

Georgian Bay Anishnaabek Youth

Evaluation Report 2020-2021



Presented by The Students Commission of Canada, January 2022

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Origin Story

Nearly 10 years ago, an Elder shared a story with Georgian Bay Anishnaabek's Youth (GBAY's) organizational mentor (OM) the Georgian Bay Mnidoo Gamii Biosphere. The story talks about the local history of the Parry Sound area prior to, and the impacts of colonization. This story was about the wiigwaas jiimaan, birch bark canoe. There were two communal canoes along the Ziigwaan River in Parry Sound, the logging industry grew and the canoes seemed to have disappeared.

Anishinaabek teachings remind us that when stories are shared, those that are listening have a responsibility to play a part in the caretaking of that story. This is a foundational piece of GBAY's origin story. Community and Elders provided support and direction, our OM took the responsibility of securing funds and creating a network to support an Anishinaabe-led wiigwaas jiimaanke, birch bark canoe build.

Federal funding secured in late 2017, and a project coordinator was shortly after hired in early 2018 to carry out this 5-year project. The project coordinator (PC) is an Anishinaabekwe from Shawanaga First Nation, a recent Trent University graduate (2018) and a Parry Sound High School (PSHS) alum (2014). The goal of the project was to build a birch bark canoe, the intention was to partner with PSHS's Indigenous Studies Department and the Indigenous student group "Oshki Shkode", to optimize Indigenous youth engagement in cultural land-based opportunities.

The pilot year of the project was primarily building community connections, including strengthening relationships with local Indigenous youth. During the summer of 2018, the PC was able to spend nearly 8 weeks with Shawanaga First Nation to participate in the entire process of building a birch bark canoe - including harvesting birch bark and cedar. As a result of colonization and the legacy of residential schools, Anishinaabek throughout the Great Lakes regions have been denied the opportunity to build birch bark canoes. 2018 was the first time for many Anishnaabek in the Parry Sound area to have had the opportunity. This experience was wholeheartedly necessary in order for GBAY to build our own wiigwaas jiimaan.

Following the completion of the wiigwaas jiimaan in 2018, the PC continued project planning with Indigenous youth. Often, the conversation themes and topics were recurring: cultural revitalization, celebrating being Anishinaabek/Indigenous, cultural land-based learning, and youth-leadership. As a result of multiple Indigenous youth planning meetings, the PC led grant writing through YOF to create GBAY.

A pillar in the GBAY origin story is that the original members, including the PC, are all graduates of Parry Sound High School (at various times), and have held a leadership role in Oshki Shkode.

GBAY was created as an outlet for Indigenous youth to lead, and be immersed, in building strong community and cultural connections. Through mentorship and capacity building, GBAY's Youth Advisory Circle leads the project planning and activities - including the strategic planning of GBAY. This is an opportunity for Indigenous youth to gain work-related experience of networking, grassroots organizing, and project planning. GBAY members are all Indigenous youth from Mnidoo Gamii. The autonomy to navigate what we want to do, learn, and share is highly effective, motivating, and holds each of us accountable to each other and our communities.

Executive Summary

Georgian Bay Anishnaabek Youth (GBAY) is an Indigenous youth-led grassroots initiative that focuses on creating safe spaces for Indigenous youth to build strong community and cultural connections. The purpose of this report is to gain a greater understanding of the positive outcomes of the Georgian Bay Anishnaabek Youth programming on participants.

A qualitative analysis of a sharing circle, various program Zoom recordings, and the group's jiimaan video was conducted to evaluate individual, social, and community outcomes. Throughout this analysis, it is evident that the program yields several positive outcomes for Indigenous youth. The program created a safe space where youth can heal, grow, connect, and learn traditional skills. It also allowed youth to connect with their culture and land, and engage with their communities.

On an individual level, members reclaimed traditional knowledge and practiced traditional skills, connecting participants with their culture. On a social level, members formed healthy close relationships with other youth in the community, as well as with elders. They noted the importance of sharing knowledge with others in the community and passing on traditional knowledge for future generations. On a communal level, the program encouraged members to be more connected with their culture and land through their teachings and values. Members described how the program encouraged community cohesiveness, as people in the community were coming together as a collective, sharing their skills and stories with one another.

GBAY also implemented activity surveys in order to gain feedback on their various activities. Overall, youth felt supported and safe within the various activities. All participants agreed that they would participate in future GBAY activities and events, thereby demonstrating that they all had a positive experience. They described the highlights from the workshops, which included feeling more connected to their culture and other youth, and gaining valuable traditional knowledge and skills. Participants described the program as safe, supportive, warm, and inclusive. Finally, participants felt empowered by their new knowledge and skills, and noted how they felt more engaged with their community and with other youth.

The *Impact Visual* on the following page illustrates the overall findings and impact across all GBAY programs. The visual includes five (5) main components:

- 1) GBAY's **contributions** to their community (sewing, cooking, fish skin tanning, beading, activities on the land, etc.) are represented by the **Jiimaan**.
- 2) GBAY contributes alongside others (advisory circle, parents, partners, etc.) to provide mentorship and support for youth. These **contributors** are represented by the **people and the paddles** that propel and guide the jiimaan.
- 3) The **trees growing along the river banks** represent the **impact** that GBAY has had on Indigenous youth throughout the program's journey.
- 4) The primary **qualities** of the contributions (i.e. the program qualities) are represented by the **water**. The water nourishes the land and helps the trees grow, the same way the qualities of a program help the impact grow.
- 5) There is space for many other contributions to nourish the work and help the impact grow; therefore, the **clouds** represent the **recommendations** for growth offered by participants.

