

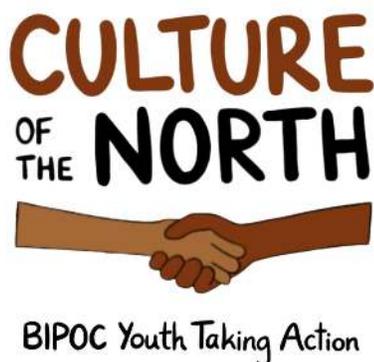


FUTURE NORTH



a network for youth

Youth-Led Project



Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action

Project Co-Leads: Kerry Yang and Aminat Lawal

Author: Keanna A. Duguay

Supported by Future North

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A Communities Building Youth Futures Initiative

Contents

Meet the Project Leads	1
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	3
Culture of the North (COTN): Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color	4
Pathways to Education.....	4
Future North	6
Culture of the North (COTN).....	6
Study Purpose.....	7
Study Definitions	7
Method.....	8
Participants.....	8
Materials/Measures.....	8
<i>Students</i>	8
<i>Staff (teachers, teacher college students and Indigenous support workers)</i>	9
Procedure.....	9
Results	10
Descriptive Statistics.....	10
<i>Survey Findings</i>	12
Students.....	12
Teachers.....	12
Teacher College Students.....	12
<i>Focus Group and Interview Findings</i>	13
Discussion	13
Future Directions	14
Project Plan	14
<i>Equity Action Teams</i>	14
Pilot Project Outcomes	16
Workshop Supports.....	16
Proposed Budget.....	17
Implications	18
<i>Calls to Action</i>	19
Future North Leadership Table.....	19
Pathways to Education.....	19
The District of Sudbury and Manitoulin School Boards.....	19
Municipality.....	20
Canadian Government.....	20
Conclusion	20
Ethical Considerations	20
Limitations.....	20
Recommendations.....	21
Reference list.....	22

Author Note: *There are no conflicts of interests to disclose. Correspondence concerning this project should be addressed to Future North, Sudbury, Ontario. Email: manager@futurenorth.ca*

Meet the Project Leads

Aminat Lawal

*Youth Intern at Future North and
Co-Lead on the Culture of the North project*

Aminat is a grade 12 student at Lasalle Secondary School and a youth intern at Future North, where she co-lead's the research project on BIPOC education. She is also a part-time crew member at Dairy Queen.



Family responsibilities over everything. That was the slogan that she has lived by, being the first child in an African family of four children. She grew up not knowing how to be involved in the community because school and taking care of her family were the priority. Since she moved to Canada, a few years ago, Aminat has been seeking to be involved - to connect deep in the community and to give back. She started volunteering at school to get steadily involved in the community. Although, her family moved a couple of times around Canada because of language and safety barriers they faced, but they settled in Sudbury.

“The complexity of this project has definitely opened my eyes to a lot of things I was initially blinded from. One of the major things I took away is that everyone has a story to tell, they just need someone to listen. It is one of my future goals to connect with more BIPOC people especially as I will be moving away for university, I want to create healing spaces/safe atmosphere of comfort for people to talk.” – Aminat Lawal

Over time, she started to get involved in the community in Sudbury. Speaking up for youth and connecting with them is Aminat's passion. At her school, she is the Vice President of the school Student Council, a member of the Youth Engagement Council, a member of the Youth Empowerment Council and a member of the Future North Youth Expert Panel.

Aminat believes that youth have a right to speak up for what they want, and it is her goal to educate them and let them know that they are not alone: youth are the Future!

“I have developed my networking skills – we have been able to expand our connections within (and outside) of the community.” – Aminat Lawal

Kerry Yang

Youth Intern at Future North and
Co-Lead on the Culture of the North project

Last on the attendance list and a descendant of the royal Emperor Yang from the Chinese Sui Dynasty (one of 48 million); Kerry Yang is a grade 12 IB student at Lo-Ellen Park Secondary School and a youth intern at Future North co-leading a project on BIPOC education.

As a first-generation immigrant, education and the youth voice have always been big focuses in her life. She is the vice-president of the student council, an RDSB student senator, a co-chair of the Science North Advisory Council, a Science North Bluecoat, a student researcher, secretary of the Volunteer Sudbury Youth Expert Council, and the organizer of an annual school supply drive. Despite being successful in her academics, what people don't know about Kerry is that she struggled a lot as a non-white student facing the lack of representation, the cultural miseducation, and the blatant racism throughout her education. She learned that this experience is shared amongst many BIPOC youth.



“The biggest challenge was tackling the project and finding somewhere to start. It seemed really daunting to carry out a big initiative until we broke it down and focused in on just the research.” – Kerry Yang

