



SEEDING RECONCILIATION ON UNEVEN GROUND

The 4Rs Approach to Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Photo by Fatin Chowdhury



4Rs YOUTH MOVEMENT

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CONTENTS

4

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND THE TERM “INDIGENOUS”

6

INTRODUCTION

- 8 HOW WE GOT HERE: OUR APPROACH TO LEARNING
- 9 SITUATING OURSELVES: THE BROADER CONTEXT OF RECONCILIATION

14

A FRAMEWORK FOR CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

- 16 GETTING THERE
- 18 PREPARING THE GROUND
- 20 PLANTING THE SEEDS
 - LEADERSHIP: CENTERING INDIGENOUS YOUTH
 - RELATIONSHIPS: A FOUNDATION FOR FERTILE SOIL
 - TRUTHS: CONTEXT FOR CONVERSATIONS
- 27 CONNECTING OUR ROOTS
- 30 HARVESTING

34

CLOSING WORDS

- 35 WHAT'S NEXT



ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

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A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND THE TERM “INDIGENOUS”

We are intentional in our use of language in this document to refer to the Original Peoples of this part of Turtle Island (what is now known as Canada). The term “Indigenous” is meant to respect the diversity of Indigenous nations, whether or not they are recognized by the Canadian state. We choose not to use the term “Aboriginal,” although we recognize its legal significance in identifying the First Nations (“Indian”), Inuit and Métis as “the Aboriginal peoples of Canada” in Canada’s Constitution.

In acknowledging and respecting the diversity among Indigenous nations, we also recognize that within Indigenous nations there are many intersecting identities that impact lived realities. This includes honouring diversity in gender identities and sexualities.

In using the term “non-Indigenous” we also want to respect the diverse peoples and communities living in Canada that are not Indigenous to these lands. This is by no means a homogeneous group, and includes many marginalized, racialized communities. It is important to note that “non-Indigenous” does not necessarily mean white settler Canadian. However the term “settler,” is appropriate in reference to the historical truth of colonization that represents the starting point when doing reconciliation work. We encourage those who are new to this work to recognize this truth despite any initial discomfort.



In the spirit of recognizing the richness and diversity of Indigenous people and nations, we encourage you to learn about how Indigenous people choose to identify themselves in your local area so that no assumptions are made. We also encourage the use of local languages in referring to distinct Indigenous nations in specific places.

INTRODUCTION

The 4Rs Youth Movement (Respect, Reciprocity, Reconciliation, Relevance) has evolved over the past three years as a collaborative, youth-led initiative seeking to change the country now known as Canada by changing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people. This document is intended to tell the story of what we have come to know about cross-cultural dialogue that is rooted in respect, reciprocity, reconciliation, and relevance.

Over the past year, 4Rs has developed a Cross-Cultural Dialogue Framework to articulate what we are learning about what might be needed in a shared experience for young people to engage in conversation that furthers reconciliation. Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people from across Canada have been involved in developing this Framework¹ as members of the 4Rs Steering Committee² and subcommittees, as facilitators and participants in exploratory trainings, and as participants in gatherings and workshops. This has been a crucial year in building our shared capacity as young people to lead dialogue in ways that honour its complexity, and respect the vision of 4Rs to support the change that Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth want to see.

4Rs is grounded in the idea that in order to change these relationships, young people will need to engage in critical dialogue on who we are, and the paths that have brought us to where we are. To be true and consistent to the land where we all find ourselves – on Turtle Island - in Canada - the starting point of these conversations are in relationship to Indigenous people.

To engage in this dialogue fruitfully, we believe that young people need to share an experience together. This kind of conversation involves bringing people together with significant differences, including grappling with the complexities of history and identity. It includes understanding stories of privilege, disadvantage, and resilience, and a comprehensive understanding of the intersecting challenges people experience based on their race, class, age, gender, sexuality, geographic location and ability. The experiences based on these complexities can create imbalanced dynamics in relationships, and uneven ground in our relationships with each other. It is with all of this in mind that we put great thought and care into how we approach this work.

1 Throughout this document, we will refer to this with the shorthand of 'the/our Framework.'

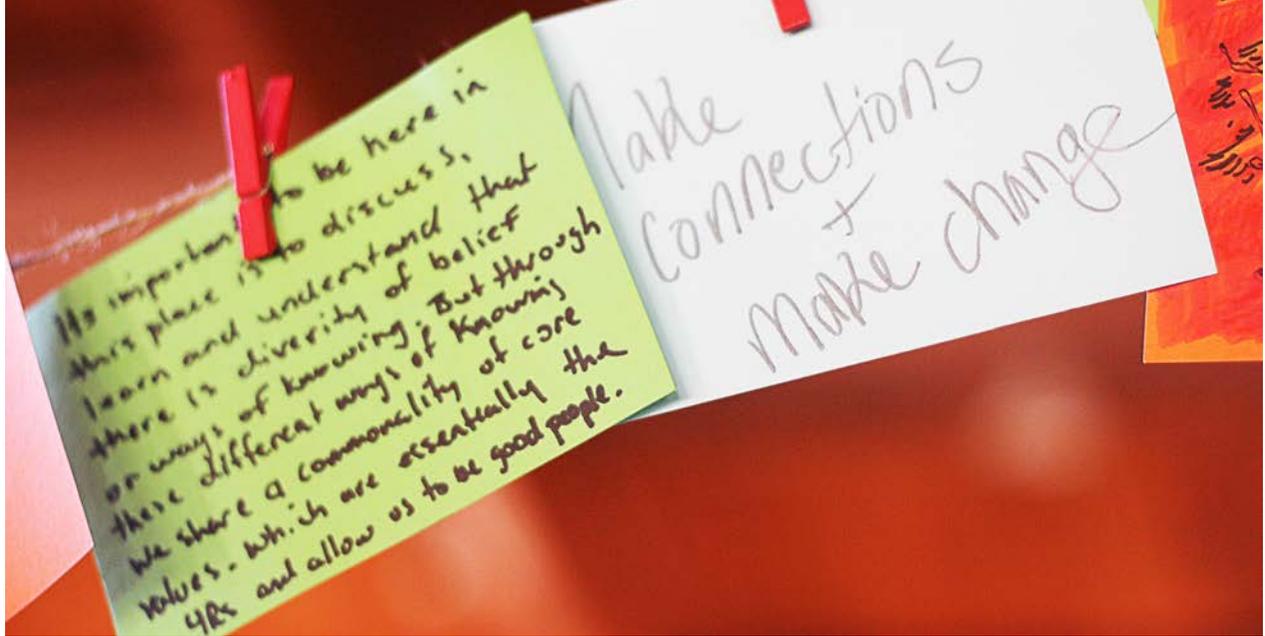
2 Established in 2014 as a youth-led governance structure to lead and advise the Movement. Inclusive of youth representatives from the 4Rs National Partners.

