

# More Than Words in Addressing Sexual and Gender-based Violence Conference

**A Dialogue on the Impact of Indigenous-focused Youth-led Engagement Through the Arts on Families and Communities**

October 3-4, 2019  
Montreal, Canada



By Emily Booker

*More Than Words in Addressing Sexual and Gender-based Violence: A Dialogue on the Impact of Indigenous-focused Youth-led Engagement Through the Arts on Families and Communities* was a two-day dialogue event created to connect and support a community of researchers, practitioners, community organizers, scholars, activists and individuals who are working to address sexual and gender-based violence through arts-based work with young Indigenous people. The event was held on October 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, at McGill University Campus, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada with 65 participants attending from all over Canada and South Africa.

The theme of the first day was *'what we are learning'*, showcasing previous projects that are youth-led and arts-based and discussing emerging challenges, including what it means to study the impact of arts-based methods. The second day expanded on day one with a focus on *'digging in'* through different working groups, refining and reframing tools and strategies for studying the impact of arts-based work with Indigenous young people and their communities. Over the two days, four prominent themes or issues arose:

1. Connecting and creating a network, a goal of the conference that was to create an Indigenous youth-focused national network and we feel as though this goal was achieved through dialogue.
2. Working with the arts, the hands-on participatory workshops allowed participants to work with the arts themselves and reflect on using the arts to study impact and sexual and gender-based violence.
3. Consent in the context of ethics, the importance of ongoing and continual consent was brought up several times over the two days. When working with youth, ongoing consent and ensuring the youth understand what they are consenting to was highlighted.



4. Challenging the language of conventional forms of evaluation, the colonial and patriarchal nature common to language in evaluation was discussed in many different contexts over the two days. The importance of being intentional with language was highlighted and participants were encouraged and inspired to find new terms to define their work.

There were many highlights, lessons learned, and connections made at the conference. The conference has had a profound impact on the *More Than Words* project moving forward. The art-based dialogue groups on day one and the working groups on day two created two learning and sharing opportunities where people from all over Canada and South Africa came together and shared their experiences, pieces of knowledge and stories. These opportunities to share and learn connected everyone in attendance, creating a global network of individuals passionate about addressing sexual and gender-based violence, using arts-based methods and working with Indigenous youth.

## Day 1: What We Are Learning

**Land Acknowledgement** | Marjorie Beaucage

**McGill Welcome** | Kakwiranó:ron Cook

**Who's In the Room: An Interactive Session** | Marjorie Beaucage

Everyone was asked to share the story of something they were wearing with someone sitting close to them. This activity took an object-based and storytelling approach, it was the beginning of the process of building a network between everyone in attendance.

**Setting the Context for this More Than Words Dialogue** | Claudia Mitchell

The *Networks for Change and Well-being: Girl-led 'From the Ground Up' Policy Making to Address Sexual Violence in Canada and South Africa* project has created a foundation for collaboration and successful partnering over the last six years by building skills and capacity for Indigenous young people to respond to SGBV in their communities in Canada and South Africa, that *More Than Words* will build on.

## Networks For Change and Well-being Panel: What Have We Learned

Moderator: Sarah Flicker. Panellists: Jennifer Altenberg, Kari Wuttunee, Marnina Gonick, Jennica Alhda, Jenny Reich, Kathryn McLeod, Relebohile Moletsane, Naydene de Lange

Individuals involved with the six *Networks for Change* sites were invited to discuss their experiences working with girls and young women in addressing sexual and gender-based violence and talk about what they learned from their experiences.

## Trauma, Story & Indigenous Healing

Suzanne Methot

Over video, Suzanne spoke about the experience writing her latest novel *Legacy: Trauma, Story and Indigenous Healing* and on the topics of intergenerational trauma, education and resilience.

## Getting to Impact: Integrating Indigenous Ways of Knowing Panel

Panel moderated by Pamela Teitelbaum. Panellists: Shanthi Besso, Elizabeth Cooper, Gabrielle Fayant, Candice Lys

The panellists were practitioners who have experience working with Indigenous youth and reflecting on the impact of arts-based and other approaches. They highlighted the colonial nature of evaluation frameworks, pointing to the problem with integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into pre-existing and colonial frameworks.

## Making and Reflecting: Arts-based Dialogue

Three hands-on arts-based workshops were offered for participants to experience engaging with arts-based methods:

1. *Visual Arts with Maria Ezcurra*. Participants were each given a white cloth glove and the prompt of “speaking out” to design the top of the hand and the prompt of “speaking back” to design the palm.
2. *Theatre and Performance with Mindy Carter*. The participants engaged in different theatre and performance exercises, reflecting on the bodily nature of performance art and the impact of physically engaging with art and the experience of doing activities in a group that required them to be conscious of others and themselves.