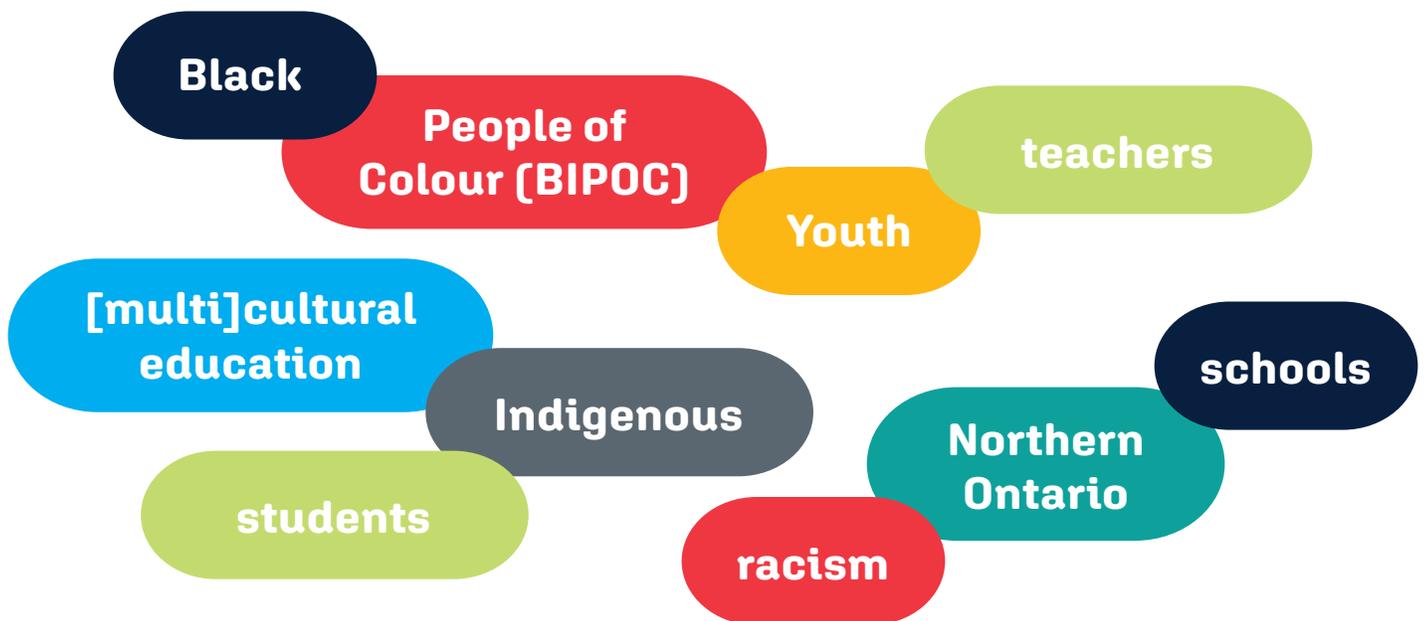
Her passion for equitable education led her to her current position at Future North, where she can connect with youth across the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin and listen to their experiences to turn them into opportunities for change. Kerry is able to combine her passions for research, leadership, community, and education, while leading a meaningful project with her youth partner Aminat. Working with Future North has been an empowering and educational experience because she feels valued as a youth voice and leader. Kerry feels capable and supported to help change the educational experiences by creating meaningful learning opportunities for the next generation of BIPOC students. Kerry is excited to continue working with youth in our region and addressing key struggles within the education system.

“The conversations we had in focus groups are probably some of the most memorable in my life and even if the project ended now, I would still be immensely grateful and proud of what we've done. So thank you for giving me this incredible opportunity...” – Kerry Yang

Abstract

The Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action is a youth-led project that is supported by Future North and funded by Pathways to Education. This project sought to determine the degree to which multicultural education is being taught within the high school classrooms in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin, and its impact on students that identify as Black, Indigenous (and) People of Colour (BIPOC). To investigate this, a youth-led project was developed to examine the lived-experiences of BIPOC students in comparison to those of teachers, teacher college students and Indigenous support workers within the four school boards i.e., Rainbow District School Board, Sudbury Catholic District School Board, Conseil Scolaire Catholique du Nouvel-Ontario, and Conseil Scolaire Public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario. This project involves descriptive research, and participants were recruited within the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. To note, this youth-led project did not use statistical analysis formulas to interpret the collected data.

Keywords:



Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge that Future North is in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin – our place of work is within the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and is in the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishinawbek and Wahnapiatae First Nation.

The Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action, youth led project is funded by Pathways to Education, and supported by Future North (a five-year initiative that is funded by the Tamarack Institute, the Government of Canada and Building Youth Futures).

Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action

The City of Greater Sudbury is the largest city in Northern Ontario with a population of over 196,000 people (Public Health Sudbury & Districts, 2018). In the Ontario publicly funded education system, there were estimated to be 630,913 students enrolled in a secondary school in the 2019-2020 school year (Public Health Sudbury & Districts, 2018).

Per the 2016 census, over 64% of the residents in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin self-identify with an ethnic origin that is not of European descent e.g., North American Indigenous origins, Asian origins, etc, (Public Health Sudbury & Districts, 2018). Multiculturalism and diversity are a fundamental value in Canada, and every Canadian has the constitutional right to practice their religious and cultural beliefs (The Ontario Public Service, 2017).

However, there are ongoing incidents of discrimination in our society that require our continuing attention. Bullying, hate propaganda and cyberbullying are major concerns for parents and students. Racism, religious intolerance, homophobia, and gender-based violence are still evident in our communities and, unfortunately, in our schools. This can lead to students feeling rejected, excluded, and isolated at school... Ontario is Canada's most diverse province, and we must find solutions to these concerns. We must address the needs of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society by ensuring that our policies evolve with changing societal needs (The Ontario Public Service, 2017).

As a recent step to support an inclusive environment for all students in Ontario, an equity and inclusive education policy has been implemented within all school boards in the province (The Ontario Public Service, 2017). The policy aims to prioritize safety and respect within the schools by valuing the acceptance of diversity amongst the staff and student body. "An equitable and inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving high levels of student achievement. It is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality education for all learners" (The Ontario Public Service, 2017).

"I hope that the BIPOC students in my classes feel comfortable, but I don't really know for sure whether they do or not. I try to teach in ways that are actively anti-racist and to foster a climate in my classes that is actively anti-racist, but as a person who has never been the victim of racism, I can't be 100% sure if my class culture is a comfortable space." – Anonymous research participant

Recent research has begun investigating the importance of multicultural education for all students regardless of race and/or ethnicity (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014). "The pedagogical importance of difference lies in the persistence of inequalities in educational performance as well as in the development of identity and empowerment, which affect how students are taught and how they think of themselves" (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014). It is widely stated that the implementation of a multicultural curriculum provides positive impacts to all learners and teachers by introducing diverse perspectives (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014). Although it challenges certain aspects of the traditional pedagogy, multicultural education is a beneficial approach (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014).