We invite you to read this document with the intention of learning from it.

We urge you to think deeply about what is being shared from the perspectives of diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people. You might feel challenged or unsettled by some of these ideas. You may also feel encouraged or inspired. Each of these feelings are important and are a part of our shared path.

Wherever it is you are coming from, we invite you to understand reconciliation as an important and challenging process that leads all of us to an equitable, respectful, and just co-existence.





How we got here: Our approach to learning

FROM ITS BEGINNINGS, the 4Rs Youth Movement set out to develop an innovative response to the complex challenge of how to promote cross-cultural dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth across Turtle Island (in this context on the lands now called Canada). We knew there were no simple solutions, but still sought a good way forward.

We asked ourselves: Why do respect, reciprocity, reconciliation, and relevance matter/why these four values? What does it mean to safely and productively engage in cross-cultural dialogue in order to promote these values? How do we uphold and complement the healing and reconciliation work of others? What might that look like? How will we know if we are on track? What, really, are we developing here? These were some powerful questions that would lead us to new possibilities not yet in view.

In 2015, the youth-led 4Rs Steering Committee set out to learn about this way forward by testing new approaches. This became our 'year of prototyping.' Two exploratory trainings were held, in addition to a number of gatherings, workshops, and presentations. These were our first series of pilot initiatives for developing the 4Rs Framework.

At the same time as we were prototyping the 4Rs Framework, 4Rs adopted a process of Developmental

Evaluation (DE), an approach to learning and development "for tracking and assessing innovations in complex situations."³ We intentionally gathered feedback to illuminate the impact of 4Rs experiences on diverse participants as well as the conditions and contexts that promote them. While a deeper analysis of impact is still forthcoming, this Framework document represents the emerging critical lessons about what it might take to foster cross-cultural dialogue in the context of reconciliation.

Our mixed-methods learning process consisted of regular feedback mechanisms alongside the two exploratory trainings held near Toronto and Calgary, and other youth focused and intergenerational gatherings. We conducted surveys, recorded interviews,⁴ and facilitated debrief sessions during and after these experiences. Throughout this document are quotes and insights that illustrate key learnings from our team and participants. They have been integrated as emerging evidence that supports our approach, grounded in young people's voices and experiences.

³ "Dip into Developmental Evaluation." Social Innovation Generation (SiG) Knowledge Hub: a partnership of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the University of Waterloo, the MaRS Discovery District, and the PLAN Institute. <http://sigknowledgehub.com/2012/09/02/dip-into-developmental-evaluation/>.

Further, Michael Quinn Patton, the founder of this approach, describes it as one that is especially well-suited to the very beginning phases of a project requiring on-going development, quick adaptation, and useful experimentation. ("Developmental Evaluation." Better Evaluation. http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/developmental_evaluation).

⁴ At the second 4Rs Training near Calgary, we asked new and old participants to share a specific experience that describes the most significant change that they were experiencing in their life as a result of being a part of 4Rs.

Situating ourselves: The broader context of reconciliation

WHILE 4RS IS RELATIVELY NEW AS AN INITIATIVE, we are stepping into a context with a deep history. We honour the movements of Indigenous communities, particularly among Elders and young people that have taken place over generations.

These have come to be known as healing movements, political movements, movements for social and ecological justice, language and spiritual resurgence. This is a critical part of the legacy that young Indigenous people in this part of the world have inherited. We acknowledge the ongoing (and tireless) work of those who have left tracks for us to follow.

The concept of reconciliation is increasingly being talked about in mainstream Canada: in the media, by all levels of government, in education and other sectors. In large part this is due to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission coming to a close and the release of its final report in 2015. The 4Rs Youth Movement took shape in the later part of the TRC's mandate and is very much a part of the growing energy and attention towards reconciliation in Canada more broadly.

4Rs has a focus on bringing diverse young people together to talk about reconciliation and what it means to them, so we encourage critical exploration of the concept in connection with experiences at the individual and community level. These conversations are also about truth; not only in terms of what has

happened to Indigenous peoples across many generations, but also in acknowledgement of continued lived realities. In other words, the importance of recognizing that the mainstream story of Canada has been a half-truth and incomplete; there exists a damaged relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples rooted in a long and unjust past. The harm that this destructive relationship has caused, and continues to cause for Indigenous peoples, brings a disconnection and disassociation between many of us living across this land today.

To understand reconciliation in the context of our work, the broader environment within which 4Rs exists, and the Framework that is shared in this document, we look to a valuable statement shared by Justice Murray Sinclair (Anishinaabe), Chair of the



Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Call to Action 66

We call upon the federal government to establish multi-year funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation, and establish a national network to share information and best practices.



Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These words reflect the overall work of the Commission and what was learned from nearly 7000 survivors of Indian residential schools and their families, through the TRC’s statement gathering process that took place in communities across the country:

“Reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relationships. There are no shortcuts.”⁵

And we also look to important words from Indigenous writers Erica Violet Lee (Nehiyaw) and Hayden King (Anishinaabe), printed in December 2015 in the *Globe and Mail*.⁶ They echo a sentiment shared by many Indigenous people:

“...before we discuss reconciling, we need truth.”

