of the institution. Moreover, through the program, Branches benefitted from connecting with members of the Black community at McGill - such as staff, alumni and professors from different departments - whereas McGill benefitted from building relationships with local Black groups and community centers.

The relationship that PYP was able to create with the Black community in Montreal is evident in the high number of applications and their diverse backgrounds for the current cycle and the five students who will begin their undergraduate studies at McGill in the fall. With a proven track record the program continues to strengthen the relationship between McGill the Black community.

**Pick Your Path – Indigenous Youth**

*A learning and mentorship experience for Indigenous youth*

**Overview**

Pick Your Path for Indigenous Youth (PYP Indigenous) was created to address the barriers that Indigenous youth face when pursuing higher education. Indigenous Cégep students are paired with a mentor, a McGill student or alumnus in a similar field of educational and career interest. Mentees will have the opportunity to receive educational support from their mentor throughout the academic year and have personalized insight into the university experience and their degree/career of interest. Mentees will have the opportunity to meet with McGill faculty, staff, and students to learn more about the university experience, and to expose mentees to potential educational and career paths. Mentees will also have the opportunity to participate in workshops aimed at offering tools for academic success.

**Participation**

The program was initially organized by the Indigenous Outreach Associate in collaboration with John Abbott College and Dawson College’s Indigenous pathway programs, for the period of February 23rd to March 29th, 2022. The current cycle has expanded to include Dawson College, John Abbott College, and Vanier College with 10 Indigenous Cégep student mentees signing on. These 10 mentees have been matched with McGill student mentors based on their shared interests and experiences.
Partnerships
PYP Indigenous had the opportunity to work with a wide range of external partners. Sabrina Fyfe; Indigenous Student Resource Coordinator with John Abbott College, Pauline Morel; Journeys program Coordinator with Dawson College, Jenifer Savard; Professor at Dawson College, and Tiawentinon Canadian; Indigenous Student Coordinator with the First Peoples Center at Dawson College connected Indigenous Cégep students with PYP Indigenous encouraging engagement and assisting in the application roll out. Destiny Thomas of Destiny Thomas Designs lead a beading workshop that received high attendance and enthusiastic participation. Pick Your Path Indigenous continues to grow its network and establish new relationships with Indigenous communities.

The programing offered by Pick Your Path Indigenous would not be possible without internal partnerships with the McGill community. Workshops have been organized with the help of Matthew Coutu Montoya; Coordinator of Indigenous Access McGill, Thomassina Phillips; Interim Manager of the First Peoples House McGill, Marlowe Dubois; First Peoples House McGill, and the McGill School of Social Work.

Mentors and mentees
Social and cultural workshops have received high attendance from both mentors and mentees. These workshops are held in-person and carry a real sense of community. The mentees have expressed that busy Cégep schedules can sometimes stand in the way of one-on-one meetings with their mentors.

Pick Your Path for Indigenous Youth participants
Impact
Through PYP, we have been helping Indigenous Cégep students access McGill University through our programming. We have built relationships with Cégep in the Montereal area and their Indigenous student resources centers. By creating a social and cultural aspect into the program, we have begun to build relationships with the wider Montereal Indigenous community. Indigenous McGill mentors are developing leadership, mentorship, and relationship building experience. By effect, this is helping bring awareness to the Branches team and their mission and goals as we create relationships with Montereal's Indigenous community. Historically McGill has had a complicated relationship with the Indigenous community but through programs like PYP, Indigenous community members see more representation and a goal to make McGill a more inclusive space for the Indigenous community.

Pick Your Path – Undergraduate

A learning and mentorship experience for Indigenous undergraduate students enrolled at McGill

Overview
Pick Your Path, Undergraduate (PYP-U) is a four-module, online and in-person paid learning experience for Indigenous undergraduate students enrolled at McGill University. In line with Branches’ mandate, PYP-U supports academic and career pathways for Indigenous students. The program offers participants a unique opportunity to take part in a series of seminars that bring potential educational and career paths into focus. This experience equips students with the tools and knowledge needed to map their future trajectory with confidence and success.

Students attend online and in-person sessions facilitated by professors, graduate students, and professionals. These sessions allow them to explore graduate school and career opportunities. Experts will be picked based on students’ interests through a consultation process to make PYP-U tailored and relevant. Students will also be offered a range of social and cultural activities throughout the program that will enhance the experience and allow them to connect with peers and build community on-campus.

Traditional Indigenous learning concepts are incorporated into the program. "Kiskinaumatowin," or "teaching each other," is a learning technique proposed by Linda and Keith Goulet which draws on Cree concepts. It reduces the western hierarchical teacher-student learning environment in favour of a more equitable environment that encourages shared knowledge transfer. Students also benefit from a small cohort — allowing for a more intimate, personalized learning experience.

Participation
PYP-U’s pilot run filled easily filled the six available spots, drawing from students that had participated in IMPRESS summer 2022 and campus outreach. The six Indigenous undergraduate students accepted into the program have participated enthusiastically and many plan to continue working with branches in the future, taking part in the upcoming IMPRESS cycle and putting their mentorship skills to work.
**Partnerships**

PYP-U offers a rich environment for internal McGill partnerships to develop. Marlow Dubois; Indigenous Student Associate with the First Peoples House, and Thomasina Phillips; Associate Director of Indigenous Student Success and Interim Manager of the First Peoples’ House aided the team with internal outreach and the application process. Joan Butterworth; Leadership Training Facilitator, Corey Hoare; Graduate Recruitment & Outreach Officer, Lorna MacEachern; Associate Director of Indigenous Student Success and Interim Manager of the First Peoples’ House, Marlow Dubois; Indigenous Student Associate with the First Peoples House, and Thomasina Phillips; Associate Director of Indigenous Student Success and Interim Manager of the First Peoples’ House aided the team with internal outreach and the application process. Joan Butterworth; Leadership Training Facilitator, Corey Hoare; Graduate Recruitment & Outreach Officer, Lorna MacEachern; Associate Director of Indigenous Student Success and Interim Manager of the First Peoples’ House, and Stephanie Zacharkiw; Career Advisor and Mentor Program Coordinator with CAPS worked to facilitate a series of workshops focused on academic and career pathways. As PYP-U is aimed at Indigenous McGill Undergrads building a sense of community within the institution encourages engagement at all levels of student life.

**Mentees**

PYP-U students participate wholeheartedly in the program’s workshops, reflecting on the workshops one mentee concluded that they the format and content was “very cool.” PYP-U participants have taken the extra step to organize social events in their own time. It is clear that participation in PYP-U has created meaningful relationships and fostered a sense of community amongst the Indigenous undergraduate participants.

**Impact**

PYP-U turns community outreach inwards, focusing on current McGill students brings to light internal barriers that exist within the institution.
IMPRESS

The Indigenous Mentorship and Paid Research Experience for Summer Students

Overview

The Indigenous Mentorship and Paid Research Experience for Summer Students, or IMPRESS, is a program delivered through the Branches team at McGill’s Enrolment Services. The program is designed to increase access to graduate studies and to boost career-readiness for Indigenous undergraduate students. Through IMPRESS, Indigenous students are offered a unique opportunity to undertake a paid research and professional internship with a McGill faculty or unit. Over the course of eight weeks, students gain firsthand research experience, engage in social and cultural activities, and take part in professional development and leadership training. The program helps students build their networks, hone their academic skills, and acquire tools needed to be successful in their future professional pursuits.