64%

of the residents in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin self-identify with an ethnic origin that is not of European descent

Nevertheless, multicultural education is still relatively new and there is still a lot of work to be done to address racial systematic barriers. “We must consider decolonising the curriculum so that curricular culture reflects the variety of experiences and backgrounds of students and faculty” (Burnett, Moorley, Grant, Kahin, Sagoo, Rivers, Deravin & Darbyshire, 2020). Hesitancy to change the traditional pedagogy is not uncommon as it can be rooted in the fear of miscommunication and a lack of awareness surrounding the facilitation of conversations pertaining to race, culture, ethnicity, and religion (Burnett, Moorley, Grant, Kahin, Sagoo, Rivers, Deravin & Darbyshire, 2020). Multicultural education can be overwhelming as it is not a dichotomous conversation – it does not imply that non-BIPOC people are all inherently racist (Burnett, Moorley, Grant, Kahin, Sagoo, Rivers, Deravin & Darbyshire, 2020). However, a dialogue that focuses on teaching the multidimensionality’s of racism must be fostered to teach multiculturalism since “racism and White supremacy culture shape the experiences of youth and adults...which is detrimental to the development of BIPOC youth” (Sánchez, Anderson, Weiston-Serdan & Catlett, 2021).

“Systemic racism affects the everyday lives of minorities, but it is only given lip service by non-minorities in the community.” – Anonymous research participant

Ghosh & Galczynski questioned: “How are students who are different in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and class socially and culturally affected by the curriculum”? Similarly, the project co-leads had pondered the same question. This curiosity led to the establishment of the Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action.

The purpose of the COTN project is to determine the degree to which multicultural education is being taught within the high school classrooms in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin, and its impact on students that identify as BIPOC. Currently, there exists research on the importance of multicultural education and the impact of racism in schools (Sánchez, Anderson, Weiston-Serdan & Catlett, 2021). However, there is a gap in knowledge with respect to data that focuses on the perspective of BIPOC youth. This project aims to prioritize the voices and lived experiences of BIPOC students by listening to their testimonials and utilizing academic literature to support their arguments with the support of Future North and the funding provided by Pathways to Education.

Pathways to Education

Pathways to Education supports 27 communities across Canada by improving high school graduation rates (Pathways to Education Canada, 2021). “For youth in low-income communities, Pathways to Education provides the resources and network of support to graduate from high school and build the foundation for a successful future” (Pathways to Education Canada, 2021). Tackling financial and environment barriers to student success, empowering youth through education, increasing civic engagement among youth and creating pathways to success are only a few (of many) ways that Pathways to Education supports youth in their communities. “The award-winning Pathways to Education Program is provided to high school students living in low-income communities across Canada. Our program’s holistic combination of academic, financial, social, and one-on-one supports is proven to remove barriers to graduation and promote positive youth development during critical high school years” (Pathways to Education Canada, 2021).



Future North

Future North is a 5-year initiative dedicated to improving available resources and opportunities for youth and young adults in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. Future North is committed to work side by side with young people in the community, to understand their experiences, and to work to influence change, so together we can improve available resources and create opportunities in our community (Future North, 2021). The Future North team is comprised of five backbone staff members including: Nicole Minialoff (Program Manager), Keanna Duguay (Community Engagement Coordinator), Charles Nyabeze (Youth Business Administrative Assistant), Kerry Yang (Youth Intern) and Aminat Lawal (Youth Intern).

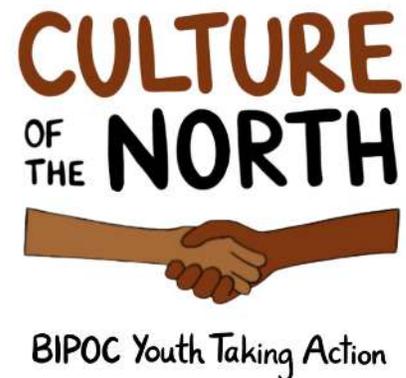
Future North is part of the Communities Building Youth Futures Initiative: “a five-year strategy to work with up to 13 communities across Canada to develop Collective Impact, system-wide solutions for youth as they build and act upon plans for their future” (Tamarack Institute, 2019). This initiative is funded by the Federal Youth Employment Skills Strategy (YESS) and Tamarack Institute (2019-2024). The Tamarack Institute also provides support and mentoring for the Future North initiative.



The Tamarack Institute is a connected force for community change... We work with leaders in non-profits, government, business, and the community to make their work of advancing positive community change easier and more effective. We do this by teaching and writing about Collective Impact, Community Engagement, Collaborative Leadership, Evaluating Community Impact and Community Innovation... We work deeply in three practice areas to advance community change: Cities Reducing Poverty, Deepening Community and Communities Building Youth Futures... (Tamarack Institute, 2019).

Culture of the North (COTN)

Future North received funding from Pathways to Education for the purpose of supporting a youth-led project within the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. Pathways to Education initially proposed the following question: “what would you tell your younger self to bring in your backpack when you started high school”? Youth were recruited through a public posting which encouraged high school aged youth to “pitch an idea” and a high-level budget for how they would implement their idea within the community. Following the successful recruitment of two students, Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action was established.



Kerry Yang and Aminat Lawal were chosen to carry out a project that stemmed from a mutual passion for cultural education. As two self-identifying BIPOC high school students, both Kerry and Aminat created the Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action, a youth-led project supported by the Future North team. Their individual lived experiences as BIPOC youth inspired them to foster meaningful conversation amongst their peers to kickoff their project.

Study Purpose

There is a gap in knowledge pertaining to the positive and negative impacts of multicultural education from the perspective of self-identifying BIPOC students in Northern Ontario. The purpose of this research project is to collect quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to the multicultural educational experiences of students that self-identify as BIPOC in Northern Ontario. The data will be compared to the experiences of the teachers in the education system to determine the discrepancies and commonalities amongst the perspectives.

It is imperative to question:

How can/are students accessing cultural resources?

How have cultural differences/being a non-white student affected student learning?

What cultural tools, resources, or opportunities would youth benefit from?

It is hypothesized that cultural barriers in the classroom create a non-inclusive environment that impacts student confidence and skills development, and that there is a lack of student-led and school-based cultural resources and learning opportunities. It is further hypothesized that youth-led projects within the arts curriculum will foster understanding and empowerment among the student body.