The reconciliation that is most talked about in this country involves the relationship between Indigenous nations and Canada. At an individual or community

level, it also involves relationships between Indigenous people and Canadians (as well as those who are not Canadian citizens). Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) encourages us to think about reconciliation and the fractured relationship between Canada and Indigenous nations beyond the scope of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which had a mandate specific to Indian residential schools:⁷

If reconciliation is focused only on residential schools rather than the broader set of relationships that generated policies, legislation and practices aimed at assimilation and political genocide, then there is a risk that reconciliation will “level the playing field” in the eyes of Canadians... the perception of most Canadians is that post-reconciliation, Indigenous peoples no longer have a legitimate source of contention... For reconciliation to be meaningful to Indigenous Peoples and for it to be a decolonizing force, it must be interpreted broadly.⁸

⁵ From the TRC website: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>

⁶ Article can be found online here: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-truth-is-there-but-reconciliation-is-deeply-complicated/article27759105/>

⁷ It is important to note the many experiences that were excluded from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement agreement and therefore the TRC mandate, including Métis and many Inuit children who were forced to attend residential schools. The refusal of the federal government to release many documents to the Commission is also important to note understand the limited scope of the TRC.

⁸ Page 22 in Leanne Simpson’s *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishinaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (2011).

Referring to the heightened attention toward reconciliation following the October 2015 election, Simpson has also written about how “a kinder, gentler, smudgier dispossession is still dispossession.”⁹ Indigenous people and nations have been active for generations to heal and rebuild in spite of ongoing assimilative policies and practices. The next steps in relationship-building with Canada are being taken with what Ryan McMahon (Anishinaabe/Métis) has aptly described as cautious optimism.¹⁰ This caution exists with good reason. Billy Ray Belcourt (from the Driftpile Cree Nation) explains:

*Reconciliation is an affective mess: it throws together and condenses histories of trauma and their shaky bodies and feelings into a neatly bordered desire; a desire to let go, to move on, to turn to the future with open arms, as it were.*¹¹

As diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, we are actively seeking a future that is much different than a false “post-reconciliation” world. The 4Rs values include respect, reciprocity, and relevance.

With these values in mind, any project or consideration of reconciliation must center on what Indigenous people need, now and for the future, as defined by Indigenous people and nations on their own terms. It should also take decolonization seriously.¹²

Indigenous young people involved in this work with 4Rs further understand reconciliation as a process within oneself, a complex journey that is needed in many contexts outside of our relationships with Canada and Canadians. Reconciliation within

ourselves means that we need to be supported in practicing self-care, and community care.¹³ We see reconciliation as needed within our families and communities, with the land, water and non-human relations, as well as between our nations. These are aspects of reconciliation that we believe absolutely need to happen and they must be supported. With the increase in funding for “reconciliation” work, priorities should also include Indigenous-led projects centered in reconciling with lands and waters, restoring ourselves as nations, and rebuilding our Indigenous nation-to-nation relationships.

In this spirit, true, meaningful reconciliation cannot fit into time limits that may be tied to funding agreements or organizational commitments; we absolutely must reject any desire to forget or move on.

We have approached the development of a Framework for Cross-Cultural Dialogue carefully, and throughout this document, humbly share some of what we have learned along the way. This Framework has been put together through deep thought and careful collaboration, using practices intended to centre the voices and experiences of Indigenous young people.

⁹ Simpson's article “A Smudgier Dispossession is Still Dispossession” (2016) can be found online here: <http://activehistory.ca/2016/01/a-smudgier-dispossession-is-still-dispossession/>

¹⁰ For more, see this article from October 2015: http://www.vice.com/en_ca/read/heres-why-as-an-indigenous-person-i-voted-for-trudeau-and-why-im-still-worried; as well as Season 5 of the Red Man Laughing podcast, the theme of which is Reconciliation: <http://www.redmanlaughing.com/listen/?category=Season%205>

¹¹ <http://activehistory.ca/2016/01/political-depression-in-a-time-of-reconciliation/>

¹² It is not possible provide a neat definition of decolonization, because it is a complex concept that will be taken up differently depending on the lands and nations involved a given context. Decolonization centers land (for more, see “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” an article by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in the online journal *Decolonization: Education, Indigeneity & Society* in 2012, available here: <http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18630>).

¹³ For more, see B. Loewe's article “An End to Self Care” (2012) at <http://www.organizingupgrade.com/index.php/blogs/b-loewe/item/729-end-to-self-care>, and ArtReach's *Caring for Yourself is a Radical Act: Self-Care Guide for Youth Working in Community* at http://ywcacanada.ca/data/research_docs/00000346.pdf.

“My experiences in that beautiful part of the country with those amazing minds provoked a lot of reflection, self-realization and appreciation for myself, my teachers, the young people that I work with and the amazing network that I became a part of during that weekend. One of the biggest shifts for me was taking the time to step back to consider and acknowledge the immense amount of work that racialized people have already done in order to be able to do the educating work that we do. You do not just wake up one morning and say ‘I am going to do this work now.’ More often than not, racialized peoples that are doing this work end up here because of their passion that has been fuelled by their personal struggles and experiences.”

Participant in 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“Somebody said something about moving from narratives of trauma to narratives of love and resilience. During one of our breakout sessions, I learned that we all draw from the strong women in our lives who may or may not be around us anymore. Even though they went through hardships and struggles way before our time, we carry their legacy of strength and resilience with us.”

Participant in 4Rs training near Toronto, ON

“As a young person in the time of the 7th fire it is important for me to be here because I am one of those mover[s], shakers and questioners prophesized by the old ones. Human kind faces a great decision and as young people it is said we will be the ones retracing our steps, bringing new life to the old ways and making way for the 8th fire.”

Participant in 4Rs training near Toronto, ON

“I feel as if I got to be a part of the healing of the nation.”

Participant in 4Rs gathering in Sault Ste. Marie, ON

“It’s about reclaiming our past and celebrating our perseverance.”

Participant in 4Rs gathering in Sault Ste. Marie, ON

“I’ve no idea what reconciliation needs to look like, or even whether we’ll ever really get there. I see 4Rs as part of a shift that I’m having, of seeing reconciliation actually as a process that always starts from where we are right now, rather than some imagined idea of where we need to be. I think 4Rs is part of a more humble engagement with reconciliation as something that’s going to take a long, long time. It’s going to start from where I’m standing, and it starts from the relationships that I form in the present. It’s relationships that I need to create and transform through hard work. It’s a different kind of impact or work we need to do.”