IMPRESS is open to current or entering undergraduate Indigenous students attending a Quebec post-secondary institution. Participating students are matched with a McGill professor or professional, who they assist in their research and other work. They are also matched with a graduate student currently studying at McGill, who will mentor and otherwise support them during their internship experience. The program is eight weeks in duration, running from the beginning of June to the end of July. Students are expected to dedicate 20 hours per week to their internship, which includes 15 hours of work with their assigned professor/professional, complemented by five additional hours of either time with their student mentor, attending workshops, or participating in social and cultural activities with other interns. Participants receive a monetary award of $5,000.

Objectives

IMPRESS supports transitions to, and within, university for Indigenous undergraduate students. The program aims to contribute to the Calls to Action laid out in McGill University’s Provost Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education, including by supporting access to education, helping to make campus a welcoming space for Indigenous students, and championing the growth of Indigenous research and scholarship. More broadly, the program hopes to support an increase in the number of Indigenous people gaining access to higher education, which will result in greater workforce participation from Indigenous populations. The program seeks to accomplish these objectives by giving Indigenous undergraduate students the opportunity to:

− Gain hands-on research experience;
− Boost their overall career-readiness through professional skills training;
− Build professional networks;
− Increase insight into pathways toward graduate studies;
Make strong connections and build community with Indigenous mentors and IMPRESS peers;
Get acquainted with McGill;
Receive financial support; and
Receive a letter of recommendation for their time as an IMPRESS intern

**Participation**

In its inaugural year, the IMPRESS program exceeded expectations. The anticipated delivery for the first year was five to six participants. In the end, a total of 18 eligible candidates applied to the program, 14 of which ended up participating in the summer of 2022. This included 10 students from McGill University, and four from Concordia. These 14 students took part in a range of projects from across the university, including at the library, in Law, Education, Arts, and STEM (in partnership with Healthy Brains, Healthy Lives). A number of these projects took a cohort-based approach, where students worked in teams, resulting in a more communal and cooperative experience. Finally, six of the 10 projects included Indigenous-related subject matter — allowing participants to draw on their knowledge and experience, in addition to engaging with Indigenous-focused research.

“I liked most that I felt I had a community and a little world that I was building in the lab. I loved my professor and the team, and I truly understood that phrase "love what you do, and you won't work a day in your life." She was an angel, and I ended up involved in far more projects than I expected but I was happy with this.”

**Mentorships**

Mentorship is a key component of the IMPRESS program that yields benefits for mentees and mentors alike. In 2022, 10 graduate student mentors participated in the IMPRESS program, four of whom took on two mentees. Of these mentors, seven self-identified as Indigenous (four of whom were McCall MacBain scholars).

“My mentor and I had an instant connection. We had a lot in common and since we both have similar career paths in mind, he was able to give me so much helpful advice and tips on how to succeed. We always had stuff to talk about since we had so much in common.”

**Impact**

IMPRRESS facilitated and supported key relationships at McGill, including with Martha Crago at Healthy Brains, Healthy Lives, Professor Claudia Mitchel in Education (who participated as a project host), and a number of Indigenous staff and Indigenous activities and initiatives across the university. IMPRESS strives to make significant contributions to the Calls to Action outlined in McGill University's Provost Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education. This includes facilitating educational accessibility, fostering a welcoming environment for Indigenous students on campus, and promoting the advancement of Indigenous research and academic endeavors. In a broader context, the program aspires to bolster higher education opportunities for Indigenous individuals, leading to increased representation and engagement within Indigenous communities. IMPRESS offers a holistic experience for Indigenous students creating a space of
community within the institution. Students reflected on their time with IMPRESS and the impact the program had on them:

“I've learned a lot about how much research takes place at McGill and how it isn't as hard as I thought to find spots to be involved. I also learned about managing multiple projects, and about being comfortable putting forth my opinions in a college environment.”

“I am so thankful for this program; I have new opportunities that have been presented to me from this that will probably improve the outcome of my life.”

**In the News**

*Inaugural IMPRESS program impresses Indigenous students*

*Program offers Indigenous undergraduate students a unique experiential learning opportunity to conduct research with a McGill professor, or to work on a project at one of McGill’s units — all while being paid!*
Explore McGill

October 28th, 2022, and April 6th, 2023 – An exploratory day on campus

Overview

Explore McGill invites Quebec high school groups to register for a day of educational activities at McGill’s downtown campus. The program introduces students to university life and learning by taking part in academic workshops, a lunch provided by McGill and a campus tour in the afternoon. Students are presented with a list of activities to choose from so they can exercise agency in the information and experience that interests them.

On October 28th, 2022, a total of 103 students from five high schools – in the company of their teachers and guidance counsellors – attended Explore McGill. Students participated in workshops and presentations held by faculty members and representatives from several McGill faculties such as Management, Chemistry, nursing, Medicine and Dentistry, Law, and Science, and a student panel. Breakfast, lunch, and a campus tour were included in the program as well.

On April 6th, 2023, the Montreal ice storm closed public schools and severely limited attendance to the second Explore McGill from Montreal secondary school students. However, sixteen students attended representing Cégeps, Youth Centers including Batshaw, Batshaw Prevost, and Carrefour Jeunesse emploi, and Smiths Falls Institute Collegiate high school who drove through the ice storm from Ontario to attend. Although weather conditions affected attendance numbers, students who did attend were enthusiastic and engaged.

Students are asked to identify the workshops of their choice early on in their application forms. A registration process was put in place and students were assigned to their respective workshops as they arrived on campus.

Workshops were coordinated with faculty staff and designed to provide students with insights on the several study fields, and for some, to provide them with a hands-on fun learning experience, such as with Chemistry and Science. Students were also encouraged to ask questions to get the answers they need as they start to think about their post-secondary studies.

The student panel hosted several McGill undergraduate panelists who shared their relevant experiences with the students, providing them with insights on lived experiences on campus, university life, other opportunities on campus and how to make the most of your time at McGill. Whereas breakfast and lunch took place at round tables and presented the students with the opportunity to mingle with each other and share their insights on their workshop experiences with their teachers and counsellors. To wrap up their visit, students went on a campus tour, guided by Branches volunteers, so they can become familiar with McGill grounds and get a feel of what it’s like to come to McGill.

Participants

In October, 103 students attended representing five Schools: Howard S. Billings, Beurling Academy, Alexander Galt Regional High School, Alexander V Humboldt German International School, and Villa Maria. In addition,
two Youth in Care from Batshaw were able to attend. Students reflected positively on the day with one participant sharing that “It was very pleasant and was just an overall fun and good learning experience!” and another suggesting that even longer workshops would be “splendid.”

April’s Explore McGill was attended by 16 students from Montreal and Ontario representing three Cégeps; Champlain College St-Lambert, Maisonneuve College, and Dawson College, three youth centres; Batshaw, Batshaw Prevost, Carrefour Jeunesse emploi, and one high school; Smiths Falls Institute Collegiate Ontario. The students who attended were enthusiastic and engaged, reflecting that Explore McGill was “Really great experience”, and that “[they] would like to participate again :)!”

Students tour the McGill Campus, led by a student volunteer

**Partners**

Explore McGill is a one-day event that requires the Branches team to coordinate with and mobilize several external and internal partners.