Study Definitions

The operational definitions of the variables in this project are as follows: the first dependent variable is multicultural education, which is “any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013). It is measured by the lived experiences of students (BIPOC versus non-BIPOC) and teachers (BIPOC versus non-BIPOC). The second dependent variable is racism, which is defined as the act of prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people, based on their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group (that are often identified as a minority or marginalized group) (Oxford Dictionaries, 2022). Examples include microaggressions that target certain populations or cultures (Oxford Dictionaries, 2022).

The independent variables in this project are gender ethnicity (BIPOC versus non-BIPOC), secondary high school and achieved social status (student, teacher, or Indigenous support-worker).

Method

Participants

The COTN project engaged 220 participants in the District of Sudbury-Manitoulin from September 2021 to November 2021. The participant population consisted of 111 current and former students that self identify as BIPOC and are between the ages of 15 and 30 years old. As well as, 38 participants that are current teachers, teacher college students and Indigenous support workers in the four school boards of the District of Sudbury-Manitoulin. These participants were recruited to participate in the project by use of the Future North social media pages, by poster distribution within the schools and by word of mouth. To note, the remainder of the 71 participants were engaged in informal interaction and demographic information was not collected. For that reason, the 71 participants that did not partake in the surveys, focus groups and/or interviews were excluded from the data set. The total sample population used in this project for research purposes is 149 participants.

Total sample population of 149 participants.

111 current and former students that self identify as BIPOC and are between the ages of 15 and 30 years old

38 teachers, teacher college students and Indigenous support workers in the four school boards of the District of Sudbury-Manitoulin.

Materials/Measures

Primary data was collected for this project by use of multiple surveys, focus groups and interviews conducted with the participant population. Secondary data was collected for this project by use of literary review.

Students

Primary data was collected from the student participants by use of surveys and focus groups. The survey was offered in both official languages (French and English) and consisted of a total of 17 questions. The participants were asked demographic questions, as well as questions pertaining to their educational experiences as BIPOC youth. The survey was open and ready to be accessed by participants on October 27, 2021, on the Google Documents platform and complete anonymity was maintained. The survey was formally closed to responses on November 20, 2021. Further, all participants were entered into a giveaway to win a \$100 e-gift card of their choice, as well as a pair of Nike Air Force 1's in their size. The two winners were randomly selected at the end of the response collection period.

The focus group participants engaged in a one-hour virtual interview that was offered via Zoom. The participants were able to choose from 4 different sessions that were offered at various times and days throughout the month of October 2021. Each session consisted of 3-5 participants, as well as 4 researchers (2 researchers to facilitate the focus group and 2 researchers to take notes and manage any technical difficulties). The audio of each focus groups was recorded, and names were omitted from the recordings to maintain anonymity – all participants gave verbal consent to being recorded.

Staff (teachers, teacher college students and Indigenous support workers)

Primary data was collected from the teachers and teacher college students in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin by use of surveys. Two different surveys were offered for these participants. To note, the surveys were offered in both official languages (French and English). The teacher participants were asked demographic questions, as well as questions pertaining to their professional experiences as teachers in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. The teacher college student participants were also asked demographic questions, but their questions were geared towards their educational experiences towards becoming teachers. The survey was accessed by participants on October 27, 2021, on the Google Documents platform and complete anonymity was maintained. The survey was formally closed to responses on November 20, 2021. Primary data was collected from Indigenous Support Workers by use of interviews via the videoconference platform Zoom. Further, all staff participants were entered into a giveaway to win a customised basket valued at \$120 for their participation. The winner was randomly selected at the end of the response collection period.

Procedure

The Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action project involved a primary analysis of qualitative and quantitative data derived from the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. Analyses involved complete case analysis of participant responses to examine the degree to which multicultural education is being taught within the high school classrooms in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin, and its impact on students that identify as BIPOC.

The target sample included all 220 as specified in the dataset(s). Record exclusion criteria included: records with no formal demographic answers, those that did not meet the age criteria (15 to 30 years old), those that did not self-identify as BIPOC (with respect to the youth/student participants) and those that did not uphold the expectations of the project responses by inputting invalid answers. The inclusion/exclusion criteria process was determined at the beginning of the project and maintained throughout the entirety of the project. Overall, approximately 32.3% (71) of the participant records were excluded since they did not meet the criteria specified for this study. Remaining were a total of 149 participants for analyses (67.7% of the original participants).

32.3%

of the participant records were excluded since they did not meet the criteria specified for this study

