

Culture and Healthy Relationships Report: Connect the Dots

The Students Commission of Canada

The Students
Commission
of Canada

*Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement*



La commission
des élèves du
Canada

*Le centre d'excellence pour
l'engagement des jeunes*

Table of Contents

Connect the Dots: Cultural Sharing Counters Harms	3
Connect the Dots: Preventing, Repairing Missteps	3
Themes: What Did Young People Discuss?	4
Products: Addressing Stereotypes to Dreams	6
Recommendations.....	7
Showcase Canadian Influencers.....	8

Connect the Dots: Cultural Sharing Counters Harms

Across four days at the #CanadaWeWant conference, our theme team Connect the Dots created a respectful, youth-led space to explore culture, belonging, and the impact of online environments on real-world relationships. Our group named culture as central to identity; we shared experiences of racism, stereotyping, and exclusion and examined how algorithms and one-sided clips drive misinformation and amplify harm.

Over the course of the next days, our group moved intentionally from relationship-building and shared storytelling toward deep dialogue, mutual understanding, and concrete recommendations for systems-level change including public safety announcements (PSAs), media-literacy tools, and cross-organization collaboration to strengthen cultural safety and counter digital harms.

We worked together on several creative projects that expressed our shared values, identities, and hopes for change. Our “Dream Tree” used roots, trunk, leaves, and fruit as symbols for values, actions, short-term shifts, and long-term transformation, and a team artist turned our collective ideas into a vibrant final image that reflected our diversity. We also made a large poster of individual squares, each representing our cultures and selves, and invited SCC Elder Grandma Kate to ensure Indigenous representation. In addition, we produced a PSA video featuring Elder Bernard, where we challenged cultural stereotypes and shared our backgrounds, ending with the powerful statement: **“We are Canada.”**

Connect the Dots: Preventing, Repairing Missteps

Meet the Team: Culture and Healthy Relationships

Our theme team represents 22 youth who came together from across Canada, travelling from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland & Labrador. Our team was a culturally diverse group, participants included immigrants, newcomers, youth from multiple faiths, languages, and racial identities, and a wide age range. We are from many regions of origin, including Lebanon, Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Brazil, Cuba, Greece, Somalia, and South Arabia among others. Most of us chose this theme team because we wanted a space to better understand culture, identity, and how people experience the world differently.

The team’s purpose naturally evolved in three steps. First, we built a culturally safe, youth-led space where participants could share lived experience and practice inclusion in real time—from how name pronunciations are important to how missteps are repaired. Second,

we examined how social media and algorithms shape perception, relationships, and harm, with particular attention to how one-sided stories and engagement-driven platforms affect youth. Third, we came up with solutions that turn learning into action, including youth-led public safety announcements (PSAs), media-literacy and fact-checking tools, and collaboration and representation strategies that carry impact beyond the room.

We adapted to the energy of the group, sometimes taking part in large group activities and other times choosing smaller, more informal gatherings. Some of the most meaningful conversations took place during nature walks, where we spent time together outside in the snow and among the trees. We also got to know one another better during unstructured time in our room, playing games like Ludo, Uno, Jenga, and Dominos.

Themes: What Did Young People Discuss?

Respect, Belonging, and Inclusion

Respect consistently emerged as the foundation for feeling safe, welcomed, and included. We emphasized that inclusion is shown through actions, not just words. Belonging came from action—accurate names, listening, adapting to different energy levels, and addressing harm immediately. We practised real-time inclusion (e.g., correcting name mistakes; one-on-one reassurances during the nature walk).

“So maybe, like, including is showing them you want to be with them, near them – like actually showing it”

– Youth participant

“It makes a difference when people notice things right away and talk about it.”

– Youth participant

Culture and Identity

We explored culture as something that shapes who we are—values, traditions, language, beliefs, behaviours, and relationships. Culture was described as lived and dynamic, especially for immigrants and newcomers balancing multiple identities. Our team emphasized that culture influences how we move through the world and connect with others.

“Culture is like your way of life and defines who you are and the choices you make.”

– Youth participant

“Tradition and identity – it makes up your identity, a shared group memory.”

– Youth participant

Shared Experiences of Racism, Discrimination, and Oppression

Many of us, including immigrant, racialized, and newcomer youth—shared experiences of racism, microaggressions, and systemic discrimination. These shared realities created points of connection across cultures and reinforced the understanding that oppression can be experienced differently but is widely felt.

“Even though we have different cultures, oppression is something we’ve all experienced. Not one of us here can say that we haven’t been oppressed.”

– Youth participant

“What happened to him could happen to us.”

– Youth participant

Digital Harm, Algorithms and Moving to Action

We examined how algorithms reward engagement over truth, how one-sided clips distort judgment, and how these dynamics shape mental health and social relations. We went beyond self-blaming for screen use and discussed structural power—naming Big Tech, platform moderation, and political influence as central issues affecting online harm and inequality.

“People only see the choices you’ve made, not the choices you’ve had.”

– Youth participant

“We’re at the mercy of what’s coming out of big tech in the states.”

– Youth participant

Sub-themes

Humour & Language Boundaries: Intent vs impact; context and consent; firm red lines on slurs.

Real-Time Inclusion Practices: Addressing name mispronunciations/misunderstandings immediately

Belonging Check-Ins: One-on-one reassurance and small-group bonding

Energy and Flexibility: Adapting facilitation to energy levels; options to pass or participate differently.