Georgian Bay Anishnabek – Our Impact



Process and Tools to Date

A qualitative analysis of a sharing circle (focus group), various program Zoom recordings, and the group’s jiimaan video was conducted to evaluate individual, social, and community outcomes. Furthermore, an analysis of custom activity surveys was conducted to evaluate feedback on the various GBAY activities.

Program	Evaluation Tools
Georgian Bay Anishnaabek Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sharing Circle (Focus Group)- Zoom Recordings- Jiimaan Video- Activity Surveys

The sharing circle provided a space for the GBAY members to reflect back on the 2020/2021 program year and talk about specific achievements, challenges, and the future of programming. The sharing circle consisted of a series of questions focusing on their thoughts on the value of the program, any challenges or barriers, how the pandemic changed programming and goals for the future.

The sharing circle was facilitated by Students Commission of Canada staff and was recorded and transcribed to be analyzed for significant themes with counts of how many times each theme was mentioned. Significant quotes were drawn from the analysis to support the numbers with thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences. Names or identifying information have been removed from the quotes and replaces with denotations such as “[name]” or a letter in place to insure anonymity.

The rest of the evaluation (zoom recordings, jiimaan video, and activity surveys) were conducted internally and submitted to the Students Commission of Canada.

Organization of the Report

This report will be broken down into the following two (2) sections:

Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis of the transcripts (sharing circle, jiimaan video, and zoom recordings) is organized based on the ¹youth engagement framework:

- **Program Qualities:** Features of the program youth appreciated and enjoyed.
- **Outcomes / Impact:**
 - **Individual Outcomes:** Outcomes that youth experience as a result of the Program that improve them as individuals.
 - **Social Outcomes:** Outcomes that youth experience due to the program that affect their social networks and relationships such as friends and families.
 - **Community Outcomes:** Outcomes that youth experience due to the program which have an even larger reaching impact such that it affects their communities or organizations.
- **Next Steps:** Next steps and recommendations for future programming.

Activity Survey Results

- **Overview:** This section summarizes the demographics and descriptions for the various GBAY program activities.
- **Results:** This section summarizes the results of the feedback from the various GBAY program activities.

¹The initiators, sustainers and qualities of engagement are all associated with outcomes of engagement; having strong initiators, sustainers and qualities can lead to a more effective youth program (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lawford, Ramey, Rose-Krasnor & Proctor, 2012; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor & Loiselle, 2002; Rose-Krasnor, 2009)

Results: Qualitative Analysis

Georgian Bay Anishinaabek Youth used qualitative tools to gain insight on the impact programming had on youth and the community. The main themes were identified throughout the transcripts as well as supporting quotes. The following summarizes the program qualities and perceived outcomes and impact brought upon by the program, which will be categorized into individual, social, and community changes. This analysis will also include a summary of the next steps and recommendations for the program.

The table below provides a summary of the findings; more detailed descriptions can be found under the table.

Category	Themes	Frequency
Program Qualities	Safe Space	14
	Positive Experiences	12
	Generative (Concern for Future Generations)	4
	Therapeutic Experience	4
Outcomes / Impact	Reclaiming Traditional Knowledge	17
	Healthy Close Relationships	10
	Cultural Connectedness	20
	Engagement	16
	Community Cohesiveness	10
	Connection to Land	6
	Supports for Indigenous 2SLGBTBQ+ Youth	5
Next Steps / Recommendations	Wider Reach and More Safe Spaces for Indigenous Youth	6
	More Activities, Meetings, and Workshops	4
	Hybrid Programs (Online and In-person)	4

Program Qualities

Participants described the crucial features of the program which they appreciated, and how those qualities contributed to their enjoyment and comfort within the program.

Safe Space (14)

One of the most common themes throughout the focus group was that participants felt they had successfully created a safe space for youth participants to discover themselves and their connection to their history and heritage as Indigenous youth. They described the space as being unique, special, comfortable, and a safe place to learn. Furthermore, members noted that they have made a specific effort since their program inception to be gender inclusive to allow for two-spirit individuals and other gender non-conforming youth to feel safe in their program. They stressed the importance of having a safe space for Indigenous youth in the community.

*Hearing those stories, hearing Anishinaabemowin when that goes with it.
That's a really, really unique and special space.*

I felt that the canoe build itself, the building process, but also the physical space, was a safe space for us to be and to learn most importantly for us to learn.

That was such a confirmation for me and for my colleagues and administrators to really see how Indigenous youth require that space.

We know it's a safe space, it's a good place for us to go and we know that our input is valued. We know that what we're saying is valid. And that we can have a good conversation about whatever it is we're trying to decide at that moment.

The participants emphasized that the main goal is to reach Indigenous youth, and because they have created such a welcoming environment, they have been able to reach a wide variety of identities in the community including adults (parents/caregivers), elders, and non-Indigenous peoples as well, strengthening their connection to the broader community.

It's a safe space for Anishnaabek to learn. Like our primary focus is with youth but we do have young kids who come out, we have elders and adults who come out. And regardless of kind of, what age group you fall into, when you come to do GBAY stuff, it's always safe. You always feel comfortable. There are always things to help take care of you, you know, water, food. I always think how great it is that someone has created a space for Anishnaabek people to do Anishnaabek things comfortably.

Positive Experience (12)

Members described how they had an enriching positive experience within the program, as it allowed them to gain new skills, make new friends, connect with their culture, and grow as a people. They described how the program offered them something to look forward to after school, and that they formed long-lasting memories. One member explained how they were thrilled to be able to share their passion with others, and that it felt good to pass on their knowledge.