As such, members of our team coordinated with teachers and guidance counsellors from Howard S. Billings, Beurling Academy, Alexander Galt Regional High School, Alexander V Humboldt German International School, Villa Maria, and Batshaw Youth and Family Centres to encourage their students to apply for Explore McGill and bring them on campus on the day-off. While we built on Explore McGill as an opportunity to strengthen existing connections with institutions and groups we’ve worked with before, we also used this opportunity to establish new strategic connections that can be employed for other Branches programs (such as with McGill’s Chemistry Outreach, Brain Reach and LEX)— an endeavour that lends it’s way to reconsider Explore McGill as a
strategic event that ought to be planned well ahead of time and for specific dates on our yearly timeline, in coordination with other Branches programs that can benefit from these connections, all year long.

Our team also collaborated with several McGill Faculties and units including the Ingram School of Nursing, Peter Guo-hua Fu School of Architecture, McGill School of Social Work, BrainReach, Outreach Law, Desautels, and Chemistry Outreach. We also engaged volunteers from the ES team, as well as a number of McGill students/Branches ambassadors to help us with the registration process, logistics and coordination on the day of the event.

In the News

Branches welcomes 100 high school students to Explore McGill,

“The Explore McGill initiative invites high school and Cégep students from around Quebec to spend a day exploring the McGill campus, meeting new people, and attending specialized workshops and presentations.”

Impact

Bringing students on campus makes for a fun and exciting field-trip day, through which students become more open, pre-disposed and motivated to discover something new, creating a segue into a more in-depth planning of their future path of education. Although the reduced attendance due to extreme weather was disappointing for all parties the smaller groups allowed for a very hands-on experience and high levels of engagement from student participants. Exposing students to the knowledge shared during the workshops helps them better choose their fields of interest for their post-secondary education, altering the way they think about their future studies, honing-in on what really speaks to them.

Explore McGill is an opportunity for Branches to reach out to new target institutions, expand our outreach and portfolio as we target new audiences, and deliver experiences that answer some of the needs of underserved
students in the community. It also allows us to strengthen existing partnerships with schools, and other McGill units and faculties.

For most student participants, Explore McGill was their first interaction with McGill University. For youth in care students, it was an experience that’s outside of their usual scope of activities, even geographically. Most students enjoyed being on campus and participating in workshops and raised their interest in their next field of study, as well as in McGill in general.

**Homework Zone**

*A learning and mentorship experience for Indigenous youth*

Homework Zone (HZ) is an after-school mentoring program connecting McGill University student volunteers with elementary and secondary school students in and around Montreal. Homework Zone Celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2021, in its time HZ has connected over 1200 McGill student volunteers with over 1500 youth in elementary and high schools, promoting equitable pathways to higher education through academic support, mentorship, and activities for educational enrichment. The program works to enable both McGill students and young students from the communities to develop leadership skills and build a support network before they embark on their career path.

Each year, HZ operates as an after-school mentorship program connecting McGill students with elementary and secondary students for two hours per week from October to April. Homework Zone volunteers come from all over the world, (almost) every McGill faculty, and every level of post-secondary education. In addition to assisting with academic work (homework completion, problem solving, reading), HZ offers additional support and imagination-based enrichment activates (workshops, speakers, creative challenges).

**Homework Zone – Elementary School**

**Overview**

The Homework Zone elementary school program is an after-school program aimed at connecting elementary student mentees with university student mentors. The goals of the program are to provide academic support to Indigenous elementary students, allow the mentees to form a connection with a student who they can look up to, and to connect the McGill community to other communities in and around Montreal.

McGill University students can apply to be mentors and are selected on the basis of good communication skills, experience working with children, and enthusiasm for mentorship.

The fall 2022 - 2023 program ran out of Karonhianónhnha elementary school in the mohawk territory of Kahnawá:ke. Students from the nearby Kateri elementary school are also bused to Karonhianónhnha so that they can participate as well.
Partners
The latest Homework Zone cycle unfolded from September 2022 through April of 2023 with a break in December. Branches’ student ambassadors/program assistants in charge of Homework Zone met with school and community partners to discuss the needs of their students, their availabilities, and expectations, while also recruiting mentors, and planning a weekly calendar including all schools and coordinator schedules.

Homework Zone would not be possible without the partnership with Karonhianónhnha and Kateri elementary schools: Janice A. Beauvais; Student & Community Engagement Consultant at the Kahnawake education centre, Lauren Robertson, Tamara Elias, and Kwaronhia:wi Dunkley; teachers at Karonhianónhnha elementary school. Linda Delormier and Adam Wolfe facilitated the Indigenous Perspectives workshop.

Mentors and Mentees
17 students from Karonhianónhnha elementary school and Kateri elementary school met weekly with five McGill student mentors and four supervising teachers. Mentees expressed their enjoyment of Homework Zone with one elementary school student sharing that they “would like to have homework zone be two times a week”. The students enjoyed working with the McGill student mentors and felt that “they were respectful, and they listened to us”.

McGill mentors were provided with training and an Indigenous Perspectives workshop before beginning to provide academic support to mentees allowing the mentors to help with homework and address learning gaps, while also providing support on a mental level. Besides helping with homework, they also provided a fun learning environment, while starting their sessions with warm-up activities. Other fun activities were planned along the way to provide students with the opportunity to engage in other alternatives ways of learning that are more participatory.

Homework Zone acknowledges the value that multidisciplinary and engaging approaches to education can have, and the program strives to offer diverse programming to participants to ensure student successes. Activities for this cohort were designed and planned with several workshop providers and organizations from the community and scheduled throughout the duration of the program.
Impact
Based on final discussions with mentees, parents, and teachers, the favorite part for several students was getting to know university students and feeling that they know somebody who is currently at a higher level of education but still being able to relate to them, which makes higher education seem more achievable. One parent commented that the sessions with the mentor seem to have boosted the student’s confidence and he felt special having a McGill student as a friend. Homework Zone created a safe space to study, hang out, talk about life, and get advice. This was reflected in the conversations with the partners/coordinating teachers.

The Homework Zone program offered the mentors a unique experience to explore Montreal outside of McGill while doing meaningful volunteering and forging connections with other students. Each student mentor in this cycle had lived in Canada for no more than two years, and many had said that they were looking to better understand Quebec, Montreal, and their respective cultures. Not only were these students able to make friendships in person after isolating, but they were also able to do it while exploring the city. The trips to Kahnawake and back were as much fun as the actual mentorship since all of the mentors got along so well.

Mentors built relationships with their mentees and gained confidence over the course of the semester. Many of the mentors initially remarked that it was challenging to explain homework that seemed so basic to us to mentees so much younger than us. However, as the semester went on, the mentors learned how to communicate with the mentees to understand exactly how to best help them. The mentees came in each week increasingly excited to see the mentors and show off new toys or books. Likewise, the mentors came in each week increasingly more confident in their leadership abilities, and ready to work on homework.
Indigenous culture is an often-overlooked part of Canada’s rich history, so traveling to Kahnawake is an extremely unique experience that allows non-natives to get a glimpse into the Mohawk people’s rich history and to see how it has influenced our university. Mentors noted that they had not appreciated how close Kahnawake was to McGill, and how many people lived there. To aid McGill’s goals of reconciliation, it is important to foster friendly relationships with Indigenous communities. Homework Zone does this by letting mentors and mentees with different backgrounds become friends and learn about what makes us different while bonding over what makes us the same. The goal of Homework Zone is not to change anything in relation to life on the reserve, but rather allow people of different backgrounds to exist communally and respectfully.

Homework Zone – High School

Overview
The Homework Zone high school program is an after-school program aimed at connecting high school student mentees with university student mentors. This cycle of Homework Zone served students at Howard S. Billings and the Kahnawake Survival School. The goals of the program are to provide academic and career support to Indigenous high school students, allow the mentees to form a connection with a student who they can look up to, and to form and connect the McGill community to other communities in and around Montreal.
In addition to the classic weekly homework help Homework zone offered high school students' workshops on CV-Building, Interview Practice, and Post-secondary program exploration. The Kahnawake Survival School found value in these additional workshops and felt:

“The name “Homework Zone” doesn’t fully represent what the program offers to the students. Many parents, teachers, and possibly students may view it solely as a “tutoring” program or a place after-school to finish an assignment. This doesn’t represent the full scope of what the program has evolved into, and the mentorship component associated, which is the true value-added.”

Partners
The latest HZ cycle unfolded from September of 2022 through until April of 2023. Branches’ student ambassadors/program assistants in charge of Homework Zone met with school and community partners to discuss the needs of their students, their availabilities, and expectations, while also recruiting mentors, and planning a weekly calendar including all schools and coordinator schedules.

Homework Zone would not be possible without the partnership with Howard S. Billings and the Kahnawake Survival School: Echo Hamelin a Transitions Counsellor with Kahnawake Survival School and Houda Nasreddine Counsellor in re-Education with Howard S. Billings offered their support as coordinating teachers. Linda Delormier and Adam Wolfe facilitated the Indigenous Perspectives workshop.

Mentors and Mentees
Homework Zone connected with 37 Indigenous high school students at Howard S. Billings and the Kahnawake Survival School. Five McGill student mentors helped to create an interactive learning environment bonding over homework and fun extracurricular activities while supporting students with their homework needs and exam preparations.

Impact
Based on final discussions with mentees and teachers, We learned that mentees looked forward to their next Homework Zone sessions and felt comfortable with their mentors, which reinforces the role that Branches is playing in expanding our outreach to Indigenous students, promoting inclusivity and bridging the gaps between McGill students and other students in the community with a hands-on approach that answers real academic, personal development and social needs on both ends.
Branches Tutoring Program

Student-centered individualized tutoring sessions for academic support

Overview
The Branches Tutoring Program is focused on individualized, student-centred tutoring. Our focus is the needs of the student; with one-on-one sessions with university students, the students receive both academic support and tutoring, as well as a role model to learn from. Our pilot project is running from October to December, with weekly tutoring sessions determined by the tutor and tutee on specific subjects.

Planning officially began back in March, with much research done on best tutoring practices, curriculum leads in Quebec, structuring sessions, conducting training, outreach to potential tutors and students, and more. Tutors also receive training before and throughout the program, on topics such as equity and diversity, best practices of tutoring, and leadership training.

Tutors and tutees are paired up based on their applications and the subjects they are able to tutor in/need tutoring in. They began with an initial meeting with the program manager or program assistant present to explain the program, as well as to provide an opportunity to get to know each other prior to beginning the tutoring.

Partners
The Tutoring program would not have been possible without internal and external partnerships. Andrea Borod and Julia Kalbfleisch of Book Dumpling Tutors hosted a Best Tutoring Practices training and developed a series of videos on Best Tutoring Practices in various study fields. The videos were shared with the tutors, part of the Tutor’s Welcome Kit.

Adi Sneg, Wisaal Jahangir, and Shelly Bahng with McGill’s Teaching & Learning Services provided valuable training in EDI and best practices. Stephanie Zacharkiw a Career Advisor with McGill CaPS hosted tutor training on Mentorship and Joan Butterworth a Leadership Skills Advisor with McGill Student Services lead a round table discussing leadership skills.

Tutors and Tutees
One of the standout aspects of the Branches Tutoring Program is the diversity of both the tutees and tutors selected, and the pool of applicants overall. The tutee applications highlighted extensive diversity in the background of the students, the schools from which they applied, the needs of the students, their interests, as well as the areas of study. Within 69 applicants, there were 6 schools represented, a range of different races and ethnicities, as well as varying grade levels and subjects in which tutoring was needed.

The high number of applications demonstrates both demand for and interest in the Branches Tutoring Program. The six available spots were quickly filled. As the pilot program comes to a close two out of the six tutees have submitted feedback. The tutees stated that the program was helpful, they had fun learning new things and enjoyed their time with their tutor, and they had good relationships with their tutor, describing them as kind and considerate. Both agreed that they would like to partake in the program again, that they felt
safe and comfortable with their tutor, that their tutor was a good mentor and role model, and that they gained real skills and experiences from the program.

Every one of the tutors spoke of bonding with their tutee, how they can discuss topics such as issues at school, their friendships, or their home life. Kieran learned about his tutee’s issues with studying at home due to distraction, and even noticed that he would regularly ask about food after lessons. Rather than ignoring this, Kieran came to us and asked if we could provide snacks so the tutees can focus better. Sarah managed to develop sessions on the go in order to connect the questions her tutee asked and to keep him engaged. She stated that she is able to learn so much from her tutee, and that he helps her see the world in a new way. Aiya’s tutee texted her excitedly after scoring a 100 on an assignment they worked on, only two weeks into tutoring and this happens on a regular basis. Priyavrat has been able to see a development in foundational math skills that his tutee did not understand prior to tutoring. Yusuf manages to connect his tutees’ topics to everyday life to bridge their understanding, even seeing a 10-mark increase in grades since October. Each of the tutors spoke of their tutees proudly and told me about their achievements or their developments with excitement. It is easy to see the care and pride the tutors have for their tutees; every single one has expressed a want to continue volunteering next semester, some even offering to take on more tutees.

**Impact**

In observing the first cycle of the Branches Tutoring Program, I have noticed a considerable impact on both the tutors and tutees over the short period of time we have had.

First, in both observing some tutoring sessions and speaking with the tutors, I have seen the tutees grow in confidence and form a real bond with their tutors. From observing each of the first sessions to hearing about the development in relationship, it is clear to see that the tutors have become close with their tutees over such a short period of time, acting as an academic support, but also as mentors.

There has also been a marked impact of the program on the tutors; each of them spoke about their own personal growth and development at the Tutor Reflection Dinner and of how their tutee left an impact on them. They discussed how they were able to learn from their tutee as well, how they developed and strengthened their own skills, how they got to be in a mentorship role, and how they were able to develop trust with their tutees. It has been so wonderful to watch the tutors grow and develop such strong bonds with their tutees, and to see the full impact of the program beyond just academic achievement.

The goal of our program is to provide academic and mentorship support to youth underrepresented in post-secondary education, particularly in youth who face socio-economic barriers to their education and are facing academic difficulties. As for tutors, our aim is to help students gain real-life skills and experiences in community engagement, teaching, mentorship, equity training, and leadership. Looking at the impact of the program after only just the pilot project, it is evident that these goals are being met. The pilot program has allowed us to determine what works and what changes need to be made, but the most important aspect is watching our goals be fulfilled in real time.
Youth in Care – Branches Tutoring Program

*Student-centered individualized tutoring sessions for Youth in Care*

**Overview**

The Branches Tutoring Program is focused on individualized, student-centred tutoring. Our focus is the needs of the student; with one-on-one sessions with university students, the students receive both academic support and tutoring, as well as a role model to learn from. Based off the success of the pilot program which ran from October to December, and drawing on connections created through outreach, this cycle of the Tutoring Program was aimed at meeting the needs of Youth in Care.