Results

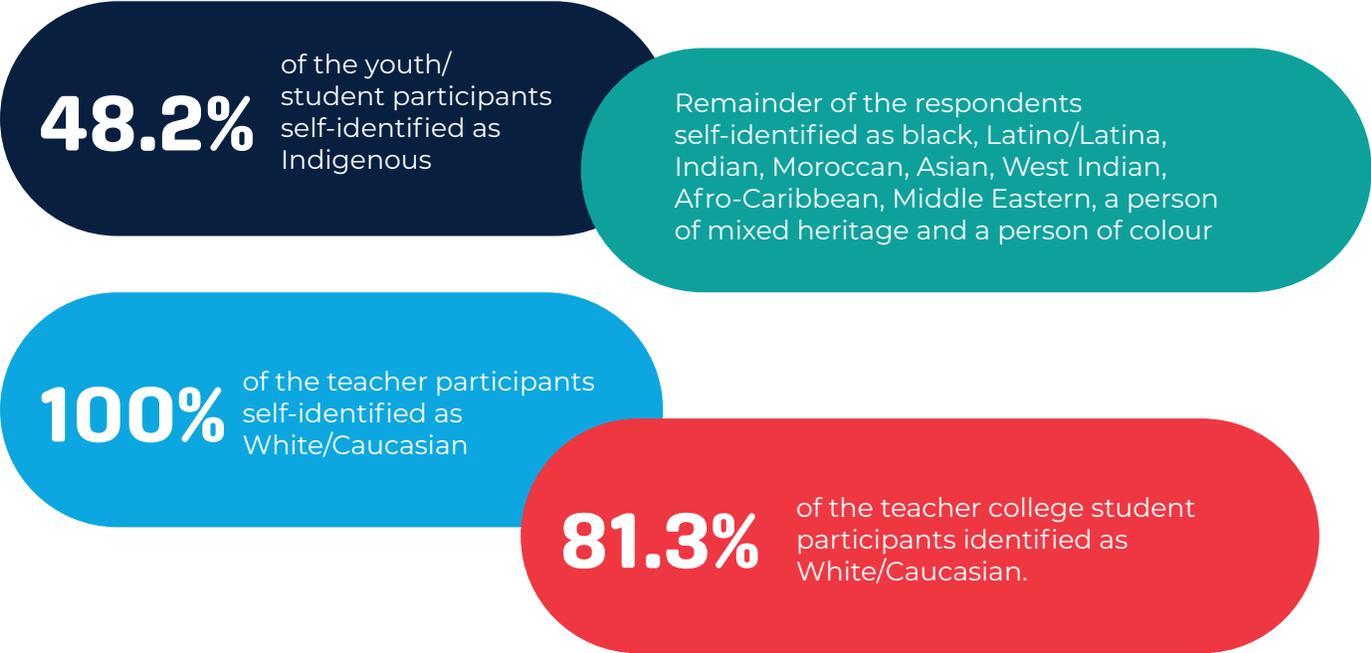
Descriptive Statistics

As stated above, the project sample consisted of 149 participants: 131 of those participants are survey responses (95 youth/student responses, 20 teacher responses and 16 teacher college student response), 16 of those participants (youth/students) participated in a focus group and 2 of those participants (Indigenous Support Workers) participated in an interview.

The demographic questions in the 3 different surveys that were used in the project provided data with respect to the participants. Per the results, 30 schools were identified and 42% of the survey participants attend a school within the Rainbow District School Board. Only 3 of the 4 identified school boards in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin were found within the dataset and 11 schools were identified as out of the designated district.

This youth-led project was developed to examine the lived-experiences of BIPOC students in comparison to those of teachers, teacher college students and Indigenous support workers with respect to multicultural education. For that reason, data pertaining to the ethnicity of the participants was collected. Per the results, 48.2% of the youth/student participants self-identified as Indigenous and the remainder of the respondents self-identified as black, Latino/Latina, Indian, Moroccan, Asian, West Indian, Afro-Caribbean, Middle Eastern, a person of mixed heritage and a person of colour. Regarding the teacher and teacher college students survey responses, 100% of the teacher participants self-identified as White/Caucasian and 81.3% of the teacher college student participants identified as White/Caucasian.

Per the results



Research Findings

The COTN project results can be summarized by identifying 6 key themes that were consistent in the survey, focus group and interview research findings. The dataset supports the identification of racism, the value of lived experience, the impact of early years, politicization, representation, and the desire for learning opportunities as important themes in this project.

Throughout the process of analysing the dataset and identifying the 6 key themes that was compiled from the survey, focus group and interview results, specific important findings were discovered. Upon further investigation, it can be observed that there are commonalities amongst the testimonials from the youth/student participants. In the instances that multicultural education was introduced in the classroom, the subject matter pertained predominantly to the exposure of cultural teachings with respect to the Indigenous culture. Non-self-identifying Indigenous participants noted that they were grateful for the exposure to another culture aside from European/ Colonial imagery, but they expressed sadness towards the lack of genuine multicultural education.

Moreover, a recurring sentiment that can be identified in the quantitative data is the misrepresentation of various cultures in the few instances that they were taught in the classroom. Such as, participants that self-identified as Middle Eastern stated that the education that was provided on their culture tended to be archaic and victimizing. These participants expressed a yearning for multicultural education that did not instill a negative connotation regarding their culture.

In addition, self-identifying Indigenous youth that attend the Alternative Education Program at the N'Swakamok Native Friendship Centre shared similar sentiments towards their experiences. The participants that opted to attend the alternative education program rather than attend a secondary high school in the four school boards of the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin had starkly different experiences in comparison to the other participants. These youth stated that they felt supported and empowered in their education as they were learning cultural teachings. Also, these participants further detail that their experiences pertaining to multicultural education (that was provided by Indigenous teachers in the program) were positive and inclusive.

6 key themes that were consistent in the survey

Identification of racism

Value of lived experience

Impact of early years

Politicization

Representation

Desire for learning opportunities

Survey Findings

Students. The student cultural education survey received 95 responses: 90 of those responses are from the English survey and 5 of those responses are from the French survey. This participant dataset consists of 50% of the respondents that between 15 and 17 years of age. The results are as follows: 67.8% of the respondents stated that racism has affected their education to some degree and 66.7% of the respondents stated that the amount of cultural representation and education has impacted their overall education. With that said, 84.4% of the respondents stated that they want to engage in more cultural education and more specifically, 63.3% of the respondents would you like to engage in more cultural education through an artistic medium. Further, 27.8% of the respondents feel as though they have/had adequate support at school to engage in cultural education.

67.8%

of student respondents stated that racism has affected their education to some degree

30%

of the teacher respondents stated that they have witnessed racism amongst staff (from staff to students)

Teachers. The staff cultural education survey received 20 responses (all from the English survey). Per the results, 30% of the respondents stated that they have witnessed racism amongst staff (from staff to students). It was calculated that 50% of the respondents stated that they are not comfortable with the quality and quantity of cultural education that students and staff receive, and 85% of the respondents stated that they think that cultural education and BIPOC representation affects student learning. The responses identified that 80% of the participants stated that they want to engage in more cultural education training and 40% of the staff stated that their school does little effort to help students speak out against racism.

Teacher College Students. The student teacher college cultural education survey received 16 responses. This survey identified that 68.8% of the participants have witnessed racism amongst students while completing placements in the schools in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. 56.3% of the teacher college students stated that when choosing their course schedule, they were not given the option to choose cultural courses i.e., electives that provided learning on various cultures. And 68.8% of the participants stated that they are not comfortable with the quality and quantity of cultural education that they received in teacher's college.