Participant in training near Calgary, AB



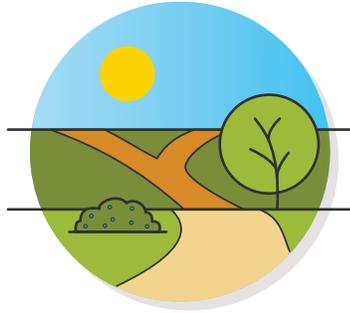
A FRAMEWORK FOR CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

The 4Rs Framework for Cross Cultural Dialogue was developed to articulate our approach and is grounded in the belief that young people need to share an experience together in order to engage in conversation that in both process and content encourages respect, reciprocity, reconciliation, and relevance.

The Framework describes essential elements in this shared experience, within which such dialogue can take place. Each component of the experience requires time, space, and care; it must not be approached as a step-by-step guide to planning or hosting conversations for reconciliation. In fact, we have learned that the activities or facilitation methods themselves are not impactful without the intentions, approach, and goals carefully thought through.

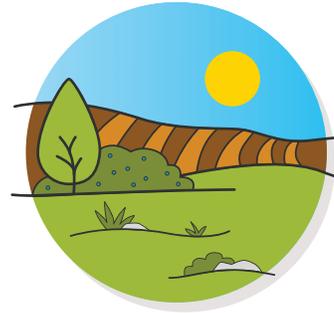
The Framework is represented visually as a garden which reminds us that growth takes time. It reminds us that all of this work takes place on Indigenous land. The 4Rs approach embraces the complexities involved in cross-cultural experiences and conversations; we understand that learning is a lifelong journey, as is the journey of building and changing relationships. As diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, we are all approaching these journeys on uneven ground. We are challenged to consider what might be irreconcilable, even while we are seeding reconciliation. The changes we want to see may not all happen within our lifetimes, but we approach our work now with future generations in mind.

The 4Rs Framework for cross cultural dialogue



Getting there

Pathways to new relationships



Preparing the ground

Restoring balance to the landscape of reconciliation



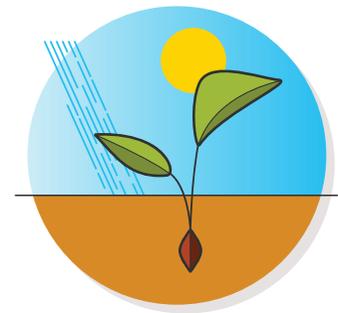
Harvesting

Taking it home



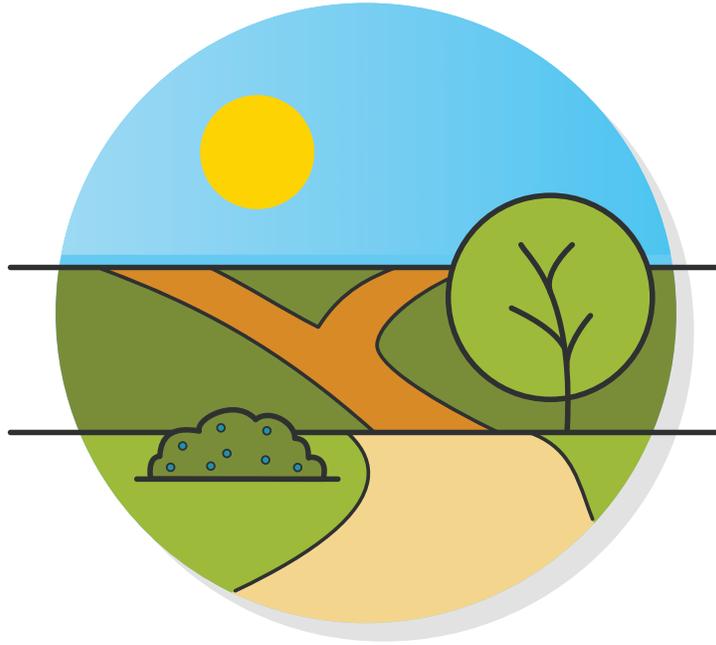
Connecting our roots

Going deeper into dialogue



Planting the seeds

Growing leadership, relationships and truth



Getting there

Pathways to new relationships

There are many paths that lead individuals to this work of reconciliation and cross-cultural dialogue. It is important to recognize that there is work to be done before entering new relationships. We are coming to these relationships on uneven ground, from a history of broken relationships that did not uphold foundations of respect or reciprocity. There are distinct differences in the paths taken by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and we must honour the diversity of experiences in Indigenous communities, and non-Indigenous communities.



Getting there

Pathways to new relationships

It is important to note that this journey starts within ourselves and our own communities; we do not wish to rush towards dialogue or positive relationships as the immediate goal. The first step is to understand the broader environment and where we are on our path, to think critically about our readiness to enter new relationships.

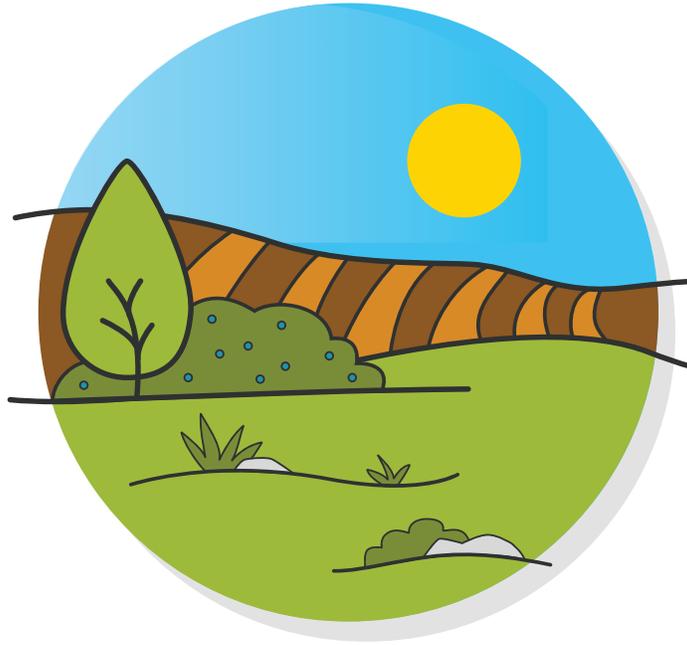
“Getting there” is about an individual journey, but it is also about communities coming together. There are conversations that Indigenous youth and communities can and need to be having on their own (in their great diversity), just as there are conversations that non-Indigenous youth and communities need to be having on their own (also in their great diversity). These conversations should be happening before, and ideally continue alongside cross-cultural dialogue. It is all a part of building a foundation in order for us to work together.