Tutors and tutees are paired up based on their applications and the subjects they are able to tutor in/need tutoring in. They meet on a weekly basis, either in person or online, to conduct the tutoring sessions. Planning officially began back in March, with much research done on best tutoring practices, curriculum leads in Quebec, structuring sessions, conducting training, outreach to potential tutors and students, and more. Tutors also receive training before and throughout the program, on topics such as equity and diversity, best practices of tutoring, leadership training, and trauma informed practices.

For this cohort, we focused on tutees who are youth in/from care, hence this version of the program is slightly different than the mainstream Tutoring cohort. We recruited youth in/from care through community partners at Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi (CJE) NDG and Centre de protection de l'enfance et de la jeunesse de Laval, who identified the youth in need of our service and who are in regular contact with these students. The youth in/from care tutoring cohort ran from March 1st till April 30th, 2023. The recruitment of tutors and tutees started in February. We matched tutors and tutees based on the various criteria in their applications, such as academic area/need, tutoring mode, interests, and availabilities. The final cohort consisted of 3 tutors and 3 tutees.

**Partners**

The Tutoring program would not have been possible without internal and external partnerships. Andrea Borod and Julia Kalbfleisch of Book Dumpling Tutors hosted a Best Tutoring Practices training and developed a series of videos on Best Tutoring Practices in various study fields. The videos were shared with the tutors, part of the Tutor’s Welcome Kit.

Adi Sneg, Wisaal Jahangir, and Shelly Bahng with McGill’s Teaching & Learning Services provided valuable training in EDI and best practices. Students attended at the suggestions of two youth centers: Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi NDG and Centre de protection de l'enfance et de la jeunesse de Laval. Vital training was provided by Tina Newton, Trauma Informed Pedagogical Practices and Strategies Educational Consultant at the Lester B Pearson School Board.

**Tutors and Tutees**

The youth we served on this cohort are all youth in or from care who not only face economic barriers to their education but also struggle with personal challenges that stem from their past and present social and personal experiences and difficult family circumstances. The program welcomed tutees who lived in group homes or in
their homes with guardians. Two of the tutees were offered the tutoring sessions online and one tutee was tutored in person at the youth organization which referred them to us.

Most tutees on the cohort struggle with low self-confidence and the lack of consistent support. Some struggle with a lack of interest or motivation to continue their education or are transitioning out of the care system which is inflicting relocation and the lack of stability in their lives. Others are struggling with social anxiety and grief due to the fact that, sadly, they’re being bullied at school and also lacked the confidence to approach their teachers with questions about tasks at hand and homework, the combination of which results in skipping school on a frequent basis, ultimately leading to poor academic performance.

Despite these challenges, these are students who are driven to overcome present barriers, improve their academic performance, grow their interests, and succeed on their education path and in their future lives. The role of the tutors was therefore key in helping them increase their level of confidence while building on their strengths and interests and providing tips to improve their study skills and overall academic performance. The one-on-one approach allowed each tutor to tailor their support to the needs and learning style of each tutee, while bonding with them and providing personal guidance on a general level.

Two of the tutors will be continuing the work with their tutees beyond April 30 and onto the next couple of months, answering to the tutees’ needs beyond the last date of the program and covering the exam period until end of June, touching on continuous and consistent support which the youth in/from care often seek.

**Impact**

Although the pilot program ran for only two months (with the prospect to run the full program for 6 months as of Fall 2023), the tutors were already noticing an improved academic performance on the side of the tutees by the end of the term. Some of the tutors received feedback from the tutees’ guardians that their tutees were also in a good mood, felt more confident and felt more motivated after the sessions. Common interests between the tutor and the tutee were opportunities for bonding, mutual exchange and personal investment. One pair bonded over coding, as a mutual interest and the tutor used this opportunity to connect with the tutee beyond the immediate academic support. Jokes, sharing a laugh, positive reinforcement and bringing the learning material to a personal relevance transformed the tutoring sessions into active learning sessions and resulted in improved overall engagement, self-confidence, and academic performance.

The Tutoring Program for youth in and from care offers these students the opportunity to not only access free academic support, but also connect with a McGill student (or alumni), learn from them, build a mentorship connection with them so they can feel supported and connected while overcoming barriers on their education path. While two months is too short of a timeline to notice considerable academic progress or build long lasting relationships with their tutors, we already noticed promising and positive effects of this kind of support on the tutees. Guardians and intervention workers came back to us with positive feedback, commenting on how the students were feeling uplifted and positive after their sessions with their tutors. As we plan to expand the duration of the program starting Fall 2023 and onto the next six months, we hope to build more positive change in their lives, bring them consistent support and build trusting relationships that would be transformational, over a long period of time. We also intend to equip the tutors early in the cycle with background knowledge on trauma-informed practices in teaching and learning, while also emphasizing the approach of focusing on the student’s strengths and fostering their current interests to empower them. We
also hope to provide them with opportunities to get exposed to university life and learning and to work on their motivation to pursue higher education.

On the side of the tutors, the tutoring program is a community engagement opportunity, a way for them to connect and give back to the community, and a learning opportunity for them that builds into their personal and professional developments, while raising their awareness on the needs of the youth in and from care in the community.

**Indigenous Community Outreach**

*Connecting with Indigenous communities*

**Overview**

Indigenous Outreach aims to increase access and reduce barriers to higher education for the Indigenous population. The Indigenous outreach goal at Branches is to encourage Indigenous peoples to pursue higher education, and to encourage that pursuit at McGill University. This is done by creating and nurturing relationships with Indigenous Communities. This can look like planning visits from Indigenous communities to the McGill University campus, visiting communities and offering educational workshops. The goal is to plant the seeds of thought for Indigenous students to think about higher education and to consider McGill. Indigenous outreach workshops and activities are designed to encourage Indigenous peoples to envision themselves at McGill, and to introduce them to the various educational opportunities at the university in a culturally safe way.

Each Indigenous Outreach workshop or activity begins by contacting schools, communities, organizations that have Indigenous communities and holding a consultation on the needs of that community and pinning down what will be most beneficial to offer on our part from Indigenous outreach to encourage higher education or bring awareness to higher education under an Indigenous lens.

After holding a consultation, we review our Indigenous outreach budget, and then we contact our internal partners who may be able to help us with our requests (e.g., campus tours held by the welcome center, reserving rooms in service point) and inform them about the communities they work with to ensure safe spaces for our Indigenous participants.

**Events**

*Mamuu (together) an Indigenous Student Gathering* – has been held twice since its conception first on October 28th, 2022 and again on December 5th, 2022. With between 10 & 20 Indigenous McGill Students between attending each event turnout is considered high. Kayla Moore, the Indigenous Community Outreach Associate with Branches collaborated with Dr. Jimena Marquez, Dr. Noelani Arista, Indigenous Studies and Community Engagement Initiatives, the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, and Indigenous Studies to host the event.
Students expressed that they appreciated the need for these sorts of gatherings like Mamuu, so they can feel a broader sense of community on campus and meet fellow Indigenous McGill students. Dr. Noelani Arista and Jimena Marquez expressed interest in continuing the workshops until the end of the academic year as they recognize the need for this event for students.