I also think it was super meaningful to see everyone to have everyone connecting and building and hanging out, and just, being Anishnaabek youth. That was super awesome. And the memories that I got there, that's going to be something I'll remember for the rest of my life.

it's such a thrill for me to be able to share my passion and excitement. things like this give me a lot of energy, and it feels so good to pass it on, and I hope that, you all can take what you learned here and pass it on to other people as well.

I was excited about it. I knew it was going to be a lot of work but I was excited regardless.

You know something about it kept me coming back every single day.

Generative Work: Concern for Future Generations (4)

Members described their work as being generative, which means a concern for future generations. They stressed the importance of caring for future generations, and to leave paths like the ancestors have done for millennia. They explained how the program is a safe space for youth to share Indigenous knowledge and practices with other youth, thereby increasing Indigenous identity for future generations.

Thinking about starting for our future relatives, this work means that there is a space for the kids who are growing up now and all these other kids that will, come into being Indigenous youth that want to practice being Indigenous youth. So I think a big part of it itself, who's going to come after us?

One of our roles as Anishnaabek people, as learners is to continue to pass on what it is that we know.

This elder, she always said to leave good footprints, that's what she said, is to leave good footprints. We're going to be ancestors one day.

The work that we're doing and those prayers and that those petitions and those offerings that we're putting out there, it's for those ones, those ones who have yet to come because we're a manifestation of our ancestor's prayers, we're here because of them, right? Now it's our turn to, to do as our ancestors once did and leave paths, right?

Therapeutic Experience (4)

Members described how the activities, such as beading and cooking, were very therapeutic for them and had positive mental health benefits. They explained how the activities offered them time to reflect upon themselves and to heal. One member even described how beading helped her through schooling, which shows that GBAY has had a far-reaching positive impact.

It is relaxing, it's a really good way to think and reflect and put some good thoughts into something.

You'll have those quiet times where you're just kind of both (people) in contemplation or you're all in contemplation, and as [name] said, that's a time like our spirits are talking to each other and we don't necessarily have to have words.

This is something you can do in class, take your beads, and do it in class, it helped me through my bachelor's and through my master's, being able to bead in class, it helped me focus, helped me stay focused.

It can be therapeutic too.

Outcomes and Impact

Individual Outcomes

Individual outcomes speak to changes that happen at a personal level, whether it be with staff/team or participants. The below is a summary of a key individual change noted in the qualitative data.

Reclaiming Traditional Knowledge (17)

Members described the importance in sustaining and sharing Indigenous knowledge and practices, especially since some were lost due to colonialism. They describe feeling empowered by reclaiming traditional knowledge, and feel like they are reminding their communities and elders that they are still sharing Indigenous knowledge and practices. Members also explained how their traditional skills were like original blood memories from their ancestors, which were activated during the canoe building activity.

We have a very strong piece of responsibility and accountability to our communities in sustaining that knowledge. It's been held back from us for so long and that knowledge has been very deep within Anishinaabe people. It's really us, reminding ourselves, reminding our communities, reminding our elders, we're still here, we still want to be doing this, we want to be continuing these practices.

Being able to be part of a birchbark canoe build, you see that fire light and reignite in in the elders in our parents and even the kids themselves activating that Anishinaabe ininewin, and in a moment that original blood memory we have is Anishinaabe, and activating our skills was just unbelievable.

There are a lot of Anishinaabe youth that need that connection and to pick up this knowledge again. That is something that's been taken from us. Through intergenerational traumas, residential schools, 60 scoop, the child welfare system. It's been amazing to be able to reconnect to that knowledge.

Social Outcomes

Social outcomes speak to changes or maintenance of relationships, connections, and networks experienced by members.

Healthy, Close Relationships (10)

Members described how the program encourages healthy close relationships to be formed among members. They felt like they built meaningful social interactions, and that they were bonding with other youth in the community. During the sharing circle it was mentioned many times that this program has allowed for the youth to develop closer relationships not only with other Indigenous youth but also older members of their communities, their own families, and the program participants. The participants indicated that one of their key goals was relationship building between youth and their families to allow for them to engage in their culture as Anishinaabek peoples together as a family.

I think like another big impact is also community and relationship building. Just through a lot of the different programs we've done, it connects people within their own households and their own families. But then it also allows you to connect to other people who are participating in your programs that maybe you haven't talked to in a long time.

It's so nice for us to just get together and talk to your peers, your cousins, your family I think that that's a big impact of our programming.

And that's again friendship that's what emerges out of people coming together and kind of being in a good relationship with each other is something bigger.

Community Outcomes

Community outcomes speak to changes that happen at a community or systematic level. These changes happen beyond the program and impact a wider range of people.

Cultural Connectedness (20)

The most prevalent theme from the sharing circle was that this program has bolstered youth's connection to their culture as Anishinabek people. This cultural connectedness increased youth's self-confidence and sense of identity, and gave them a sense of empowerment. Youth describe feeling like more confident with their cultural knowledge, and eager to share their culture with others.

I think what this program does is it sort of creates sense of empowerment. And it's like mastery over Indigenous culture. You sort of like feel familiar and feel a better sense of self identity and that just makes you more confident and more willing to share your culture, sort of bridge any gaps that exist.

It was mentioned several times that this is the first generation that has the resources and abilities to really embrace their culture. The participants talked about how even their own parents do not have the same knowledge and connection to their culture. The participants also emphasized that the goal is to creating lasting connection to their culture, and they are looking forward to the future generations to ensure that future Anishinabek youth have access to their culture from a young age.

That type of resurgence and revitalization truly is about making future history. Like that's a bigger, big, bigger story. It feels like magical almost to be just waiting to see these youth just out here just living their best lives. We were just being Anishinaabe, doing Anishinaabe things that's what the canoe build was.