“We are getting back to some of how Indigenous people have approached community building. So the future, I think it looks more like the past and what that relationship could have looked like if it had been approached with reciprocity and respect.”

Jessica Bolduc, 4Rs Executive Director

“Sometimes a community just needs space for themselves.”

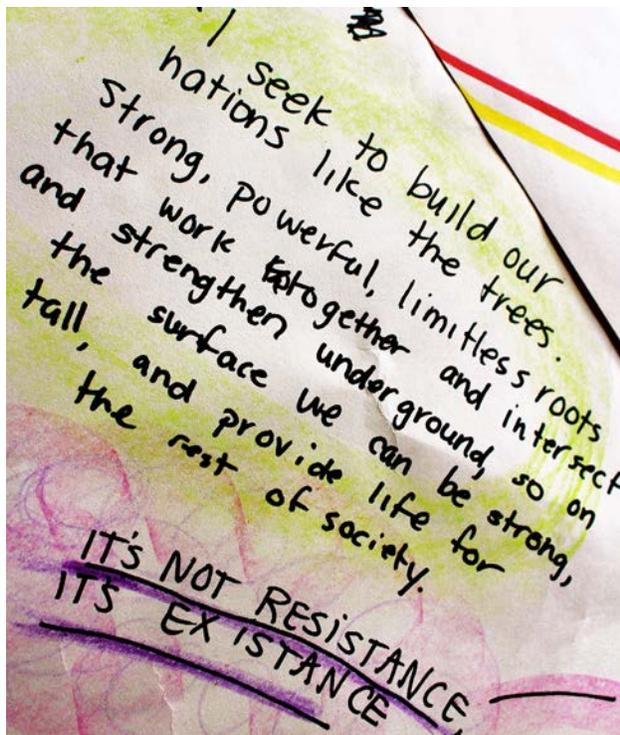
Participant in 4Rs training near Toronto, ON



Preparing the ground

Restoring balance to the landscape of reconciliation

Since we are entering new relationships on uneven ground, we each need to understand how we relate our distinct histories and identities to this landscape. Everyone needs to reflect on their path here and build their readiness for dialogue; none of this work can be rushed. A healthier environment with more even ground requires investments in Indigenous youth and communities, so that they can enter dialogue in wholeness, on their own terms.



Participant in 4Rs training near Toronto, ON

Preparing the ground

Restoring balance to the landscape of reconciliation

Before we come together to seed new relationships and engage in dialogue around reconciliation, we need to reflect on the path that brought us here. This reflection helps us to see that we are entering new relationships on uneven ground. We have inherited broken relationships and still hold misunderstandings, stereotypes, lack of trust, and confusion. The land we gather on is not neutral. The real work here is to restore some balance, to level the ground.

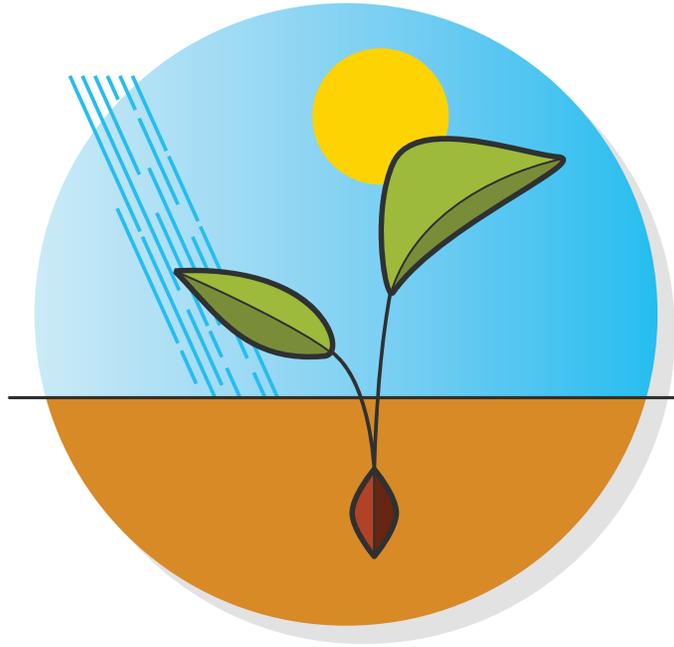
We all need to explore who we are and how we relate to the conversations connected to reconciliation that we want to have. Indigenous youth need opportunities to learn and connect within themselves and with each other. They need to be supported to enter new relationships on their own terms. Levelling the ground involves investing in Indigenous youth to find strength and pride in identity. It requires centering and restoring Indigenous languages and knowledges before, and at the same time as seeding reconciliation.

Individuals and communities who have inherited power and privilege, need to learn the truth about Canada's history and invest in their readiness to

engage in cross-cultural dialogue. This means a willingness to change and be challenged; to be self-aware; create space for other voices; and be receptive and respectful of these ongoing truths about privilege and power in their historical and present contexts. 4Rs intends to support this initial learning as part of the broader work of preparing the ground in preparation for cross-cultural dialogue.

Non-Indigenous youth need to come to understand their identities and experiences, not defined by, but in relation to colonialism in Canada. It is also important to learn about and respect how Black communities and communities of colour live in relation to colonialism in Canada, as distinct from white settler communities.