**Chisasibi Visit** 44 Cree secondary 5 high school students from the James Bay Eeyou School in the Cree community of Chisasibi, Quebec spent a day on campus. Students toured the campus and visited the Rare & Special Collections, Osler, Art and Archives (ROARR) before enjoying pizza.

Students expressed their enjoyment of the McGill campus tour and ROARR visit. They were happy to learn more about the McGill campus and felt that the tour created a welcoming environment.

**Mistissini Visit** 46 Cree secondary 5 high school students from the Voyageur Memorial High School in the Cree community of Mistissini, Quebec spent a day on campus. Students toured the campus and visited the Rare & Special Collections, Osler, Art and Archives (ROARR) before enjoying pizza.

Mistissini Students were excited to tour the McGill campus and found their visit to the ROARR intriguing. They were happy to learn more about the McGill campus and felt that the tour created a welcoming environment.

**Outbound Explore: Chisasibi** 200 Cree secondary 5 high school students from the Cree community of Chisasibi, Quebec participated in the pilot installation of Outbound Explore McGill from February 20th – 24th, 2023. The program brought the experience of Explore McGill to the far-north community of Chisasibi.
Cree Regional Science Fair: The Cree Regional Science fair offered an opportunity for further collaboration with our McGill partners, namely the Trottier Space Institute (TSI). 200 Cree secondary 5 high school students from the Cree community of Chisasibi, Quebec participated in the science fair and activities offered in collaboration with TSI.

The overarching goal of the Branches Indigenous Outreach and TSI partnership is to leverage the power of astronomy education to empower students to engage with academia and pursue higher education in the sciences in a way that is culturally relevant and respectful. By encouraging students to explore the links between Indigenous and Western Astronomy, Indigenous students can engage in academia without sacrificing crucial aspects of Indigenous culture and scientific knowledge. Indigenous students would be encouraged to engage with the scientific community at McGill University in all its forms, from academics to research opportunities to networking and career-building. We aim for an academic experience that upholds and supports indigenous knowledges, places, and spaces.

Students expressed interest in having Branches return to Chisasibi and offering more STEM workshops, an opportunity that we had in March with the Prep for Success Conference.

![Trottier Space Institute science outreach](image)

Prep for Success Conference: 200 Cree secondary 5 high school students from the Cree community of Chisasibi, Quebec participated in the Prep for Success Conference offered in collaboration with TSI. The Conference was a success and our community partners expressed interest in further continuing our partnership, having us return to offer more higher education and STEM outreach.

Impact
Branches Indigenous outreach continues to grow community networks both within McGill and the larger Indigenous community. There is clear demand for the events facilitated by the Branches’ Indigenous Community Outreach Associate. The year’s activities have planted the seeds for future collaborations with internal and external community partners.

Black Community Outreach

*Connecting with the Black community*

**Overview**
The Black community outreach team aims to facilitate access to university for Black youth by organizing outreach events with student groups in school and on campus.

**Events**

**Dawson College Student Panel** Dawson College’s student association reached out to Branches in October to help organize a panel with university students to share their experience with Cégep students, answer questions, and address concerns in the hope to help them get ready for university. We met with the association’s president to discuss the format of the event and the questions that would be asked. The panel took place on November 10th from 6pm-9pm and was attended by roughly 30 Dawson College students. The panel was held in collaboration with the McGill Black Student Network and the Dawson Student Union.

Black Cégep students enjoyed getting the opportunity to speak to university students with similar lived experiences, they mentioned being able to relate and being inspired by their journeys. Students enjoyed the diversity of experiences on the panel.

**John Abbott College Student Panel** The president of the John Abbott College Black Student Union reached out to our team in October to help organize a panel with Black university students to share their experience with Cégep students, answer questions and address concerns in the hope to help them get ready for university. We reached out to Black student on campus and were able to recruit 4 students for the panel: three PYP mentors and SSMU’s VP Student Life. The panel took place November 22nd and had an attendance of between 15 and 20 students.

John Abbott College students were very engaged, and the Branches team stayed an extra hour to answer all their questions and concerns. Many students exchanged emails to stay in contact.

**West Island Black Community Association (WIBCA) Visit** Svens Telemaque reached out to one of our student ambassadors to organize a visit to McGill with WIBCA’s youth group. Our team met with him to organize the format of the visit: a tour of campus and a lunch with Black professors and students. The visit was held on October 22nd and was attended by 10 students. Branches collaborated with Black Student Affair Liaison, Equity
Office: Antoine Samuel Alavo, Professor David Austin, and Professor Wendell Adjetey. Students were very impressed by the university. It was the first time any of them had stepped foot on a university campus.

Impact
Branches Black community outreach continues to grow networks both within McGill and the larger Black community in Montreal. There is clear demand for the events and panels facilitated by the Black Community Outreach Associate at Branches with direct requests being made for such programming.

Outreach to Youth in Care

Building a preliminary network of connections and implementing programming

Beginning the year and in preparation for the deployment of Branches’ programs for youth in care (January-April 2023), and in collaboration with Anurag Dhir (Student Services), we reached out to several youth in care organizations and centers in Montreal to lay out the grounds for our upcoming YIC recruitment activities. We were able to connect with, and build working relationships with the Batshaw Youth Center, Carrefour Jeunesse NDG, and Child & Youth Wellness Khanawake.

We developed a preliminary and anonymous survey, part of our research process to inquire into the youth in care needs and interests, so we can tailor our program to them. And distributed the Branches Youth in Care digital pamphlet which includes information about the 3 Branches programs that we aim to offer to youth in care. We circulated the pamphlet to all our YIC contacts as they expressed interest in sharing it with their students so they can get an initial idea about the programs we’re planning to offer to them.
Youth in/from care attend Explore McGill

Alongside the one-on-one support that we aimed to provide to a select number of youth in/from care on the tutoring program, we expanded our outreach to youth organizations to recruit the youth in/from care students with whom they’re in contact in our bi-annual outreach program, Explore McGill, which took place on April 6, 2023.

That date coincided with unforeseen weather circumstances and a regional power outage which unfortunately prevented many of our registrants from attending, including the majority of the youth in care who registered.

For Explore McGill, our outreach to high school students grades 11 and 12 and who are youth in care included reaching out and building connections with:

− Batshaw (and Prevost campus)
− Carrefour Jeunesse NDG
− Child & Youth Wellness Kahnawake.

We had a total of 18 youth in/from care registrants coming from these centers (in total) to Explore. The Bourbonnière group home (through Batshaw) also planned to come and confirmed on the last day before the event, with 4 workers and 7 youth in care students.

For Explore, student participants come to McGill’ downtown campus for a full day of activities. They participate in workshops that take place at different faculties on campus, discover McGill’s prestigious Faculty Club where the event is hosted, have lunch with us, go on a campus tour with our tour guides, and get the chance to meet with McGill students, faculty, and staff, ask them questions and learn more from them about programs, student life and other opportunities on campus. A key component of Explore is also the motivation and transition workshop which addresses the motivation of students to pursue higher education, and a discussion on transitioning to university life and studies, and the challenges and opportunities that come with this transition. This is a space that allows participants the chance to address their feelings and concerns about these issues and learn from our student volunteers and their experiences before and on campus.