There are just so many different aspects of being Anishinaabe that have taught me so many different things... these experiences with GBAY are some of my biggest teachers in my life and so it's been really awesome for me to have that connection. To have that knowledge.

Participants talked about how the access to knowledge for Indigenous youth is limited, there are very few opportunities for Indigenous youth to engage in activities and ceremonies because the primary resources are in print form so they can read about their culture but not actually practice. They also explained how they want to change the narrative for Indigenous people, and that connecting with their culture allows them to heal. That is where organizations like GBAY come in to provide the actual experience for the youth to learn hands about their cultural practices and revive that which was taken from them due to colonization and its lasting impacts.

Just seeing how fast it is, how easy it is, and how fast it can happen to lose that sense of connection to the culture, I really find that now I'm trying to jump at every opportunity that comes at me to make sure that I have that connection to keep that connection there just because of how easily I lost it while I was away at school.

We are dealing with intergenerational trauma. We are dealing with so much hurt so much anger and so much shame that if we had a space as Anishinaabe youth to come together and to share our experiences and our realities that perhaps we can change the narrative. We can shift it. We can really focus on celebrating Anishinaabe life.

Engagement (16)

Participants discussed how the program encouraged youth to be more involved and engaged in their communities. Participants can sense that youth want to be involved given their positive feedback and engagement within the program. Youth expressed interest in becoming more involved, and sharing their new knowledge with others in the community, thereby widening the program reach.

They described how GBAY was created from youth seeing a problem and wanting to fix it; these same youth wanted to strengthen connection to culture through land-based activities and youth engagement. They described the important of sharing what they know with other youth, and work together to revitalize cultural connectedness in the community.

The story to behind the name, oshkinigig is really cool because it's about the youth realizing that they have to, if they want to learn the culture and the land-based activities, they're going to have to do it themselves.

The whole formation of how GBAY came to be was just a bunch of youth coming together who saw a problem. We wanted stuff to happen but we weren't seeing it in our communities we thought well if no one's doing it we might as well try.

The story of what Anishinaabe means. It's the youth realizing that they have to take it upon themselves to learn these ways and to be able to teach them to youth so that they can keep going.

I'm most proud of the youth leaders because this is their work. They came together, they defined what they wanted and they wanted land-based learning to reconnect with their culture and then share it with others.

Community Cohesiveness (10)

Members described how the program encouraged community cohesiveness, as people in the community were coming together as a collective, sharing their skills and stories with one another. They noted how their close-knit community is resilient and they kept their sense of community intact throughout the pandemic. They described their positive memories from the canoe building activity, and explained how everyone in the community played an equally important role.

There's something for everybody to do no matter if they were young, if they're an elder, or a little kid. There was always something for them to do. There, the whole building process was like that it didn't matter who you were sitting with, the what part of the jiimaan, you were working on. There was always laughs and fun and memories going on.

Community members youth, children, and elders coming in to help build as well, that was one of my favorite parts.

Members explained how the sense of belonging within the program and within the community felt like family. They also felt touched to see the amount of support they had from the community throughout the year. It is evident that the work GBAY does is appreciated and supported by other community members.

The strong sense of belonging, it was like family almost, and reconnecting with that family is the most accurate way that I could describe it.

I think the sheer impact or and amount of people that were there was just so mind-blowing. Just to see the amount of support we had. Like day to day there were always lots of people coming in and out of the building but just to see everyone there all at once was almost overwhelming just that sense of community that sense of family.

Connection to Land (6)

Youth described how they had important conversations about connecting with their Indigenous identities and their land, and redefining what that means. They explained how the canoe building activity gave them a more profound connection to their territory, and ignited a cultural flame within them. This connection with the land gives youth a sense of cultural identity and empowerment.

It is such an important conversation for young people to know and to understand, like, this new generation of Nishnaabeg that are really connecting with our identity in our homelands and redefining what that really means is incredibly beautiful.

Everybody who was involved in the canoe build, all of these young Anishinaabe still have a very profound connection to Oshkinigig but also the territory in a new way that we haven't been able to ignite and tend to in so long.

Furthermore, they described the importance of respecting the land, for instance, through sustainability and conversations of climate change. They explained that we must respect our lands and fight for change. They also described the importance of native science, which promotes sustainable healthy living, in fighting climate change.

This is a nice way to connect, and in era of really advocating for the land and the waters.

Building and harvesting for Oshkinagig was special in that it helps Anishinaabek people learn about Anishinaabe ethics but also about sustainability and respect. When you're harvesting you want to do it in the best way possible.

A program like this where you're able to reconnect Anishinaabe youth and also youth in general with native science and native culture, which is sustainable healthy living, is one of probably the most important things you could do today because we're at a turning point in the environment as well as culturally for Native Americans there's a native resurgence to make that shift to sustainable living. People have been calling for this for forever.

Supports for Indigenous 2SLGTBQ+ Youth (5)

Members described how they offer a safe space for non-binary and two-spirited youth in the community, offering them support and connection. They explained that they have important conversations revolving around gender and identity, and aim to break down systematic barriers and challenges. They described that having these important conversations is extremely important to foster change in the community.

This is an ongoing conversation about gender and identity, and really breaking down those barriers and challenging these systems that's been violently imposed on us as Anishnaabek people.

It is hard work, especially for those that identify as two-spirited, transgender, non-binary, it's really hard work, but it's so important.