68.8%

of the Teacher College Student participants stated that they are not comfortable with the quality and quantity of cultural education that they received in teacher's college

Focus Group and Interview Findings

The COTN project facilitated 4 focus groups with students/youth and 2 interviews with Indigenous Support Workers in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. The findings are as follows: 66.7% of the participants in the focus groups stated that they have experienced racism, 81% responded that they have witnessed racism and 73.9% of the participants are comfortable talking about race, cultural identity, and associated struggles. Furthermore, 84.4% of the participants responded that they would like to engage in more cultural education.

81% responded that they have witnessed racism

The qualitative findings demonstrate that there is a desire for increased representation and a diversified curriculum in the classroom, as well as more hands-on learning opportunities that pertain to multicultural education. It can be deduced that the BIPOC youth are seeking more leadership opportunities that could support multicultural education. There is a particular interest in microgrants and guest speaking opportunities that will allow BIPOC youth to actively engage in their learning, with preference to artistic cultural education such as BIPOC literature, murals, and art project e.g., drawing, writing and music.

Discussion

The Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action project sought out to determine the degree to which multicultural education is being taught within the high school classrooms in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin, and its impact on students that identify as Black, Indigenous (and) People of Colour (BIPOC). To investigate this, a youth-led project was developed to examine the lived-experiences of BIPOC students in comparison to those of teachers, teacher college students and Indigenous support workers within the four school boards i.e., Rainbow District School Board, Sudbury Catholic District School Board, Conseil Scolaire Catholique du Nouvel-Ontario, and Conseil Scolaire Public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario.

With respect to the findings, the initial hypotheses cannot be denied nor proven. Given that statistical analysis was not conducted, this research project would require further analysis (on a larger scale) to validate the findings. However, it is possible to deduce that there is a need (and desire) for more multicultural education opportunities within the classroom.

Per the results, it is hypothesized that further research would confirm that cultural barriers in the classroom create a non-inclusive environment that impacts student confidence and skills development. Further, it can be deduced that there is a lack of student-led and school-based cultural resources and learning opportunities and it is hypothesized that youth-led projects within the arts curriculum will foster understanding and empowerment among the student body.

Future Directions

Project Plan

To capitalize on the findings of this project, Culture of the North is proposing a plan for a pilot project that aims to reduce the negative experiences lived by BIPOC student in the classroom and support multicultural education in Northern Ontario. The proposed pilot project is currently being referred to as: The Equity Action Teams.

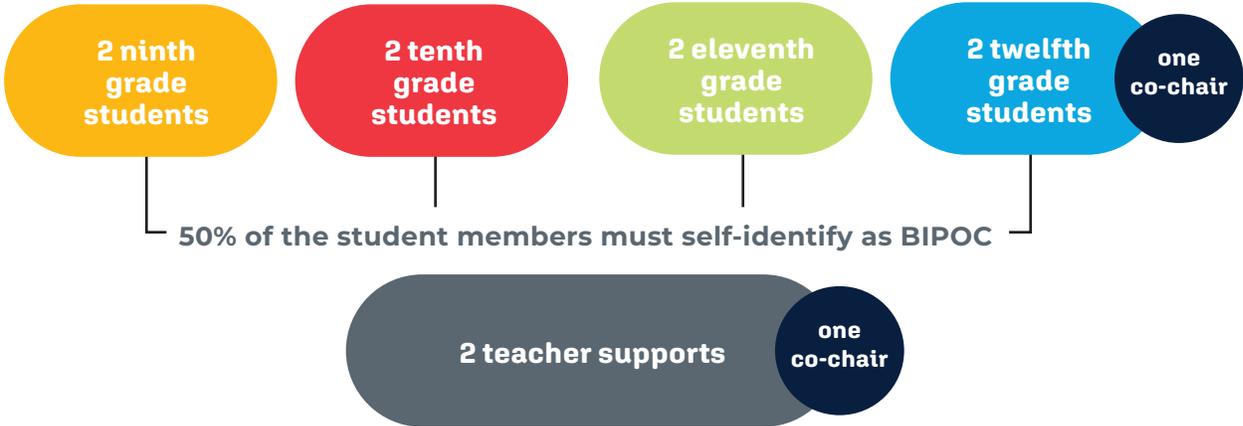
In brief, four schools will host a 10-week structured pilot project that will include all the necessary tools, resources, mentorship, workshops, and training to establish a student led Equity Action Team within their school. Each Team will receive a \$5000 fund for an arts-based project to engage youth in learning, celebration and understanding of diverse cultures within the District of Sudbury-Manitoulin. Each school will commit to ensuring communication pathways are clear for students to connect issues with the ongoing strategic priorities of individual schools and school boards.

Equity Action Teams

The Equity Action Teams will consist of 8 student members: 2 ninth grade students, 2 tenth grade students, 2 eleventh grade students and 2 twelfth grade students. The purpose of this criteria is to ensure that each grade within the school is represented. Further, this structure encourages mentorship by aiming to foster an environment of learning amongst the younger and older members in the team. The Equity Action Teams will not tolerate a hierarchal dynamic amongst the student members, rather it is planning for sustainability (long term implementation) and a diverse background of different lived experiences. One of the 12th grade students will be nominated to co-chair the Equity Action Team. To note, the 50% of the student members must self-identify as BIPOC.

Further, two teacher support must be members on the Equity Action Teams. This will consist of a teacher with a passion and interest in multicultural education, and an arts teacher that can help facilitate the art components of the program. When possible, the teachers must both self-identify as BIPOC. If this is not feasible given the staff directory, the two teachers must have up to date anti-racism and allyship training. One out of the two teachers must co-chair the Equity Action Team alongside the 12th grade student co-chair.

Members:



The schools that will be selected to partake in the proposed pilot project must meet the following criteria:

1. Identify a clear communication pathway between the Equity Action Team and Administration Team.
2. Identify reporting mechanisms that are appropriate and minimize stress on students and administrators.
3. Identify a space where the Equity Action Team can regularly meet and store program supplies.
4. Communicate openly with Future North about Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (E.D.I) priorities.
 - As noted above, the proposed pilot project will be thoroughly structured to follow a cohesive 10-week timetable that consists of weekly goals.