3. *Cellphilm with Katie MacEntee*. The group was given “impact” as a theme/topic/theme to create a cellphilm. The work challenged the word “impact” highlighting how it was a colonial and patriarchal word and spoke to the importance of thoughtfully and critically engaging with language. The cellphilm can be seen [here](#).



Above: Creating gloves  
Below: Creating the cellphilm



## Day 2: Digging In

### Opening, Land Acknowledgement

Marjorie Beaucage

### What Matters Now? | Judith Marcuse

Participants engaged in six different physical embodiment activities centred on reflections related to their work. Each activity had a unique message or theme. These themes and messages included leadership, the power of imagination and art without words.

### Sohkeyimowin: The Making of the Young Indigenous Women's Utopia Video Panel

Panel by Andrea Cessna, Kiyari McNab, Jennifer Altenberg, Kari Wuttunee, and Sarah Flicker

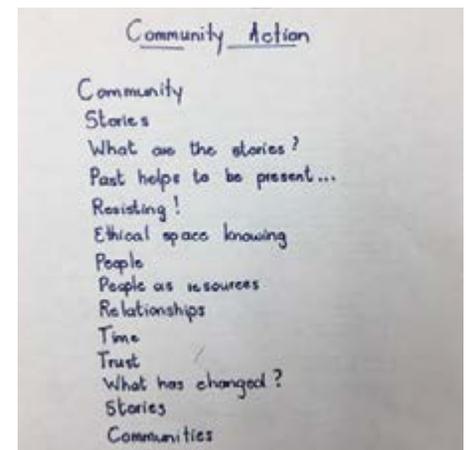
*Sohkeyimowin* was an inspiring film speaking to the positive impact of the group on the girls who participate in it but also their family members and community. The film featured family members speaking about how they have seen the impact of the group on the participants but also felt it themselves. The film was a celebration of Indigenous girls, families and communal love. The panel touched on

the importance of “ethical storytelling” as the filmmakers, Kiyari and Andrea, spoke to how important it was to have the trust of the people they were working and to tell a story of resilience.

## Digging in Part 1 and 2

In Part 1, working groups were convened on topics relating to addressing the impact of arts-based tools and methods. In Part 2, the groups came together to share their work.

1. *Community Action with Naydene de Lange and Relebohile Moletsane*. The group discussed common language in community action, thinking about terms such as “speaking out” and “speaking back” and the importance of considering who is speaking and listening. The importance of relationships in community action was highlighted by the group such as engaging communities at different levels, working with teachers or elders. Naydene and Relebohile created a found poem called “Community Action” from their working group:



2. *Vision to Action with Shanly Dixon*. The group engaged in a provocative conversation around the idea of bringing a vision to action through a “blueprint”. Issues surrounding the word “blueprint” were identified and the group brainstormed alternative words that might more accurately portray the intentions of the people creating the “blueprint”. The issues around word choice highlighted the importance of consciously and critically engaging with language and recognizing our different cultural understandings of words. The notion of a blueprint and replicating projects led to a discussion of the importance of ongoing consent and critically engaging with power imbalances.



### Vision to Action

3. *Youth Advisory Groups with Sarah Flicker.* The group discussed creating safe spaces when working with youth and the importance of listening to them and respecting their wishes. “Direction without control” was a recurring theme, meaning there are moments when adults need to be quiet and let the youth lead. Language around “youth leader” was discussed,

particularly how the word “leader” is patriarchal. The word “oskâpêws” was suggested as more of a helper.

### Speaking Back Exchange

Moderator: Catherine Vanner  
 Panelists: Angelina Weenie, Felicia Tugak, Mary Fredlund, Shaheen Shariff

The panellists reflected on the importance of centring youth in work and noted the resilience of youth. The importance of language was identified in the “Digging In” presentations, highlighting the importance of being intentional with language and insuring everyone working together understands the language being used.

### Reflecting Forward | Claudia Mitchell

*Sohkeyimowin* was screened again. Afterwards, the audio from the launch

of *Dear Nosizwe* by Girls Leading Change was played. The young women reflected on their experiences over the past 6 years. The intensity of the two days was acknowledged, as was the emotional intensity of the work that many of the participants do.

### Conference Closing

Judith Marcuse & Marjorie Beaucage

Judith ran a closing activity, passing energy around the room. Marjorie closed the conference by asking participants to take the good with them and leave the bad and then by thanking the ancestors for being with us and helping us do this work.