Further, any consideration of reconciliation must also take into account the wellbeing of the earth. The 4Rs trainings take place on the land, in retreat-style settings that support young people to connect with each other and with land, water, plants, and animals. Levelling the ground is also about acknowledging the non-human relationships that have been broken, and our intention to restore balance with the earth. When lands and waters are under threat from "development" and pollution, we do not have a healthy environment for our shared work.



Planting the seeds

Growing leadership, relationships, and truths

There are several key elements to consider in growing something from seed. First, we need a foundation of nutrient-rich soil where relationships can take root: what we call safe(r) and brave(r) spaces for conversation. In these spaces, Indigenous youth, are leaders who have distinct voices and needs that must hold a place at the centre of our work. Coming to know the truth is also critical, acknowledging deep histories, modern context and the complexity of individual stories. Truth and leadership, like sunlight and water, is the energy that allows relationships to grow.



Planting the seeds

Growing leadership, relationships and truths

Once the ground has been prepared, we are ready to come together for cross-cultural dialogue. We cultivate a space for dialogue by balancing important elements: leadership, relationships, and a context of truth for the conversation.

Leadership: Centering Indigenous youth

4Rs is a youth-led initiative, working with peer facilitators to build capacity through practicing together. 4Rs trainings are facilitated by young people, for young people. Indigenous youth from the local territory lead cultural and spiritual components of the experience, opening the space for Indigenous youth from other territories to share what they know. Supporting diverse young people in their leadership takes time, care, and mentorship.

In doing this work of cross-cultural dialogue, the voices, perspectives, and needs of Indigenous youth should be at the centre. In an article for ActiveHistory.ca, Adam Gaudry (Métis) contributes to recent conversations around the implementation of mandatory Indigenous Studies courses in universities.

“There are many reasons why the work we are doing this weekend is important. One is definitely to be able to hold spaces centered around Indigenous voices and experiences.”

Participant from 4Rs training near Toronto, ON

“Since being here, I think it [a highlight] would be when some of us ladies went down to the water. There’s a little river that runs down there. The first night we got here, we went down. We sang some songs and put some tobacco down because it was the full moon. It was nice to just bond like that with people... We all came from all of these different parts of the country, but we knew those songs and we sang together and it was just this feeling, that unifying feeling... that was a good feeling, I remember that.”

Participant at 4Rs training near Toronto, ON



Photo by Fatin Chowdhury

The dynamics he refers to are fundamental to the work of cross-cultural dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, both within and outside of classrooms:

If done improperly, educating a large number of non-Indigenous students can come at the expense of Indigenous ones. ... The comfort of non-Indigenous students cannot come at the expense of the hard-won space of Indigenous people in the academy. If universities are going to discuss this option, the conversation needs to prioritize the needs of the Indigenous student body—no matter how large or small—to avoid once again putting the needs of Canadians above those of Indigenous people. This would, again, reinforce all that we should be undoing.¹⁴

As was explained earlier, the process of preparing the ground for cross-cultural dialogue involves

holding conversations and building foundations within communities before coming together as Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people.

This means cultivating internal relationships within communities, exploring history in ways that are relevant to that community, and also in ways that are connected to present and future. Cross-cultural dialogue means coming together across difference, and to do so responsibly means to understand and centre the needs of Indigenous young people.

¹⁴ Gaudry's January 2016 article can be found on the Active History website: <http://activehistory.ca/2016/01/paved-with-good-intentions-simply-requiring-indigenous-content-is-not-enough/>



“[There was an] emphasis on identity and how everyone embraced who each person was. I felt ‘heard’ and helped me step out of shell. Lots of song, dance and fun.”

Participant at 4Rs training near Toronto, ON

“The whole objective of the 4Rs is to create a safe environment where we can talk about our struggles, our needs.”

Participant at 4Rs training near Calgary, AB



Relationships: A foundation of fertile soil

A foundation of relationships starts with coming to know one another, within our own communities and also across difference. It starts with who we are, where we come from, and what communities we are part of. When bringing youth together from diverse communities, there should be attention given to the balance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Through facilitated dialogue and relationship-building, we gradually connect to the histories and ongoing realities implicated in conversations around reconciliation. It is a process of situating, positioning, and naming ourselves in relation to context. Coming to know self is a lifelong journey that is particularly significant for Indigenous youth who are increasingly migrating to urban centers¹⁵, seeking identity, strength, and pride in a world that still denies access to languages, lands, and knowledge systems.

15 Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study. Environics Institute (2010). Online: <http://www.uaps.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/UAPS-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

There is a necessary balance of elements when bringing a group together, just like when planting seeds in a new garden. In the 4Rs approach to cross-cultural dialogue, we take time and care to tend to the soil, ensuring it is fertile for growth. This can be thought of as similar to creating safer spaces and braver spaces.¹⁶ As a foundation, the soil provides the group a place from which to start and also somewhere to land when things get challenging.

The experience of building relationships can be deep and meaningful. It can also be playful and fun, which helps to nurture excitement, energy, and understanding. Even while friendships and connections are seeded, discomfort can emerge and become unsettling.¹⁷ These relationships

16 For more, see Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens’ “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Social Justice” (2013): https://sty.presswarehouse.com/sites/stylus/resrcs/chapters/1579229743_otherchap.pdf

17 For more on the importance of feeling and being “unsettled” in reconciliation, see Paulette Regan’s book *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (2011).



are the strength that can create change, if they are developed in ways that respect difference rather than erase difference. This is why we seek to honour the needs and realities of marginalized people.

Truths: Context for conversations

In approaching cross-cultural dialogue, it is necessary to determine the scope of the conversation. It will not be possible to provide all of the context that is involved in terms of reconciliation broadly in Canada. Context looks different for those who are Indigenous and have experienced colonialism directly on their own lands, than it does for those who are not Indigenous to this part of the world. In any attempt to discuss “Indigenous Issues 101” or “Colonialism 101,” many things will be missed.¹⁸ There is also the risk of assuming a non-Indigenous audience in establishing context even when there are Indigenous people in the room, as Adam Gaudry noted above.