To have those conversations about gender identity and pronouns even the act of discussing, and touching on that conversation of pronouns is a really big deal so miigwech for the work that you do. This is really important

Next Steps / Recommendations

Wider Reach and More Safe Spaces for Indigenous Youth (6)

The group discussed next steps for GBAY programming and offered some valuable recommendations. They explained how they hope to spread their program to other communities beyond Georgian Bay, and to reach Indigenous youth across Canada.

I hope we sort of build up to, is being able to spread what we do in Georgian Bay, in this community, to other communities as well.

Something else we've talked about that I'd like to see at some point too would be really cool lacrosse stick making. I always thought that would be cool or like snowshoe making.

Members explained how they hope to create more safe spaces for Indigenous youth in the community, and want to make the program as inclusive as possible. They hope to follow all the necessary protocols to ensure that everybody has equal access to resources. Their goal is to create a safe space in the community for Indigenous youth to feel safe to be themselves.

Creating more safe spaces for people, which I already feel like we are doing and we're extremely inclusive. But just ensuring that there's protocol in place so like resources for like everybody in that sense.

What I really want to see is GBAY grow into something that is always going to be there for Indigenous youth to learn who they are and be able to give them experiences where they can feel or they do feel they're in a safe space to be Indigenous.

More Activities, Meetings, and Workshops (4)

Members suggested that they should have meetings and activities more frequently in order to bond more. One member suggested new activities to include in the program such as Lacrosse stick making and snowshoe making.

But I think bringing that forward with us to be able to meet more frequently, I think would be really cool.

Hybrid Programs (4)

Finally, members explained that they would like to continue meeting online as well as in-person in the future, since online meetings are more accessible. Therefore, they can reach more people by having meetings online.

I actually think being able to meet online works well for a lot of us.

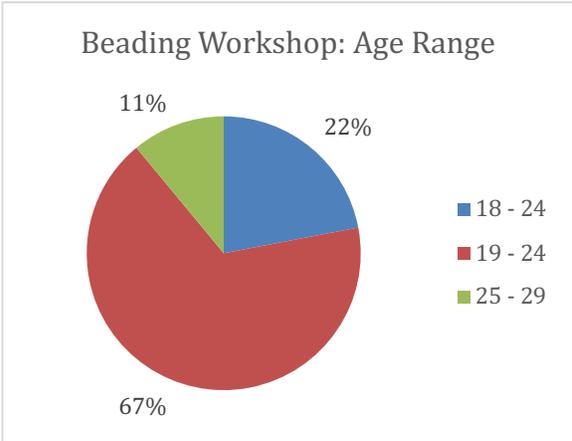
Results: Activity Surveys

Overview of GBAY Activities

Beading Workshop

The GBAY beading workshop is a free online workshop led by Christine King to create a beaded lanyard, and is open to Indigenous youth aged 13-29 in Ontario.

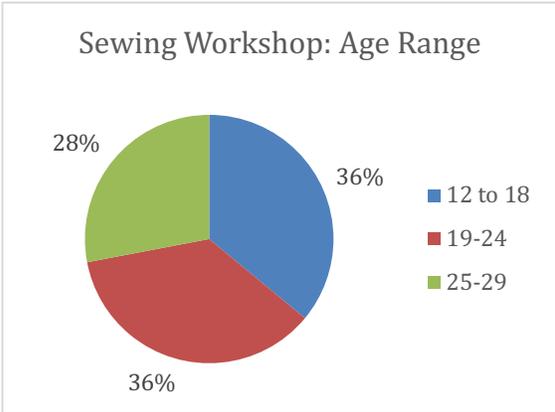
The demographics reveal that the majority of participants who attended the beading workshop were between the ages of 19-24, and identified as Anishinaabe, with some identifying as Mohawk.



Sewing Workshop

In partnership with Parry Sound Friendship Centre, Georgian Bay Anishinaabek Youth held an online workshop for sewing a ribbon skirt or vest. The workshop was led by Deina Bomberry and was open to Indigenous youth ages 13-29 in Ontario. Materials for the workshop were provided and sewing machines were available to borrow.

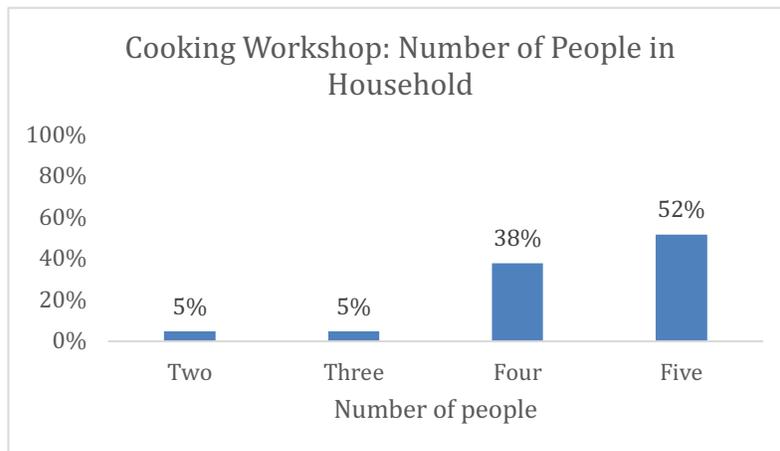
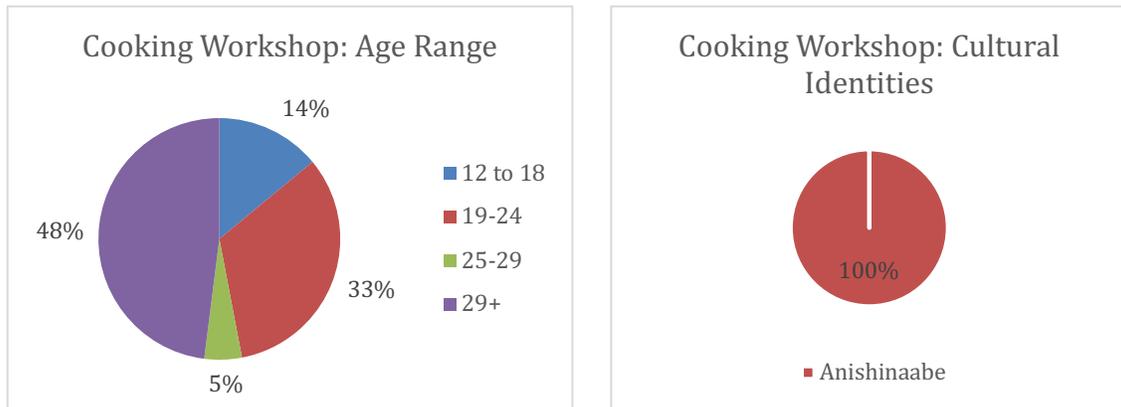
The demographics reveal that the participants were spread between the age ranges of 12-18, 19-24, and 25-19. Most of the participants identified as Anishinaabe, but some also identified as Mohawk and Cree.



Cooking Workshop

The cooking workshop was an at-home workshop where participants learned recipes and tutorials on how to cook traditional Anishinaabe foods along with the traditional stories behind the foods prepared. Provided in partnership with Georgian Bay Anishinaabek Youth and the Shawanaga First Nation Healing Centre.

The demographics reveal that about half of the participants were over the age of 29, and a third were between the ages of 19-24. Moreover, all the participants identified as Anishinaabe and over half the participants had 5 members as part of their household.

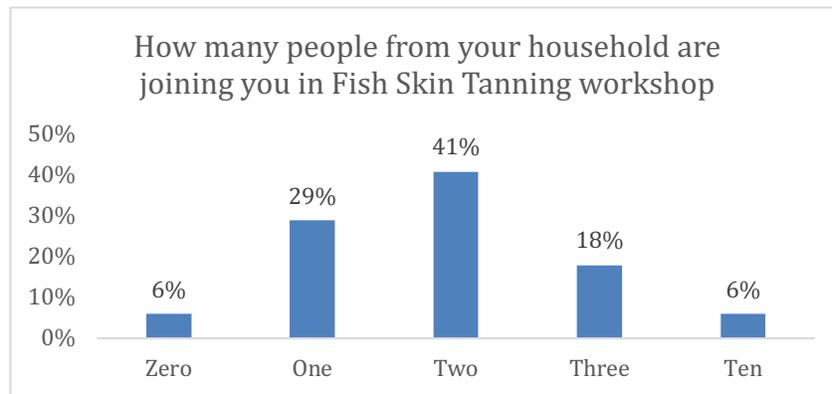
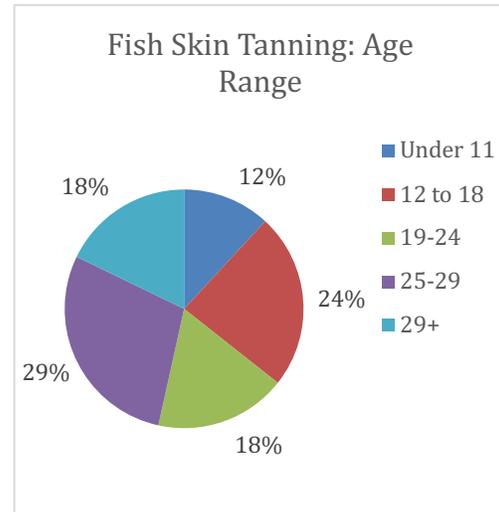
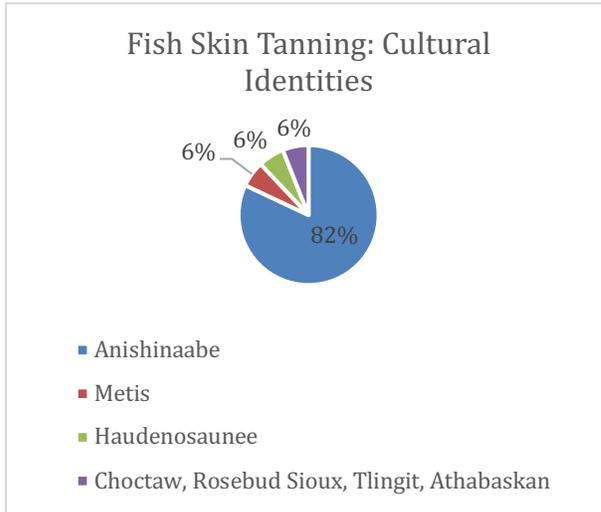


Fish Skin Tanning Workshop

The fish skin tanning workshop was hosted by Georgian Bay Anishinaabek Youth and led by invited Knowledge Holder, Amber Sandy. This was an at-home two-part virtual workshop. Many participants received fish skins that were locally harvested from the Shawanaga First Nation River, a community-led ecological preservation initiative to sustain the Walleye population.

The demographics reveal that the participants came from a variety of age ranges and cultural identities. Participants were as young as ten years old, and over 29 years old. Moreover, they

mostly identified as Anishinaabe but also identified as Metis, Haudenosaunee, Choctaw, Sioux, Tlingit, and Athabaskan.



Jiimaan Workshop

Georgian Bay Anishinabek Youth led the wiigwaas jiimaanke (birch bark canoe build) at the Sail Parry Sound Sailing School. The focus of the build was to revitalize and celebrate ancestral knowledge, teachings, and practice of building an Anishinaabe wiigwaas jiimaan (Ojibwe birch bark canoe). Click on the image below to learn more about this activity.



Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csFvWrKYO-w>

Outdoor In-Person Activity

Outdoor in-person activities vary based on the season. Spring through to summer is focused on paddling Oshkinigig. Fall activities focus on caring for Oshkinigig and ceremony. Winter and spring activities were online due to COVID-19.

Drop-in Programming with PSHS

GBAY staff visit with the Parry Sound High School's Indigenous studies department, once a week. Topics of visit vary based on the classes. Often, GBAY staff will present on topics such as: Gender and Identity, Land-based learning, Indigenous Food sovereignty, Seasonal storytelling, Indigenous arts, and more.

GBAY facilitated 14 sessions throughout the spring and winter of 2020-2021; 27 youth participated in total, and an average of 9 youth attended per session.

Virtual Visits

GBAY held virtual meetings in collaboration with other Indigenous organizations in the communities, such as the following:

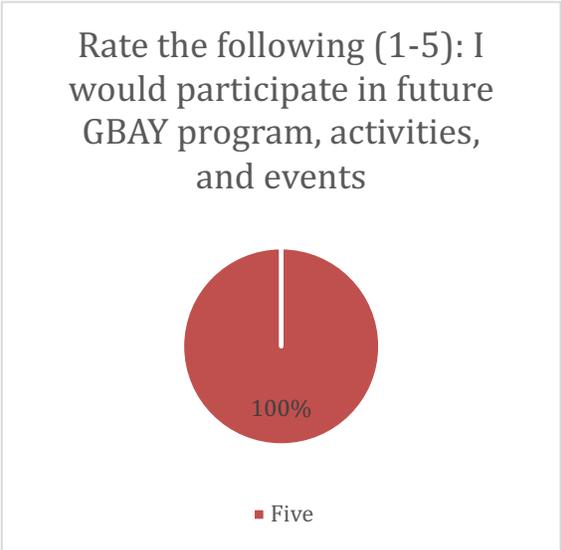
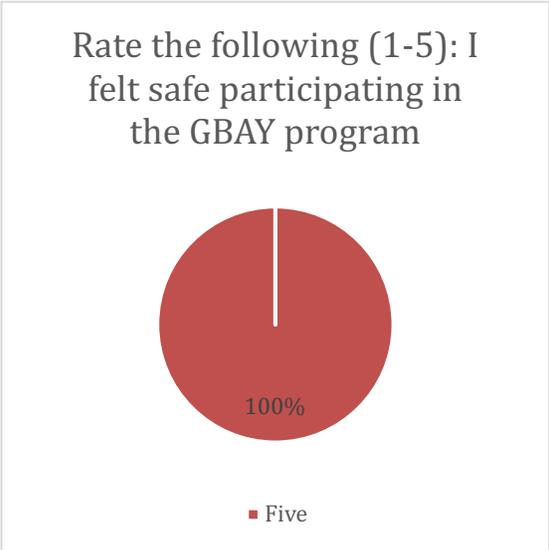
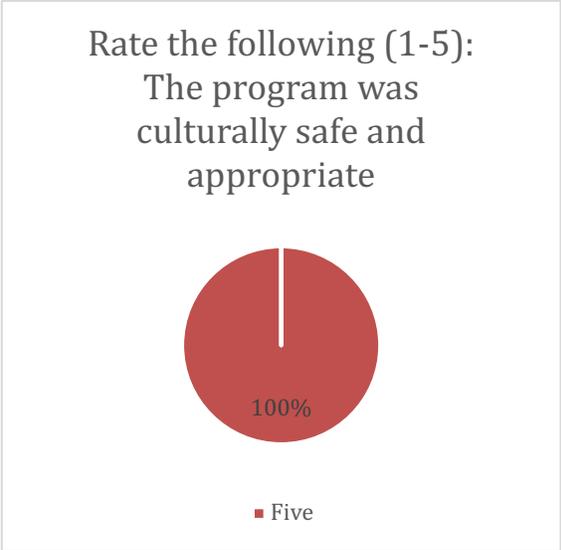
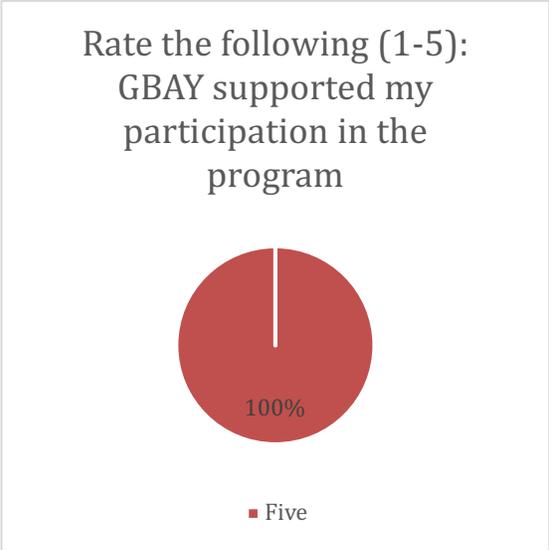
- **Nimkii Aazhibikong Eshkiniigjig** – Online Zoom meeting where participants chatted about culture-based learning, intergenerational teamwork, diversity of Anishinabek kinship, and grassroots organizing.
- **Chief Lady Bird** – Meeting with Anishinaabe artist, digital storyteller, advocate, and mentor about storytelling, art, self-care, and connecting with homeland roots.
- **Native Youth Sexual Health Network** – Meeting with NYSHN which is an inter-generational community-based network led by and for Indigenous youth that works across issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice. In their session they talked about identity, land/body connections, and how to be better cousins: Recognizing identity and using pronouns, 2S+ awareness and support, environmental justice, and health and wellness.

GBAY Advisory Circle Meetings

GBAY advisory circles are held monthly to help govern GBAY programs activities and goals. The circle consists of 8 Indigenous youth from the eastern shores of Mnídoo Gamii and one GBAY staff.

GBAY Activity Results

Participants were asked to rate their experience within the GBAY program on a scale from 1-5. They were asked questions regarding their perceived support and safety within the program, and whether they would participate in GBAY workshops or events again in the future. For all the questions, all participants gave a rating of 5, demonstrating that they feel supported and safe within the program, and found GBAY to be culturally safe and appropriate. Moreover, all participants agreed that they would participate in future GBAY activities and events, thereby demonstrating that they all had a positive experience.



Participants were also asked to describe their highlights and take-aways from the activities, as well as what they have learned from participating. The following illustrates key themes that were identified through the survey answers.

Cultural Connectedness

A prevalent theme in the survey answers was the connection to culture that was encouraged during the activities. Youth said that they enjoyed learning more about Indigenous culture and practices, and felt more connected with their Indigenous identity and culture.

Learning beading and sewing allowed me to feel more connected to the culture and helped build my bundle.

I learned about tanning fish skin and about Indigenous culture.

New Skills and Knowledge

Youth felt empowered and confident with their new traditional skills and knowledge. A lot of youth noted that the highlight from the workshops was learning fish skin tanning, and that they would carry this skill with them outside of the program. Youth also noted that they learned more about their culture and history, which strengthened their sense of identity.

I now have the ability to tan fish skins which is great since I'm neighbour to a fisherman who usually discards his fish skins after.

I learned about the terminology surrounding the jiimaan. Learned about the process and history of Jiimanke.

Safe Space

Participants highlighted how they felt safe, supported, included, and appreciated during the GBAY activities, regardless of their cultural identity. They described the setting as being very warm and welcoming, which made them feel confident and comfortable. GBAY created a safe space for Indigenous youth to connect with each other and with their culture.

The setting was very warm and welcoming and the pace was perfect.

Social Support

A theme which came up through their answers was social support for fellow Indigenous people in the community. Participants explained how they enjoyed taking care of elders, and stressed the importance of supporting their fellow Anishinaabe in whatever ways they can.

I really enjoyed all of the fall-winter programming and how we discussed supporting our fellow Anishinaabe in whatever ways we can (culturally, identities, etc.).

Social Connection

Some participants explained how their highlight from the activities was the social connections they formed. Youth expressed how important human connection is to them, and how happy they were to get the chance to connect with other youth, especially during the pandemic. They described sharing special moments with each other, even stating that socializing at GBAY events was the highlight of their year.

Human connection is a key factor for us people. It is important to cherish these moments that we get together and make the best of them.

Connecting with others and learning traditional crafts.

Connecting with like-minded folks; talking about what's important to us and coming up with a plan or project that is inspiring.

This was an amazing get-together for members to socialize and share special moments with the jiimaan that we made. This was the highlight of my year! During these tough times (Covid), it is so hard to socialize and try to feel normal when we're stuck in a world that we can't control.

Opportunities like these are what helps to make us feel somewhat normal again.

Engagement

Finally, some participants felt empowered by their new knowledge and skills, and noted how they felt more engaged with their community and with other youth. They stressed the importance of engaging with and supporting other youth, especially during the pandemic. They felt proud of what they have accomplished as a group and felt thankful for the opportunity they had to connect with other Indigenous youth in the community.

We are some pretty DEADLY youths doing some pretty DEADLY things!! from paddling and learning on the bay and water, to figuring out Zoom and online workshops! I learned that beading a lanyard is really easy.

Meeting young people where they are at is important. Innovating during COVID times to best meet/engage/support youth.

Being able to engage with other youth.

Discussion and Conclusion: Making meaning of the findings

Georgian Bay Anishinaabek Youth (GBAY) is an Indigenous youth-led grassroots initiative that focuses on creating safe spaces for Indigenous youth to build strong community and cultural connections. The purpose of this report is to summarize and highlight the outcomes of the Georgian Bay Anishinaabek youth in the 2020-2021 program year. It is clear from the content of this report that the program has made important progress towards their goals of helping Anishinaabek youth reconnect to their culture and establish practices for future generations to be able to forge their own connection easier than past generations.

Throughout this analysis, it is evident that the program yields several positive results for Indigenous youth. The program created a safe space where youth can heal and grow, learn traditional skills, and connect with their culture and elders. The program encourages healing, growth, self-confidence, and cohesiveness. Members feel supported, heard, and comfortable enough to share their thoughts and feelings with the group. Overall, the program created a safe space for Indigenous youth and elders to connect and practice traditional skills together.

This program has gone further than just creating a space for Anishinaabek youth to connect with each other, they have fostered deeper family and community connections. They have expanded the education around Indigenous people in their wider community. Finally, they have given their youth a confidence boost, and strong support system that can understand what they are dealing with because they have similar lived experiences.

Youth voice gathered in this report can help to better understand the reality of GBAY youth, the impact of such a program, and can help to develop and improve similar programs that are beneficial for youth. Additional opportunities for youth to share their stories of the program will offer a deeper examination of the changes that may be occurring as a result of the program and the process. Future evaluations could include both qualitative and quantitative tools to further evaluate the impact of programming and include more voices from participants; for instance, through another focus group. Our recommendation is to discuss the present results with youth in the community to see if this data portrays what they are experiencing.

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