

Kinship Rising

UNAPOLOGETIC, RESURGENT, CONNECTED, SOVEREIGN BODIES.



RESTORING
CONNECTIONS



RESURGENCE

Home. Connection. Healing. Awesomeness!
The Surrounded by Cedar and Kinship Rising
Indigenous Youth Wellbeing Research Project

By Carmin Blomberg, Dorothy Stirling, and Sandrina de Finney



The Surrounded by Cedar Youth Advisory Council is a collective of youth in care or formerly in care who meet regularly to participate in workshops and projects that support leadership skills. Our Council also provides guidance to Surrounded by Cedar on their child and youth programs. As a way to reclaim connections with our cultures, communities and identities, we come together to learn from and support one another in our modern life while practicing traditional ways. By connecting with Elders, knowledge keepers and community supports, we have opportunities to manifest a sense of belonging with self, lands, waters, family, and all our relations. Gathering together also fosters a sense of connection and stability, and provides supports to build reliable, respectful and healthy relationships.

Home. Connection. Healing. Awesomeness!

These are words Indigenous youth chose to describe an arts-based research project on Indigenous youth wellbeing. The project is a new partnership between Kinship Rising and Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services (SCCFS), a local Indigenous agency that works with children and youth in foster care. The project is led by a team of amazing youth researchers from the SCCFS Youth Leadership Council, which consists of Indigenous youth in care or formerly in care.

During this project, the Youth Council has been working as a circle under the guidance of SCCFS youth facilitator Meagan Saulnier, artist and artistic mentor Yuxwelupton Qwal'qaxala (Bradley Dick), and the Kinship Rising team—Anna Chadwick, Angela Scott, Chantal Adams, and principal investigator Dr. Sandrina de Finney. Each week, the youth take part in hands-on land- and arts-based workshops focused on healing, restoring connections to land and culture, and developing leadership and art design skills. Some youth have taken on additional research tasks such as photo and multimedia documentation, surveys, digital storytelling, and writing (including co-authoring this newsletter!)



*Making art and circle sharing, Tseycum First Nation
Photo credit: Jaadaa Stinlaa/Chantal Adams*

"I loved the circle work and the vision exercise to see what was bothering us and I also loved the group energy and all the materials and food provided." - Youth Council Member



Kinship Rising is a community-engaged research project focused on restoring Indigenous practices of gender wellbeing. In response to the epidemic of gendered colonial violence impacting Indigenous communities, our projects foster land- and arts-based research workshops with Indigenous youth, young adults, and community members on issues related to gender-based reclamation, healing, and resurgence. Kinship Rising: Restoring Body-Land Sovereignty.

Dorothy Stirling, SCCFS Youth Leadership Council member and co-researcher with the project, shares how taking part in the arts-based research process has impacted her: "Art has always been something I've been passionate about and a part of what I do and who I am. I always wanted to return to it. I definitely didn't think I could do as well as I did with the project. Art gave me a lot more confidence." Dorothy describes how the workshops gave youth "new ways to make art, express ourselves and our issues, and connect together."

For Carmin Blomberg, also a SCCFS Youth Leadership Council member and co-researcher, one of the most significant aspects of working on an Indigenous research project is "building relationships with other youth, community members, mentors, knowledge keepers, land, spirit, and all our relations." She adds, "hearing others' truths made me feel validated in my lived experiences of displacement and discrimination. There is a word in my Cree language, Wetaskowin, which means 'to live in harmony.' This is the feeling I felt many times during our gatherings as we all met each other where we are at, with so much encouragement, guidance, and unconditional love."



*Making art and circle sharing, Tseycum First Nation
Photo credit: Shantelle Moreno*

"I enjoyed the circle, smudge ceremony with healing medicines, sharing a meal together, and freedom to practice and take photos of what we personally envisioned." - Youth Council Member

Surrounded by Cedar Mural

"The crew is amazing!!
Everyone is so nice.
The art was just awesome,
I loved it and also it was
just a good energy.
I enjoyed healing from
nature and being together."
- Youth Council Member

"I loved sharing a
traditional meal, hearing
the story behind it and
giving thanks to the hunter
and spirit in a good way. I
loved connecting with
everyone through good
medicine."
- Youth Council Member

"I liked smudging being
outside, sharing our pics
trying out new skill, I
enjoyed seeing everyone
and making cedar roses, I
liked everything about it."
- Youth Council Member

The group's most inspiring project so far is the creation of a large mural that will greet visitors when they arrive at Surrounded by Cedar. The mural conveys the powerful vision of young people who have grown up in the foster care system, to remind visitors of the spirit of Surrounded by Cedar's work. Dorothy talks about how the mural "brings all the Indigenous youth together from Surrounded by Cedar to talk, eat, and paint together. We all get to know each other well working on an incredible piece of art. I think it's great helping Indigenous youth artists connect together in a good space... it feels kind of like a full circle." "As a youth growing up with so much loss, displacement and discrimination", Carmin adds, "the Kinship Rising project helped me dismantle internalized colonial harm through traditional practices such as storytelling, connection to land, loving relatives and cultural wellness practices. I could feel my ancestors guiding me. All my relations heard me and released some of the pain I had been holding: We were healing together."



*Youth working on their art designs, Surrounded by Cedar
Photo credit: Jaadaa Stinlaa/Chantal Adams*

"I loved working with medicine and bonding with each other about our ideas and catching up on each others lives, getting to know one another better" - Youth Council Member

"The words, the youth and simply how they showed up each session was medicine like no other. As someone that has experienced much loss over the last while this work has filled my cup in so many ways."
- Yuxwelupton Qwal'qaxala (Bradley Dick, artistic mentor)

"Being heard and seen."
- Youth Council Member

"The importance of family and community we gather in life who help us, I heard the voice of my ancestors reminding me I am not alone."
- Youth Council Member

"Creating space for expression"
- Youth Council Member

"Hay'sxw'qa si'em na'kwilia"
(Thank you respected all)
-Yuxwelupton Qwal'qaxala
(Bradley Dick, artistic mentor)



*Youth designing and painting their mural, Surrounded by Cedar
Photo credit: Jaadaa Stinlaa/Chantal Adams*



Photo credit: Meagan Saulnier

"My vision for Indigenous youth is..."

- Self-love
- Sovereignty of the spirit, body, and land
- Resurgence of culture and traditional language and practices
- More Indigenous outlets for youth to learn culture
- Indigenous youth leadership in action

- Youth Council Members

Surrounded by Cedar Youth Council Mural

The mural will be blessed during an upcoming ceremony in order to ensure the group's work is upheld with utmost respect and honour .



Photo credit: Ash McDonald

For more information about Kinship Rising projects, please visit our websites:
kinshiprising.uvic.ca and landbodyart.ca.

Kinship Rising is based at the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria. We acknowledge with great respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples whose sovereign homelands the university occupies, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ Nations whose relationships with this land remain unbroken. In making this acknowledgement, we commit to everyday practices that uphold Indigenous self-determination. Kinship Rising is supported by funding from the Canet Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Insight grants).