¹⁸ But Chelsea Vowel has put together lists of valuable resources under the title “Indigenous Issues 101”; highly recommended to read and share: <http://apihtawikosisan.com/aboriginal-issue-primers/>

A foundation of context is about truth: what are we talking about, when we talk about reconciliation? What do the people in this conversation want to know? What do they need to know? Understanding who we are, where we come from, how we are connected to what has happened and continues to take place—all of this requires some shared context for conversation.

In many ways this component of a group foundation is about uncovering truths that have been hidden or erased. This reflects Erica Lee and Hayden King’s words: “we need truth.” It is about demystifying and calling attention to what has happened, how history is relevant now and into the future. Chelsea Vowel (Métis) has referred to this as “myth-debunking,” addressing stereotypes held by non-Indigenous people in Canada:

I have found it very difficult over the years to have discussions about anything related to Indigenous peoples because so many bizarre beliefs get in

“From my perspective as a newcomer to Canada, there is a lot of information that is left out that inform the way newcomers see Canada. I think 4Rs does the job of remedying that lack of information or gaps in information that newcomers receive.”
Participant from 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“I need to feel safe to ask questions.”
Participant at 4Rs training near Calgary, Alberta

“[What has shifted is] knowing that I wasn’t alone. Sometimes we get overwhelmed working so hard within our communities, meeting like-minded people working as diligently as we do gave me hope for the future.”
Participant at 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“This awareness is so critical—to articulate the heavy load we’re carrying. People are still experiencing it, but only seeing the tip of the iceberg, the history that is built up.”
Participant from 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“Truth is going to make you uncomfortable. If you’re not uncomfortable, you are not doing it right. You have to be comfortable in the discomfort.”
4Rs Steering Committee member

*the way. Try discussing what happened at Oka, for example, and you’ll quickly realise you’ve got to explain a lot of history and address a lot of misunderstandings before you can even get to that topic.*¹⁹

be clear about the limits of what can be achieved in a given timeframe. Providing a list of resources in order to learn more is a valuable way to invite non-Indigenous participants to be responsible in preparing to enter spaces together, as well as a way of encouraging continued learning for everyone.

So context is a necessary part of the overall foundation. It should not be rushed, however, before coming to know who we are, where we come from, and how we relate to what is being discussed (our relationships). Misunderstandings exist across difference and it takes time to break these barriers down. Learning about context requires care and attention particularly for those who have experienced traumas. It is not just information sharing; these are experiences that are lived and carried daily.

All of this being said, it is important to think about setting context carefully and in ways that are engaging and participatory. We should always

19 <http://apihtawikosisan.com/aboriginal-issue-primers/>



“It’s tough to think about it. When you are talking about heavy things like children being taken away from their communities... It’s really heavy stuff. It’s not the best stuff to talk about or the best stuff to live through. I’m surfacing a lot of feelings where I talk to them [non-Indigenous people] about this stuff.”

Participant from 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“This is something that others need to experience, particularly those who have the philosophy that this is in the past and people need to get over it. I think if more people came, it would create a more supportive healing and reconciliation movement.”

Participant from 4Rs gathering in Sault Ste. Marie, ON

“My understanding of our true history in Canada has not been an accurate one until quite recently. It’s important that I’m here to learn and to understand more about.... the truth of the people that live here, in their experience. And it’s also important, to me, of stepping beyond that to be here as a listener and a witness to the truth that other people have been living... that I have not been, that I haven’t been hearing until recently. I’m so glad that I’m hearing it now.”

Participant from 4Rs training near Calgary, AB



Connecting our roots

Going deeper into dialogue

Once we have started to prepare the ground with some shared context, we can begin to go deeper into dialogue. This involves connecting what we have learned about history and context with our lived experiences. Neither relationships nor seeds can be neglected once they begin to grow; both take constant work and care to maintain. The need for a balanced foundation becomes clear as groups navigate the challenges of deeper conversation.



Connecting our roots

Going deeper into dialogue

Cross-cultural dialogue that is about respect, reciprocity, reconciliation, and relevance is necessarily challenging; to take care of a group is to invest in their readiness to go deep into dialogue. In practice, there is a tendency to rush past foundation-building and jump into a deeper conversation, but if youth are pushed towards deep dialogue without attending to the uneven ground, misunderstandings will happen. This can be unsafe for Indigenous youth and others coming from communities that experience oppression.

Here we make a distinction between conditions that pose learning challenges compared to threats to safety. For Indigenous youth and others coming from communities that experience oppression, we need to ensure safer conditions for discussions about historical harm and trauma.

It may seem like the “real” dialogue takes place at this time, but again we emphasize that the processes of getting there, preparing the ground, and planting the seeds involves critical conversations and learning. In other words, preparing for the dialogue is the dialogue. A garden will not grow without preparing the ground and planting the seeds with a balance of fertile soil, water, and sunlight.

To go deeper then, is to take the conversations further. A group will have been, at this point, supported in coming to understand who they are in relation to the context of reconciliation. They will have explored identity and history in ways that centre Indigenous youth. When the group is ready to go deeper, we ask: now that we know, or have a sense of where we are, what are the critical issues and conversations we want to have? What is the work we are doing, or want to do in our communities? What do we need to take our next steps?



“This particular training has brought up a few issues that I realize [were] completely off my radar. We’re addressing a very complex challenge i.e. reconciliation, with ties to racism, prejudice, systemic discrimination, personal biases, etc. Some of those things came up at this training in a way that I haven’t encountered before and it really tested my assumptions about our ability to smoothly work on this project.”

Participant from 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“I think the idea of co-creation and partnership changed for me and what that can truly look like... I saw so many cross-cultural dialogues that were invigorating and challenging (especially between [People of Colour] and Indigenous folks) and this is an area that is complex but also encouraging... Cool things are happening in our spaces and in my mind!”

Participant from 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“As a non-Indigenous person, it was a very unique experience that has sparked my interest in continuing the 4Rs dialogue going with the youth in my community. There was a shift in the way I think I should approach cross-cultural dialogues—looking to be more an observer and leave the floor open for others to speak in future events of this nature.”