The areas that Explore addresses are particularly relevant to youth in care and those who are transitioning out of care, and are brought to them in a fun, social, and hands-on format that aims to expose them to areas of studies, campus life and other students who may have gone through similar transitions too.

Due to the power outage and the school boards having to close on April 6, 2023, only 3 out of the planned attendees from this pool were able to come, accompanied by 3 social/intervention workers. Nevertheless, those who attended enjoyed their experience on campus. They engaged in the motivation/transition discussions and heard from existing students on concerns they have about choosing a program of study and transitioning to campus life, attended hands-on workshops on Chemistry (engaging in an activity on the science of making ice cream in a lab), Engineering, Social Work, and other areas of study. Additionally, the campus tour offered them a firsthand experience of McGill’s downtown campus. They also met the newly appointed Student Access and Support Advisor at McGill establishing a connection that will be vital if these students.
Future projects for youth in/from care at Branches

With the hopes to further support youth in/from care in the community and expand our outreach to them through our connections with youth organizations, we plan to develop and deploy the following programs tailored to them, during the summer 2023 and as of Fall 2023:

− Tutoring Youth in/from Care: based on the pilot we ran in Winter 2023, we will be deploying the 6-months tutoring program in Fall 2023 and continuing until April 2024 for the coming term.
− Pick Your Path Youth in/from Care: a mentorship program that aims to pair each youth with a mentor from the McGill community (student or alumni) to provide them with consistent and tailored guidance and support for a duration of 6 months, with the aim to encourage them to learn more about housing, employment, career paths and other opportunities on campus, and with the higher aim to pursue higher education and earn a university degree.
− Explore McGill (youth in/from care attendance): recruit and engage youth in/care participants for the October 2023 event
− Email Campaign for youth in/care outreach and liaison: We’re planning to coordinate our communication strategy with the Student Services unit on sending emails to and strengthening and expanding our connections with youth organizations, to explain the McGill youth in/from care framework to them and offer our services to their students. This email campaign tackles into the Branches EDI Outreach and Recruitment Specialist and the SASA’s roles as liaisons for prospective and newly admitted youth in/from care.
− Application clinics: we worked on developing a proposal for an Application Clinics project, the object of which is to provide eligible prospective students (of whom are youth from care) one-on-one support to fill out and submit their application to McGill, with the help of outreach staff, recruiters and admissions staff, and providing fee waivers to further encourage students who already struggle with barriers to higher education to apply to McGill. The project is currently in review and we’re hoping to deploy a
pilot Application Clinic for these students and other students from underrepresented groups in February 2024.

Outreach to LSES Students

*Data-driven outreach to LSES French and English high schools in QC for the recruitment of tutees, under the Branches Tutoring Program, and Explore McGill participants*

Overview and Goals

Through our purpose-driven programs, we strive to create an empowering environment, allowing students to see themselves succeed. The Branches Program’s goal is to provide underserved students with the necessary resources, mentorship, and material support to overcome obstacles, unlock their potential, and empower them to pursue higher education.

The Business Analyst Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion provides dedicated support to the Branches Program through demographic data and research. This facilitates the Branches Program’s data-driven approach to strategic planning and outreach to target populations. Data reports issued by Statistics Canada, Provincial Boards of Education, and local School Boards are drawn upon to develop lists of priority schools in Quebec and Ontario. Identifying these schools has had a tangible impact on our operations, with schools on these data-driven lists participating in a guidance counselor focus group, applying to the tutoring program, and attending Explore McGill. The McGill Student Census and demographic data reports are also provided on current students to assess representational gaps in the McGill student body, as well as on our applicant pool to help us evaluate and implement needed changes to address identified areas of underrepresentation. We aimed to recruit tutees for the Branches Tutoring Program who, based on the data-driven analysis and results, would be enrolled in LSES high schools in Quebec.

Following up on our virtual Outreach Campaign, which was held in May 2022, we reconnected with guidance counsellors in September 2022 who had expressed interest in the Branches Programs, to announce our application launching and to recruit their students. Some of these schools expressed a high interest in joining the Tutoring Program, however, due to the restricted size of the – pilot—tutoring cohort, we were limited at 5 to 7 tutees and our final selection consisted of 1 student from each of these schools. In April of 2023 five students from Smiths Falls Institute Collegiate, one of the LSES schools identified in Ontario, attended Explore McGill. Two parents drove the students through the ice storm that had succeeded in shutting down much of Montreal. The parents shared that

“The girls had an amazing time (as did [the other parent] and I). Your team did an amazing job. Everyone talked about their workshops on the way home. Well received by all. ... You will definitely be getting some applications next year for University.”
Outbound Explore McGill

In the first half of the year Branches developed the proposal for the strategic Outbound Explore McGill Outreach activities “Outbound Explore McGill” is essentially the reverse of a typical “Explore McGill” event in the sense that, instead of bringing students to McGill campus, we go to them, at pre-determined and targeted high schools, Cégeps or even community centres. With similar objectives to Explore, Outbound is an exploratory and informative day of activities designed to familiarize students from marginalized or underserved communities with McGill, build a connection with them by putting them in touch with McGill student-panellists from diverse academic programs and cultural backgrounds. The objectives are to inform them about studies, opportunities and life on campus, engage them in motivational workshops and interactive games on transitioning to higher education with the steps, challenges and opportunities involved. A key component is to sensitize them to Branches’ programs and offer our mentorship and tutoring programs as a first practical step toward joining the McGill community and higher education in general.

February 20th to 24th, 2023, marked the dates of the first Outbound Explore McGill edition since the conception of the program proposal in December of last year. The team targeted students from the Indigenous (Cree) community in Northern Quebec, Chisasibi, at the James Bay Eeyou School.

The team’s programming activities took place in 2 parts: Outbound Explore McGill which rolled out on the 21st and 22nd, and the Cree School Board’s Regional Science Fair which took place on the 23rd.

This outreach initiative (and any future Outbound initiative) focuses on reaching remote, excluded, underrepresented, and underserved communities, while aiming at relationship building with these communities and promoting interest and preparedness for higher education to the students. Chisasibi is a rural Quebec community with a population of approx. 4,500, almost all are Indigenous. The activities we deployed were attended by a crowd of 200 (approx.) Cree students, their teachers, parents and students from other Indigenous communities in the neighboring areas participated in the February events.

This initiative was a collaboration between Branches’ team members, and members from the Programing team at the Trottier Space Institute. We were joined by representatives of the McGill Physics Department, and Computer science department.
James Bay Eeyou School students work together on a project

**Objectives**

Through the programming activities deployed in Chisasibi, the team wished to build connections with the Cree students, engage them in discussions on motivating factors to pursue higher education, transition to the city, to university or Cégep, expose them to learning opportunities through interactive workshops, presentations and science fair experiments, and provide a talking circle format for them to connect with McGill students and staff and learn more about their experience, and vice versa. The workshops promoted inquiry based and experiential learning, while combining higher education knowledge with local realities/interests (e.g. beading as coding, Indigenous constellations). These workshops were well received by the students who expressed further interest in these subjects.

For the Branches team, these types of activities - and the direct objectives tied to them - fall under Branches’ Indigenous Outreach mandate, in relation to the Calls to Action on McGill University’s Provost Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education. Reaching out to remote Indigenous communities is a key factor in connecting these high school students to McGill, raising their awareness on university studies and student life, closing the gaps with higher education institutions while addressing their concerns and needs, taking into consideration their initial sentiment towards leaving their communities and transitioning to bigger cities, McGill as a higher education institution, pursuing their education after high school, and overcoming barriers of this sort on their way to pursuing higher education and furthermore, securing their future careers.