Representation Matters: We noticed limited Indigenous representation in our group; invited Elder Bernard into the video making

Algorithms Reward Outrage: Negative engagement still boosts harmful content; partial clips become “truth.”

Mental Health & Influence: Doom-scrolling and constant negativity shape worldview and wellbeing.

“If harmful stuff can be pushed out this far, then positive narratives can be pushed too.”

– Youth participant

Products: Addressing Stereotypes to Dreams

We created several powerful projects together including our speech for our showcase presentation. One was our “Dream Tree,” where the roots represented our shared values, the trunk symbolized the actions that support our desired outcomes, the leaves stood for short-term changes, and the fruit represented long-term change. Everyone contributed their ideas to a draft version, and a very talented artist on our team transformed it into a beautiful final tree, filled with many kinds of fruit to reflect our diversity.

We also created a large poster, where each of us designed our own square to represent ourselves and our cultures. To ensure Indigenous representation, we invited Grandma Kate, one of the SCC Elders, to join us. Some of us drew pictures, while others chose words.

In addition, we produced a PSA video. Wanting to reflect Canada's diversity, we invited Elder Bernard to participate, and we spoke openly about stereotypes related to our cultures—for example, "I am not a pirate." After that, each of us shared where we come from, and we ended together with the words: "We are Canada."

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Public Safety Announcements

Invest in youth-created PSAs that promote ethical digital behaviour, challenge misinformation, and model critical engagement with social media.

Recommendation 2: Fund Canadian Tech Companies to design and run Social Media Platforms

Counter algorithmic harms and one-sided narratives with Canadian created social media platforms and fact-checking programs that surface full context.

Recommendation 3: Cultural Safety and Respect as a baseline in youth spaces

Treat respect as a baseline, get to know names, cultural practices and address harm in the moment.

Recommendation 4: Create More Spaces for Honest, Youth-Led Conversations About Culture and Identity

Prioritize youth-led circles, Q&A, and peer facilitation over lecture-heavy content to deepen learning and trust.

Recommendation 5: Increase Collaboration Between Organizations to Break Down Silos

We want collaboration across schools, community groups, cultural orgs, and youth-serving systems.

Showcase Canadian Influencers

Connect the Dots: [Points Commun](#)

[Je suis très excitée d'être ici avec vous aujourd'hui.](#)

I couldn't be more happy to be here today talking to all of you guys.

Why should we as Canadians allow foreign companies this much power over our youth? The Canada We Want Conference was an opportunity for us to learn and grow together. We grew as a group by having meaningful discussions about culture, diversity, relationships and boundaries. We didn't expect to challenge our own assumptions or that we'd realize how much we still needed to learn. Being surrounded by people from different places and cultures, broadened our perspectives. It showed us that respecting someone does not require you to agree with them but to value them as people. We heard each other out. That doesn't happen a lot these days. Shouldn't our social media platforms reflect this?

Social media affects all of us. Sometimes it shows stories that aren't fully true or that make certain groups look bad. If you're not careful, you can start believing things without checking if they're real. That can create misunderstandings and even hurt people. Social media can repeat the same negative ideas over and over again until they start to feel normal. It's important to question what we see and think for ourselves instead of letting an algorithm decide what we believe.

[Le temps passé en ligne façonne notre façon de penser, de ressentir et de nous percevoir. Ce qui était autrefois censé nous connecter, engendre souvent de la pression, comparaison et division. On compare sa vie réelle à des versions idéalisées et soigneusement mises en scène, ce qui provoque de l'insécurité, anxiété et un besoin constant de validation par le biais des « likes » et de vues. Le cyberharcèlement, les standards de beauté irréalistes, la culture de l'annulation et la désinformation ont devenus une monnaie courante, et le silence ne fait qu'amplifier ces effets néfastes.](#)

[Avant de publier ou de partager, demandons-nous si nos mots sont bienveillants. Faisons des pauses, suivons des contenus qui encouragent l'épanouissement et qui contribuent à transformer nos espaces numériques. Les réseaux sociaux ne nous contrôlent pas, c'est nous qui les contrôlons. En utilisant notre voix de manière responsable et empathique, nous pouvons faire des réseaux sociaux un lieu où la prise de parole une nouvelle norme.](#)

[Nous avons constaté que le concept de « liberté d'expression » sur les réseaux sociaux est une illusion. Les plateformes mettent souvent en avant certains points de vue plus que d'autres.](#)

Ceci mène à des situations inégales, où certaines voix sont entendues tandis que d'autres sont ignorées.

Nous recommandons que le gouvernement fédéral prenne les devants et crée ses propres plateformes de médias sociaux ! Actuellement, nos voix, notre culture et nos histoires sont en grande partie contrôlées par des entreprises étrangères. Les principales plateformes comme Instagram, TikTok et Twitter ne reflètent pas l'identité et les valeurs canadiennes. Le gouvernement canadien doit investir dans le développement de plateformes canadiennes afin d'offrir aux créateurs canadiens un véritable espace où ils seraient au centre des préoccupations. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de technologie, mais aussi de protéger notre identité, de créer des emplois et de veiller à ce que notre présence en ligne reflète qui nous sommes en tant que pays.

In addition to these platforms, we should be launching a national program to fund developers and recruit Canadian influencers to support with another major recommendation of ours: These Influencers could help with **Public Service Announcements**, to spark conversation and to expose Canadians to all the diversity in this country and appreciate that it is our biggest strength.

The Canada we want is a country that is ahead of the curve by putting young people's wellbeing first and celebrating diversity!