The weekly breakdown is as follows:

WEEK 1 consists of a recruitment and onboarding period

WEEK 2 focuses on providing workshops to all members for training purposes

WEEKS 3 AND 4 are a designated time for designing and developing the arts-based project that the team chooses to pursue

WEEK 5 TO 8 consist of implementing the arts-based project within the school

WEEKS 9 is an evaluation and reflection period

WEEK 10 will end the pilot project by taking the time to plan for sustainability and build on momentum

Pilot Project Outcomes. The Equity Action Teams will focus on multicultural education by prioritizing youth leadership and youth-led actions, creating a safer space, implementing a support system, fostering open communication, and nurturing arts-based learning. This will be possible by launching the pilot project and 4 youth-led Equity Action Teams in select high schools. The selected high schools will not have pre-existing youth-led equity, diversity and inclusion groups; therefore, the Equity Action Teams will be connected to the school administration and the board priorities to ensure youth leadership. Also, the schools with higher BIPOC populations will be prioritized – creating safer spaces and cultural supports for the BIPOC students.

The Equity Action Teams will receive:



By aligning student identified priorities and concerns with existing E.D.I strategic priorities of the school boards, clear communication pathways for partnership will be ensured. With that said, the school administration teams must work with students to ensure actions are heard, acknowledged, and addressed. All these steps will lead the Equity Action Teams towards designing and implementing an arts-based project that increases inclusivity, celebrates culture, and supports anti-racism efforts.

Workshop Supports. The training and workshops designed by the COTN youth-led Project Co-Leads and the Future North team are a key aspect of the launch of this pilot project. The Equity Action Team members will all partake in a mandatory training period that is tailored for this project, given that it will be created in consultation of BIPOC youth and professionals. The workshop supports will provide an array of resources that will be fundamental to the goals and values of the Equity Action Teams to prioritize multicultural education.

Firstly, tips and tricks for speaking on sensitive and emotion driven topics that pertain to intergenerational and intercultural differences will be implemented within the training. This will support positive and proactive communication skills. Secondly, professionalism and partnership will be key themes in the training period. All members will be guided towards understanding the importance of working effectively with executives by always maintaining professionalism. Thirdly, it is important to ensure that all members of the Equity Actions Teams fully understand key policies, practices and processes that exist within the structure of a school board. For instance, the communication pathways, the policies, the procedures, the codes of conduct and the steps towards making changes within complex systems. Lastly, the Equity Action Teams will foster allyship by ensuring appropriate use of language, non-performative actions, discussing the concepts of race, privilege, equity, and the traits of a strong ally.

Proposed Budget

The COTN project (supported by the Future North team) consisted of the recruitment of two youth Project Co-leads, a project identification period, a research period, and the completion of this report. This initial phase has been identified as phase 1 (from September 2021 to January 2022) in the budget proposal, which already received \$18,500 of funding to support the research phase. The proposed pilot project consists of 5 more phases that have been detailed below:

- Phase 2 (February 2022 to August 2022) is the pre-launch and preparation phase which will require \$10,580 in funding. It consists of the development of the materials and workshops, the recruitment of schools and the creation of a toolkit. An action team will be formed with interested community partners to develop workshops and training materials based on existing resources in the community. E.g., Allyship training through Public Health Sudbury and District.
- Phase 3 (September 2022 to November 2022) is the pilot project launch phase which will require \$23,000 in funding. At this point, two schools will be selected, and they will receive honoraria for their students, the arts-based project budget, and the overall supplies for the project. The project will then be launched in both schools.
- Phase 4 (December 2022 to February 2023) is the evaluation and improvement phase which will require \$5,000 in funding. The review of the findings, successes, and challenges of the initial launch of the pilot project (the first two Equity Action Teams) will commence to produce a summary report.
- Phase 5 (March 2023 to May 2023) is the pilot project expansion phase which will require \$28,000 in funding. This has been identified as the time to expand the Equity Action Teams in two new schools and proceed to supply the honoraria for their students, the arts-based project budget, and the overall supplies for the project. The project will then be launched in both schools.
- Phase 6 (June 2023 to August 2023) is the sustainability phase which will require \$5,000 in funding. The evaluation, reporting and sustainability planning with all four Equity Action Teams will be conducted.

Budget Breakdown

Phase 1 (research)

September 2021 to January 2022

\$18,500

Phase 2

(pre-launch & preparation)

February 2022 to August 2022

\$10,580

Phase 3

(pilot project launch)

September 2022 to November 2022

\$23,000

Phase 4

(evaluation and improvement)

December 2022 to February 2023

\$5,000

Phase 5

(pilot project expansion)

March 2023 to May 2023

\$28,000

Phase 6 (sustainability)

June 2023 to August 2023

\$5,000

The proposed budget for the launch of the pilot project also includes a \$5,000 bursary fund. In the dataset for the COTN project there is an identified need for more BIPOC youth/student opportunities and inclusion. This proposed bursary fund can be awarded to one (or divided amongst multiple) BIPOC youth(s). The selection criteria for this bursary fund can be determined at a later date, in consultation with identified partners such as Black Lives Matter Sudbury, the Public Health Unit of the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin, Youth Rex, Pathways to Education, Indigenous communities and the Rainbow District School Board. In sum, the budget proposal for the launch of the next 5 phases of the proposed pilot project (as well as the bursary fund) is \$71,580.

Implications

Future North (and COTN) requires support from Educational Professionals to understand existing priorities and support and enhance initiatives already in place. The Equity Action Teams contract is a key aspect of this project, for all parties. It will likely be a new concept to the youth members, but it will introduce the importance of commitment. The contracts will also foster partnership and commitment by ensuring ongoing accountabilities for all parties involved. Students, teachers, and administrators have all been significantly affected by the pandemic. The goal of this pilot project is for the schools to implement an easy and accessible project that is timely and important, and to recognize the limitations of all parties. Flexibility will be an aspect of the Equity Action Teams.