Participant from 4Rs training near Calgary, AB





Harvesting

Taking it home

Harvesting could be seen as the end goal, but in practice it takes a long time to get there. The food that we grow nourishes us and is medicine; it is not a product to be bought or sold. We grow it for the benefit of others and think of giving back to the Earth and our communities. In the movement towards reconciliation, we too must always ensure this clarity of purpose, while also saving seeds for the future. We nurture the garden so that it can take care of us in return.



Harvesting

Taking it Home

There is an inherent reciprocity in caring for the Earth, and tending to a garden. We receive so much in return. Bringing a shared experience to a close should support participants to reflect on their learning and what they will be taking home.

Dialogue cultivated with respect, reciprocity, and a deeper understanding of reconciliation can grow understanding and inspiration. In sharing a powerful experience together, young people can find common interests and motivation to collaborate on issues in their communities. Specific projects or ideas may be developed during deeper dialogue, inviting participants to keep the momentum going through online communications, information sharing, and continued conversations.

4Rs nurtures this connectivity during and after gatherings through online spaces and informal network-building at the community level and is mindful of what care and support might be needed after coming together and returning home. This point in the experience is about thinking of the future, in terms of immediate next steps and also longer term possibilities. It is about realizing the energy in the room and supporting its growth.



Saving the seeds

The 4Rs gatherings have been rich experiences with both intended and unintended outcomes for participants. These are the 'seeds': the experiences, lessons, relationships, and emotions that will be carried with us as we continue our journey. The more seeds that are saved and carried forward with us, the more we will learn about the ecology of reconciliation, and the more we learn what seeds need to be planted for the future Canada we want to grow.



“I’ve learned a lot from the 4Rs cross-cultural facilitation training that I did. Learning about what actually makes a good and positive ally and navigating the lines between ignorance and naivety. Some people have no idea. Some people will come up with every way to ignore information that challenges their beliefs. Learning how to work with that in respectful ways on both sides is really important and something I am always learning.”

Participant in 4Rs training near Toronto, ON

“I spend a lot of time doing reconciliation and decolonization work in both my professional, academic, and volunteer life. These kinds of experiences are always important though for regrounding, building a stronger and larger network, and getting more tools to continue to do this work.”

Participant in 4Rs training near Calgary, AB
[Indigenous to Turtle Island]

“I hope to impact young people that are going through the period of their fast life, and navigating how to live in the Western world. In turn, this will have ripple effects to those around them. I want to do this in a way that also engages and is informed by stories and traditions passed on by our Elders.”

Participant in 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“I will always carry this with me and hope that I can find a way to contribute to the healing. I hope that many more people can gain this kind of experience to gain respect and to understand that the healing that needs to take place is for everyone.”

Participant at 4Rs gathering in Sault Ste. Marie, ON

“It was healing as well as learning and also re-ignited my motivation to keep on track with this journey of work. I realized I have very little to no knowledge of efforts being made by other people of colour when it comes to reconciliation driven initiatives. I also learned that there are so many allies focused on raising awareness and exciting projects happening all across Turtle Island!”

Participant in 4Rs training near Calgary, AB

“The most important thing that I’ve learned here during this week was my purpose being here and doing the work that I need to be doing. I hope to take away the tools and facilitation skills that have been learned and also the teachings that have been taught during this time. I hope to take all those back to my home community and do some real reconciliation work there.”

Participant in 4Rs training near Toronto, ON

CLOSING WORDS

In the 4Rs approach to cross-cultural dialogue, we are on a journey of seeding a process of reconciliation on uneven ground, knowing that it will take a long time. In this journey, there are rich and dynamic impacts on participants that challenge and encourage them in their lifelong learning and relationship building. Rather than measurable outcomes, we see these impacts as medicine. They are healing and nourishing. We are not thinking about an end product that can be easily packaged or replicated; our Framework is not an assembly line. This impact is not just for us as individuals; we are thinking of the future, the Earth, and our communities.

This Framework emphasizes that cross-cultural dialogue cannot be rushed. It identifies the need to prepare the ground for cross-cultural conversations around reconciliation that are rooted in respect, reciprocity, and relevance. There is also much work to be done in “getting there,” readying ourselves and our communities to come together across difference. When we carefully tend to these new relationships, so much is possible. We also know that there is so much at stake. As Adam Gaudry reminds us, to approach this work improperly would “reinforce all that we should be undoing.”

This Framework is also our humble contribution to growing conversations around reconciliation in Canada today. It is a call for increased investment in the leadership of Indigenous young people and community-led solutions. It is a call for thinking of the Earth—lands, waters, plants, and animals—in our pursuit of healthier relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It is a call to pay attention to the voices and perspectives of young people, to be challenged and inspired by an emerging vision of a possible Canada not yet imagined.

But the truth about how history continues to live in the present is a challenge for all of us: we have to be willing to learn from our mistakes before we can build our future. Know that wherever we are starting from, there is a path forward, all we need to do is take our first step.



“It is the work of amazing young people who want to see change in this nation and won’t stop until they see it realized. I’m happy I am one of those people and this movement encourages me to keep going. (#blessed?? LOL)”

Participant in 4Rs training
near Toronto, ON



So what's next?

RECONCILIATION STARTS FROM WHERE WE'RE STANDING, meaning that we have the power and influence to begin to shift the narrative from where we are, exactly in this moment.

From how we build relationships with the land we call home and our neighbours nearby, to the words we use, the books we read and the stories we tell to others. Together our collective microgestures have the power to shift culture in Canada.

In addition to the resources shared on the 4Rs Facebook group and website, decades of work have already been undertaken by individuals, organizations and initiatives across Turtle Island. Some great places to go to continue learning include checking out the efforts of the 4Rs national partners as well as becoming aware of the work of local changemakers across the country. Here is a small (but mighty) list of organizations, like 4Rs, who are dedicated to moving reconciliation forward in Canada:

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, nctr.ca

Reconciliation Canada, reconciliationcanada.ca

Legacy of Hope Foundation, legacyofhope.ca

Canadian Roots Exchange, canadianroots.ca

The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, philanthropyandaboriginalpeoples.ca

Canadians for a New Partnership, cfnp.ca

KAIROS Canada, kairosblanketexercise.org

This document can be translated upon request.



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