We do that while also honoring these students’ strengths, as they currently are overcoming barriers to education in their current circumstances, which materializes in their perseverance to continue their education, and to some of them, their current motivation to seriously consider pursuing higher education and follow their dreams.
We’re hoping to continue to pilot Outbound with KIUNA (Indigenous Cégep), and design other Outbound events targeting:
- Low Socio-Economic Status (LSES) francophone and anglophone high schools (in MTL, Rural QC, ON...)
- LSES francophone and anglophone Cégeps (in QC)
- Indigenous high schools (i.e. KSS...)
- Indigenous Cégeps (i.e. KIUNA)
- Youth in Care community centres (i.e. Batshaw, Carrefour Jeunesse...)
- Black community centres

**Inclusive Access McGill at Enrolment Services**

**Overview**

Following the hiring of the new EDI Outreach and Recruitment Specialist (Hiba Farran) who onboarded the position at the start of February 2023, and continuing from the work of the previous person in charge, the Specialist developed a first draft proposal to suggest active implementations of the IAM project in the immediate term, covering Yield-EDI goals and shedding light on similar EDI initiatives that could potentially be rolled out for prospective students in the coming cycle.

**Outline of the IAM project proposal**

The target EDI groups (based on the student census) are the following: Indigenous, Black, youth in/from care, financially challenged students, ethnic minorities, religious, students with disabilities, refugees, queer/2SLBBTQ+, women, caregivers, and first-generation students. There would also be a special focus on francophone and international students, in line with the university’s strategic goals towards these groups.

The goal of the IAM project for yield: To provide info to yield students, support them on their next steps towards McGill, build a sense of belonging, invite them to socialize with current McGill students, remove barriers (emotional, financial, etc.) on their way to McGill, and ultimately encourage them to accept their offer. Similarly, the goal of the IAM project for recruitment: To provide info for prospective students, build a sense of belonging, invite them to socialize with current McGill students, brake emotional barriers and challenges on their way to McGill, and ultimately encourage them to apply.

**Projects and initiatives under the IAM Project:**

- EDI Communications: updating the Accepted website (and later the UGA website) with EDI content and messaging. Social Media posts reels and takeovers on the Admissions IG and FB pages. Video production, student testimonials, articles in the reporter. Review the viewbooks to incorporate EDI contents there. Slate mailings to diffuse EDI contents and messages posted on the website(s).
- Application Clinics targeting Black, Indigenous, youth from care and financially challenged youth
- EDI webinars (in collaboration with the recruitment team)
- EDI outreach initiatives: Explore and Outbound
- Recruitment and Yield events: incorporating an EDI component in the recruitment and yield events (Meet McGill, Study at McGill, Open House).

**Meet McGill x EDI**

For the Yield season, the EDI Outreach and Recruitment Specialist suggested the implementation of an added component to the three Meet McGill events: an EDI Student Hub.

The aim with the EDI Student Hub is to create a space for diverse student clubs at McGill to be represented at the events, and for newly admitted students to have the opportunity to identify with and connect with existing students on campus who share similar backgrounds and interests, so they can explore opportunities for them on campus and start building connections with existing students before they come to campus. The ultimate goal is to offer newly admitted students—particularly those coming from EDI-seeking groups—a chance to foster a sense of familiarity, comfort and belonging on campus. McGill student clubs are quite diverse and active on campus. Not only do they represent diversity at the level of McGill’s community (some of which are EDI-seeking groups), but they also have an active voice with their missions and initiatives, hence, they constitute a driving force for active engagement, diversity, and inclusion on campus. We’re building onto this existing force at McGill to welcome and include newly admitted students and give them the opportunity to find their community on campus right off the start.

With over 250 student clubs at McGill, we focus our outreach on the student clubs that carry a clear EDI component or goal. Hence, the EDI Specialist created a database of the student clubs that would be relevant to consider for future IAM Project initiatives. Also, given the limitations of space and number of tables we can reserve for the Student Hub at the Meet McGill events, we restricted our final selection to hand-picked clubs that would participate on the three dates on a rotating basis and depending on their availabilities.

Lively and meaningful interactions took place at the Student Hub, at all three events. As intended, the Student Hub gave space to newly admitted students from minority groups to connect with existing students who share the same backgrounds and interests.

Ideally, in the future, the EDI Student Hub would expand later to include student clubs representing ethnic minorities as well, and there are many ethnic clubs at McGill such as the Syrian, Lebanese, Bangladesh, Chinese, French student clubs and others. That, however, would incur a change on the logistics side with regards to reserving a larger space and more tables for the Student Hub. On the other hand, participating clubs would be hand-picked in relevance to the type of attendance expected at each of the Meet McGill events.
EDI Communications on the Accepted website

Also part of the IAM project, the EDI Outreach and Recruitment Specialist suggested the development of a ‘Find Your Community’ section on the Accepted website so that newly admitted students can access resources and learn about opportunities tailored to them on campus, right off the start.

Starting with a general benchmarking against the UoT, UBC and U of Ottawa websites for newly admitted students, we noticed some representation for some EDI groups (namely Black, Indigenous, and or youth from care and students with disabilities) on these websites, with the aim to transfer our own model of EDI content on the Accepted website.

The FYC landing page (which would be visible in the main menu and on the Accepted homepage) will feature 12 blocks, each one linking to a target audience or need. The pages target newly admitted students who are: Indigenous, Black, queer, financially challenged, youth from care, students who require accessibility support, women, first gen, caregivers, ethnic minorities, refugees, and religious students. Of course, all groups are intersectional, and student-users can navigate this section the way they see fit, based on their needs and interests.

The draft for each of these pages was developed based on our own research on the web as we looked for existing McGill resources that would be relevant to each one of these groups, and contacting different units, clubs and stakeholders on campus who are the owners of the material we’re planning to share on the Accepted site. The pages include existing information on student clubs, wellness advising, financial aid, people to contact on campus, resources, toolkits, events and other information tailored to each group’s needs.
Stakeholders from various units on campus were very collaborative and enthusiastic about this project, as they see the benefit of sharing this tailored information early on to newly accepted students as they make their way to campus. This is also a great opportunity for McGill units to showcase their services to them.

Our main aim with these pages is to deliver a welcoming and supportive message to the newly admitted students coming from various cultures and backgrounds and having different needs. We wish to portray the idea that McGill is a safe, welcoming institution where they can feel comfortable, included, accepted and engaged.

The EDI Outreach and Recruitment Specialist is lead on the development of this project, assisted by Branches’ Communications Assistant, while Comms at ES are taking the lead on the execution phase of the project. We hope that, once the pages are published, further communications via social media (and slate) would be planned to direct newly admitted students to these pages so they get acquainted with that content.

In the short term, a short version of the EDI section on the Accepted site, labeled ‘Diversity’ in the main menu, has been published, so students from the current yield cycle can access the most relevant content, support and resources tailored to them, as they prepare to come to campus in the Fall 2023. Social media posts, stories and takeovers will take place on the Admissions IG page to direct newly admitted students (all followers included) to the Diversity section and explore these resources in the coming weeks leading up to Fall 2023.