Nevertheless, the students that partake in the proposed pilot project and the members of the Equity Action Teams will have the opportunity to develop various 21st century skills that will aid in their future ambitions. The skills development includes, but is not limited to:



Calls to Action

To best support future youth-led projects, the Culture of the North team have proposed detailed wish list items that involves all potential parties in the proposed project plan. These key items are changes and/or supports that are best suited for a multicultural education in adjunction with the proposed Equity Action Teams that have been formulated from the current dataset of the COTN project. These propositions are a call to action for the Future North Leadership Table, Pathways to Education, the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin School Boards, the Municipality, and the Canadian Government.

Future North Leadership Table

It is recommended that a policy and protocol for increased representation of BIPOC community members on the Future North Leadership Table are established. Further, the members of the Leadership Table should review processes and protocols within individual agencies to consider the implications of this research within their own work. The Future North Leadership Table will support future development of this work through Future North's mandate and strategic priorities.

Pathways to Education

Continued support and funding for Culture of the North through the implementation and evaluation phase is a key component of these calls to action as it would support the expansion of the Equity Action Teams project within other host communities, post-pilot project. In addition, the consideration of the establishment of a permanent program in Sudbury: the gateway to Northern Ontario.

The District of Sudbury and Manitoulin School Boards

The COTN project encourages an increase in hiring of BIPOC teachers, administration, and school board employees; implement trainings such as unconscious bias training and protocols for ensuring an increased presence of BIPOC staff. When increased hiring is not immediately possible, the inclusion of BIPOC guest speakers, trainers, workshop presenters, elders, knowledge keepers within the school environment to support an increased presence of BIPOC leaders within the school setting.

It is also important to establish clear anti-racism policies and protocols with strategies to address incidents of racism amongst students, recognizing that traditional reporting measures do not effectively prevent or put an end to racism. The COTN dataset supports the establishment of workshops, trainings and youth-led information sessions in elementary schools and high schools that discuss topics of racism, how to be an ally, definitions of racism and support students to become allies from an early age. This action would coincide with the existing literature on the importance of multicultural education. Further, an increase in the number of Indigenous Support Workers within schools would be ideal, as well as the consideration for Black student support workers to foster safer spaces. Finally, this is a call to action to support youth-led research projects and review policies that exclude and invalidate high school student-led research.

The Municipality

This youth-led project has clear hopes that the establishment of communication pathways for BIPOC youth to be able to bring their voice to the Mayor and Council are considered. As well as a consideration for the needs of the growing newcomer population. The descriptive statistics in this project support the establishment of opportunities for BIPOC youth to complete paid internships and co-op placements to work towards the increased representation of BIPOC individuals within the staffing complement for the Municipality.

The Canadian Government

This is a call to action to the Canadian Government to support the expansion of the Equity Action Teams Projects within other schools following findings and outcomes of the pilot project. Also, to support the Equity Action Teams to bring their identified challenges and areas of concern to higher levels of government to support systems change.

Conclusion

Ethical Considerations

The COTN project maintained ethical procedures throughout the entirety of the project. The participants were made aware that they may be subject to emotional distress given the nature of the survey and interview questions. All participants could seek additional information, support and/or revoke consent at any point throughout the project given that the respect for the dignity of participants is prioritized. The protection of privacy, as well as anonymity of the participants and adequate level of confidentiality of the research data is ensured. All participants provided verbal informed consent. In addition, all possible conflicts of interests with respect to the researcher(s) were declared to maintain objectivity. Finally, the research was conducted with honesty, transparency, and full disclosure.

Limitations

The COTN project faced research restrictions and constraints that must be acknowledged. For all parties involved, this research project was a new endeavour that required evolving changes towards expectations. The learning curve that this project entailed brought upon many lessons for future youth-led projects. For instance, upon greater reflection it has been deduced that a longer time frame for a youth-led project is required. It is imperative to the success of a youth-led project that all Project Co-leads and mentors are aware of the expectations of the project, but also realistic with the demands of research. It is not realistic to task high school students with conducting a research project without an intensive learning and training period – to fully understand the skillset and previous research knowledge that each member is bringing to the project is key. However, to do so, a greater time frame is required. With respect to this research project, the condensed deadlines did incur limitations.

It is important to note that the lack of ethics training for all parties involved was a limitation. It would have been beneficial to have all team members (rather than just one) complete their ethics training and certification to avoid added steps to maintain ethical standards. Again, this was largely due to the newness of a youth-led project model and the restricted time frame.

Other limitations to this research project are the sample size, data collection, methods, and access to data. Although the participation population was greater than 100, this is not representative of all BIPOC youth in the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. Given that this project consists of qualitative data, there is always the possibility of sample bias as questions and/or responses can be misconstrued. Human bias is also possible with respect to the Project Co-leads as it is a topic that stems from an innate passion – this is a potential limitation. The research methodology used in the COTN project could have included alternative methods of analyses i.e., statistical analyses which would provide greater opportunities to validate and/or deny the hypotheses.

Finally, obtaining access to data and/or resources is a limitation to the findings of this project. It is difficult to navigate a research project without accessible information from all parties involved. The pathways of communication with the school boards did incur limitations as it was time consuming and challenging to determine the correct approaches for youth-led research implementation in the four school boards of the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin.

Recommendations

Future North supported this project by aiding in the report preparation and templating, providing mentorship and training, assisting in the recruitment of participants, providing support in moments of need, developing the final presentation, providing research guidance and support, as well as drafting the final report. Throughout this project, the Future North interns and COTN Project Co-leads acquired an array of skills that will be beneficial to their future academic and professional careers. Research, presentation skills, community engagement, organization, time management, leadership, networking, teamwork, creative thinking and design, adaptability, communication, and objectivity are examples of the skills acquired. Nevertheless, youth-led projects require adequate professional mentorship and resources to be successful. A training period that reviews essential skills for conducting research and working professionally are encouraged.

"My cultural identity makes me unique from other people, which makes me proud."

"As I've grown up and learned about how amazing it is to be me, I love it."

"Once you find those people, you feel like there's even this small community behind you and that you belong"

– Anonymous student participants

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