For a full conference report and video summary, visit the *More Than Words* website:

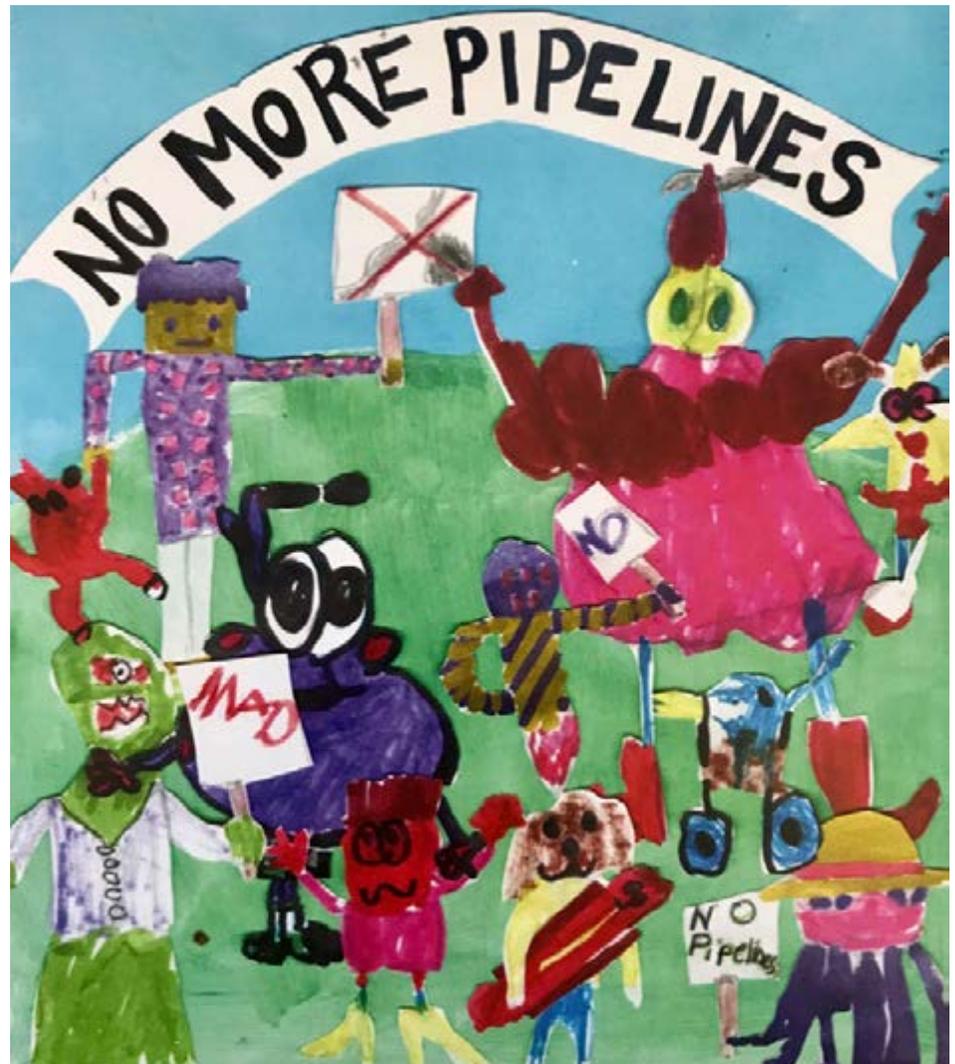
[www.mcgill.ca/morethanwords/](http://www.mcgill.ca/morethanwords/)

## Statement of Solidarity with Wet’suwet’en Nation

*Networks4Change*, *More than Words* and the Participatory Cultures Lab stand in solidarity with the people and the Hereditary Chiefs of the Wet’suwet’en Nation and all land defenders. Many of the youth attached to our projects in Canadian contexts have been active in demonstrations. We all support the Wet’suwet’en Nation’s rights to govern their ancestral territories and we urge the Canadian government, government ministries and police forces to respect Indigenous sovereignty. The coastal gaslink pipeline and the RCMP occupation of Wet’suwet’en territory are in violation with the Canadian government’s commitment to reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We find it crucial to acknowledge the construction of the pipeline will put Indigenous women, girls and 2spirited individuals at great risk and we call for the end of colonial violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2spirited individuals.

McGill University is situated on the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien’kehà:ka (Mohawk). We support the Kanien’kehà:ka of Tynedinaga, Kahnawà:ke and Kanehsatà:ke as they stand in solidarity with Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chiefs. Information on how to support the land defenders can be found here:

<http://unistoten.camp/>



Artwork by Salix & Ezra as part of their postcard fundraiser. All proceeds go towards Wet’suwet’en land defense. Contact [qtlifedrawing@gmail.com](mailto:qtlifedrawing@gmail.com) for more details.