

Indigenous Women from the Sixties Scoop Healing through the Full Moon Ceremony and Storytelling at Winona's Place

"I just feel better, it's like it was a reflection of letting go of things and putting into words instead of sitting at home thinking from the head and the heart. They're not same as using your words. So that's where the circle comes in - it's like I say what I'm suffering, I just say it. I get emotional and cry, I cry openly, I get sad openly."

Executive Summary

Due to generations of colonization, cultural genocide and violence, Indigenous peoples have faced oppression and been denied healing. This trauma is heavy, and opportunities for healing are lacking. In this report, YWCA Toronto's Winona's Place and its research partners wanted to carve out a space to promote healing amongst Indigenous women and study its effects. Through the Full Moon Ceremony and a series of teaching circle sessions and storytelling with Knowledge Carriers, a space was created for participants to exchange knowledge and share their experiences of the Sixties Scoop in a safer environment. This project also helped to build relationships and community through access to healing and medicines and to culturally specific Knowledge Carriers.

This report summarizes a community-based project at YWCA Toronto's Winona's Place establishing an environment to promote cultural connection for Indigenous women who are Sixties Scoop survivors. The objectives were to:

- Increase their cultural knowledge through teachings and engaging with Knowledge Carriers
- Participate in a full moon ceremony and teaching circles, and
- Identify other supports and resources the women require.

The Sixties Scoop was a disturbing practice beginning in the 1950s until the 1980s in which social workers forcibly removed First Nations, Inuit and Métis children from their Indigenous families and placed them in non-Indigenous homes across Canada, the United States and Western Europe.

The trauma of being “scooped up” from one’s home and culture continues to affect survivors – and their families – today, through intergenerational trauma and in practice, via the child welfare system (known as the Millennial Scoop.) Often Sixties Scoop survivors report a loss of identity and culture, as well as physical, sexual and emotional abuse, which can have intergenerational and long-lasting repercussions. Connecting or reconnecting to one’s Indigenous culture provides a level of support for well-being and healing that is unlike Western approaches to mental health.

Participants spoke about how learning cultural traditions, plants and elements has supported their healing journey by providing daily guidance. They developed relationships with each other, community mentors and teachers, and the research team. These relationships benefitted the collaborative nature of the project and supported a deeper experience for all participants.

Throughout the project, the women discussed their experiences of the Sixties Scoop and the Millennial Scoop, trauma and hardships resulting from that experience, reconnecting to Indigenous culture to deal with their trauma, the impact of Indigenous culture on their own well-being, and the significance of programming for Sixties Scoop survivors.

This report offers community organizations a roadmap of possibilities when thinking about supporting Indigenous women who may have experienced the Sixties Scoop or other forms of colonial violence. There are clear and considered recommendations that define roles and responsibilities for attendees. Readers will also find templates for focus groups and menus attached. As a gender-based organization working to provide safety and opportunity for women, girls and gender-diverse people across Toronto, it is our responsibility to strive towards holistic approaches that have long-lasting impacts and work towards securing justice for the communities we support.

We recognize that the land on which we work is the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

The territory is subject to the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, the Ojibwe and allied nations to share peacefully and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, the meeting place of Tkaronto is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory.