


Article

# “Community Envelops Us in This Grey Landscape of Obstacles and Allows Space for Healing”: The Perspectives of Indigenous Youth on Well-Being

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**Abstract:** This paper presents Indigenous youths’ perspectives on well-being. Using Indigenous youth participatory action research with the Indigenous youth advisory committee of the Québec Youth Research Network Chair (Canada), community care emerged as the central feature of well-being and was then visually presented in the form of a postcard. We discuss the meaning given to community care, the factors that support it, and the role that a visual illustration can play in promoting change. The article is informed by the co-creation of the postcard, an online luncheon conversation, and several debriefing/reflexive sessions with the Indigenous youth co-authors. Emphasis is placed on cultural continuity, relational agency, and solidarity, offering an alternative point of view to the prevalent and damaging decontextualized, deficit-based, and individualized approaches to well-being.

**Keywords:** indigenous youth; community care; well-being; indigenous youth participatory action research; healing



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## 1. Introduction

Globally, Indigenous young people are mobilizing and seeking to (re)connect with community and culture (Berman et al. 2020; Fast and Lefebvre 2021). In doing so, they are espousing alternative forms of well-being that contrast with the individual-focused, decontextualized, and restricted approaches of mainstream Western notions of health and well-being. These have often been harmful and disempowering to Indigenous youth and communities, perpetuating damage-centered narratives (Wood et al. 2018). There is a growing call to reframe approaches and models of intervention with young people that recognize community strengths (Kirmayer et al. 2011; Vettraino et al. 2017). The involvement of young people in informing programs and services helps to ensure that these programs and services more adequately respond to youths’ lived realities. This raises the question of how this could be done in ways that are respectful, empowering, and reciprocal.

In this article, we share the story of a postcard pertaining to the significance of well-being, created with the Indigenous youth advisory committee of the Québec Youth Research Network Chair: Indigenous stream (YNC). The Indigenous youth participatory action research (IYPAR) approach allowed young people to co-create a tool to represent Indigenous youth experiences and voices related to this notion. In presenting Indigenous youths’ perspectives, we draw on the creation process itself, as well as the follow-up conversations that took place in an online panel and in the debriefing sessions amongst the authors.

As co-authors of this paper, we come together as members of the youth advisory committee from Indigenous Nations in Québec with different lived experiences and as facilitators for the YNC. Johnny is Innu and Atikamekw and is currently working as a data sovereignty community facilitator for the Montréal Indigenous Community NETWORK.

Marie-Hélène, is a proud mother and liaison officer for the Nutshimit living environment. Sébastien is Pekuakamiulnu, was born and raised outside of the community, and is currently studying medicine. Alicia is a Kanien'kehá:ka and Chilean youth research assistant for the YNC. Natasha is an ally, co-chair, and professor at Concordia University. In coming together to share this story, we aim to inform others on how to better support Indigenous youths' well-being, as well as demonstrate how Indigenous youth can and should be meaningfully involved in identifying what support entails in the first place.

## 2. Situating Well-Being

At the outset, the fact should be noted that globally, there are substantial disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples ([The Lancet Global Health 2021](#)) that call for a fundamental shift in the current modus operandi. Indigenous young people have been reported to have higher suicide, homelessness, drop-out, poverty, and incarceration rates, as well as a higher number of children in foster care ([Jongen et al. 2023](#)). An accumulation of factors account for these dire statistics, including colonization and assimilation policies that have resulted in the infringement on land rights and the loss of culture and language. The application of restrictive notions of health and well-being have been part of these policies and practices. Namely, dominant Western approaches have focused on health in terms of the absence of illness and the treatment of problems, while well-being has prioritized individual self-care and self-actualization ([Little 2021](#)). For instance, the US [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention et al. \(2018\)](#) defines well-being as a subjective measure of the presence of positive emotions, satisfaction with life, and positive functioning. Little or no consideration has been made of contextual factors or structural impediments ([de Leeuw et al. 2018](#)). Decontextualized, historical and individual-focused interventions have been disempowering, unhelpful, and ultimately harmful to Indigenous peoples all over the world.

In contrast, Indigenous peoples tend to view well-being holistically, equally considering physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects. Seeking balance of mind, body, and spirit, as well as between the individual, community, and the land are prioritized ([Kading et al. 2019](#); [Okpalauwaekwe et al. 2022](#)). Many First Nations communities represent this view in the four quadrants of the medicine wheel, where well-being comes from balance and harmony within and across the four spheres. In the circle of courage model ([Brokenleg 2012](#)), which draws on the medicine wheel and research on youth development, two quadrants involve community: belonging (being related and connecting socially) and generosity (practicing service to others).

The holistic perspective on well-being is captured in many Indigenous languages, including the Anishinaabe term Mino Pimadisi'win, which has been defined as "both a state of mind and certainty that wellness consists of cultivating our desire to be in harmony in everything, in time and in space" ([RCAAQ 2012](#), pp. 8–9), and the Cree term mamatowisomon ([Ermine 2007](#)). Similarly, the Nehiyaw concepts of miyo-wícêhtowin (laws of good relations) and wâhkôhtowin (kinship relational ethics) speak to the way the community protects and cares for the land and people ([Fast and Lefebvre 2021](#), p. 185). Thus, nurturing connections to community, including human and non-human entities, is integral to Indigenous notions of holistic well-being. [Ullrich \(2019\)](#) describes the concept of collective well-being for Indigenous children in the form of a connectedness framework that includes community, intergenerational, family, and environmental connections.

Research with the Anishinaabe youth using group concept mapping indicates that interconnectedness and balance are integral notions of what it means to live a good life/have wellness and framed by the Seven Grandfather teachings (i.e., love, honesty, wisdom, bravery, respect, humility, and truth) ([Kading et al. 2019](#)). Similarly, for the Rotinonhsión:ni (also known as the Haudenosaunee), the teachings of the Ohén:ton Karihwatékwen (also known as the words that come before all else or the Thanksgiving address) provide a guide for gratitude and care in relation to the land and all beings that inhabit it, highlighting the importance of giving thanks and honouring and respecting everything in our surroundings,

including one another (Patton et al. 2021). The values and principles contained within creation stories also shed light on community responsibility to strengthen and rebuild communal institutions, providing tenacity, dignity, resourcefulness, and hope (Kirmayer et al. 2011).

Attached to a holistic view of well-being is healing. Reflecting the interconnectedness, Richardson et al. (2021) refers to “healing/well-being” (p. 5) as a relational process: “we do not live alone in the world and social interaction is required for healing, with other human beings as well as with the natural world” (p. 7). Increasingly, social, cultural and land-based activities carried out with Indigenous young people seek to strengthen these connections as part of the healing process (Kant et al. 2014). For urban Indigenous youth, for instance, land-based retreats are being offered to support resilience, strength, connection, and well-being (Hatala et al. 2020). Storytelling, ceremony, and connection to the land nurture collective identity and provide for a sense of pride. Elders have also been identified as playing an important role for young people. A scoping review conducted with Indigenous Elders and stakeholders in Québec indicates that they contribute to individual and community well-being and that there is reciprocity with youth, as they transmit knowledge as well as learn with and from youth (Viscogliosi et al. 2020). The opportunities to connect with self and others are generative, illustrative of decolonization and Indigenizing (Fast and Lefebvre 2021).

Alongside cultural continuity, empowerment is important to consider. As demonstrated in Chandler and Lalonde’s (2008) landmark study, the more that communities had control over their services, the lower the suicide rates. Thus, self-determination is an aspect of well-being. In a similar way, the cultural safety of programs and services are determined by recipients; the quality of services and programs can be measured by the extent to which clients feel respected (Brascoupé and Waters 2009). In other words, transforming the way intervention is provided entails recognizing a recipient’s cultural and historical location as well as agency in their own well-being. This understanding is essential if we are to begin addressing the current racism and discrimination in social services and cease devaluing traditional knowledge, values, and beliefs.

Thus, decolonization, as it relates to well-being, goes beyond rejecting one form of knowledge. Rather, it implies generating alternative approaches to better meet the needs and realities of Indigenous peoples (Chilisa 2020). As encapsulated by Vizenor (1994), survivance is “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Indigenous presence as active, vibrant, and alive and survival as resistance to dominant discourses of disappearance”. This concept provides theoretical grounding for the notion of Indigenous resurgence. Thus highlighting the relevance of an IYPAR process as a means of bringing forth new understandings by youth. With this framing in mind, we turn now to the value of the involvement of Indigenous youth in participatory action research to provide a space to redefine and create novel approaches to services and programs that reflect their perspectives.

### 3. The Importance of Indigenous Youth in Participatory Action Research

Engaging with Indigenous youth in research has been cited as critical to achieving and enhancing well-being by, for, and with Indigenous youth (Okpalauwaekwe et al. 2022; Wexler 2011). First, there is the fact that in Canada and all around the globe, Indigenous young people are the fastest growing demographic. Therefore, “ethically and equitably” (FNCS 2019, p. 6), their voices and experiences matter and should have a larger presence in research. Second, research has demonstrated that young people’s involvement in the identification of problems and solutions is beneficial in terms of ensuring effectiveness (Richards-Schuster et al. 2021). Research that engages youth as partners fosters a sense of belonging, self-determination, and self-actualization, thus enhancing community well-being (FNCS 2019; Okpalauwaekwe et al. 2022). It is an empowering process for youth who, in gaining knowledge, acquire the capacity to bring about change for themselves and their communities (Blanchet-Cohen et al. 2022). However, young people have historically been the object of research, even more so in the case

of Indigenous young people, with research being carried out in exploitative ways with an inordinate focus on negative aspects of community and with little to no youth participation (Doel-Mackaway 2021).

In doing meaningful research with young people, Okpalauwaekwe et al. (2022) identified that respect for the knowledge of the lived experiences of youth involves “meaningful relationships built over time among all involved” (p. 3). Numerous participatory methods have been used with Indigenous youth, including photovoice, visual voice, participatory videography, performative arts, participatory narrative, and storytelling methods. These methods commonly foster an environment for transformative learning, reciprocal transfer of expertise, shared decision-making, and co-ownership of the research processes. For instance, photographic storyscapes with youth in a Neehithuw community in remote Saskatchewan provided a visual language for them to conduct their own research content and meaning-making (Victor et al. 2021). The photos largely portrayed youth in relationship with their surroundings, including people and the land, and showed how these connections were identity-forming. Arts and creative approaches have generally been identified as having a positive impact on young people’s well-being. Vettraino et al. (2017), using applied theater for co-creation with Indigenous youth, found that it provided a safe space and enabled dialogue and openness.

In this study, we refer to using an Indigenous youth participatory action research (IYPAR) process. In general, IYPAR is socially motivated research that is oriented towards social justice, reduction of social inequalities, empowerment, and change (Conrad 2020). Its goal is to generate knowledge that contributes more directly to practical solutions to pressing issues relevant to their lives. Indigenous youth PAR is action-oriented, with the aim of benefitting youth directly.

We refer to an Indigenous YPAR to emphasize the decolonizing lens from which we operate which prioritizes a process that is led by Indigenous youth with considerations for relational accountability, respect and relevance for the community (Bird-Naytowhow et al. 2017; Korteweg and Bissell 2015). As contended by Kovach (2021), we are building on conventional approaches to IYPAR but operate from an Indigenous epistemology that prioritizes spirituality and the well-being of the whole person. This position is particularly relevant when considering the historical context of research with Indigenous youth (Blanchet-Cohen et al. 2022), which considers that decolonization is about exploring alternative forms of knowledge production that is generative of new ways, and that such exploration needs to be done in ways that are appropriate (Cheney 2018).

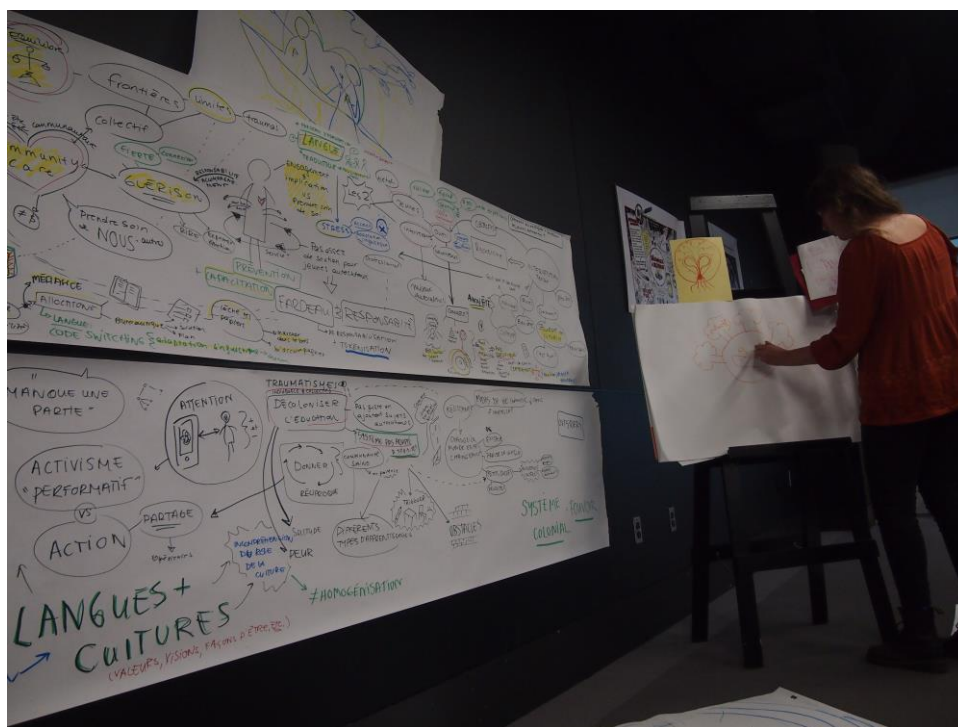
#### 4. Methods

Consistent with IYPAR, the focus and interest in redefining well-being emerged from a participatory process with the Québec Youth Research Network Chair’s youth advisory committee. This advisory committee, composed of 10 members aged 18 to 30 years old, was created at the inception of the YNC as a holder of the principles for gathering Indigenous youth, researchers, partners, and decision-makers. These Indigenous youth are members of different Nations of Québec, with varying profiles (in terms of living in community or urban areas; pursuing education or working). They joined the YNC because of their interest in research and Indigenous youth voices, many having had little to no previous experience in research.

Prior to gathering, the youth had worked on several action projects, including a first postcard around decolonizing research (<http://chairejeunesse.ca/prodmultimedias/carte-postale-la-decolonisation-de-la-recherche/>, accessed on 29 January 2023), another on Indigenous youth identities (<http://chairejeunesse.ca/prodmultimedias/carte-postale-les-jeunesses-autochtones/>, accessed on 31 January 2023), a collaborative video on how Indigenous youth could take care of themselves during the pandemic (<http://chairejeunesse.ca/prodmultimedias/video-le-bien-etre-en-temps-de-confinement-chez-la-jeunesse-autochtone/>, accessed on 31 January 2023), and a second video on Indigenous identity (<http://chairejeunesse.ca/prodmultimedias/capsule-video-un-espace-de-dialogue-sur-lidentite-autochtone/>, accessed on 31 January 2023) that

inspired the second postcard. The ideas and messages found in that first video sparked a conversation on well-being and self-care in difficult times and how youth viewed these notions a year later. This focus helped inform the next steps on defining well-being and creating a postcard that could help to inform and guide intervention workers. They decided to create a postcard, as it provided a tangible output that could easily be shared but was also effective in working collectively and conveying complex ideas.

Over a weekend retreat, seven youth advisory committee members met alongside Emanuelle Dufour, graphic facilitator and illustrator, and Véronique Picard, youth advisory coordinator, to discuss this question, taking into account their lived experiences and perspectives. The conversation began with brainstorming, moderated by Véronique, with Emanuelle documenting the discussion (see Figure 1). The rest of the day then focused on the youth selecting the highlights, key terms, and important aspects to be portrayed visually and through their lens, including the choice of imagery, colour schemes, and other aspects. The postcard was finalized through Facebook communications with the youth and Véronique providing feedback on Emanuelle's illustrations (see <https://chairejeunesse.ca/prodmultimedias/carte-postale-une-vision-inclusive-et-collective-du-mieux-etre/>, accessed on 23 January 2023).



**Figure 1.** Brainstorm process in creating postcard.

The YNC then organized a virtual discussion to continue the conversation and gain further insight on this larger notion of well-being, and particularly, community care. This discussion, part of their lunchtime talk series, featured three Indigenous Youth Committee members, two of whom were absent during the creation retreat itself, and was entitled “Community care and helping relationships: Indigenous youth perspectives”. These youth were invited to share their thoughts and experiences around these questions: How do you define well-being? When you talk about well-being, you are also talking about healing—how do you see healing manifest itself in your own personal lives or with the people you work with or your family? How do you see the postcard being used? What are some of the obstacles or hindrances to your well-being and what should be addressed?

A few months later, IYC members were invited to co-author this article. Johnny, Marie-Hélène, and Sébastien were interested in participating. To deepen the notions and

understandings within this article and to help inform it from within the realm of their own personal experiences and expertise, these three youth advisory members wrote reflections on: What does community care signify for you? What are some specific examples of the postcard's relation to your own context? What do you see in terms of the postcard's use/implications? With these reflections along with the transcripts from the creation session and the virtual discussion, we undertook a thematic analysis guided by our research question around the significance of well-being; the meaning of support and the value of the post-card as a tool.

## 5. The Perspectives of Indigenous Youth on Well-Being

In situating the perspectives on well-being that emerged from the IYPAR process, we base our preliminary analysis on the postcard (see Figure 2). We consider that the choice of visuals, the colour scheme, and the selection and placement of the words captured Indigenous young people's views on well-being. Below, we discuss the importance of community care in terms of what it represents and entails in providing well-being. We then focus on how young people view support in the context of well-being and community care: the place of youth agency, support, and other culturally relevant mediums. Finally, we discuss the impacts of the postcard as a tool for social change.

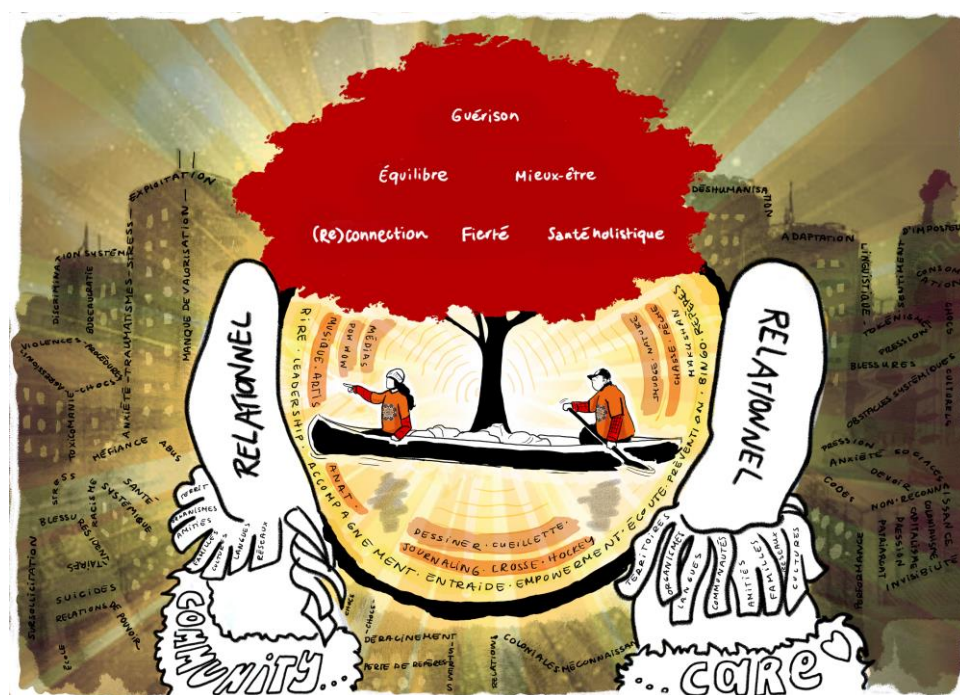


Figure 2. Postcard.

### 5.1. Community Is at the Center of Everything

Community care emerged as a foundational aspect of well-being for the youth with the words being spelled out at the bottom of the postcard. JB<sup>1</sup> explained that it is “a solid base. And you see at the bottom ‘community care.’ And I feel like it’s with community and with the care of the community that things can kind of come together and generate that circular energy”. Having this larger connection with others is a source of strength, providing a sense of belonging that supports young people’s well-being and their reconnection with their culture.

More specifically, MHC considered:

No matter the way, and more importantly, no matter the community, because to me the word *community* takes on many forms. It can be used in a broad sense; you shouldn’t limit yourself to your community of origin. You need a wider vision to

care for a community. As long as there is love, kindness, mutual help, and active listening. To care for a community is to feel something that you cannot see but that you feel with your heart and soul.

Similarly, JB said community care encompasses many aspects related to a person's health:

[It is] much more than a service as we often see it described as. . . . It is a source of networking. . . . By participating in the community, each individual gets to be given opportunities to use their voices, their history, their experiences, and relating to one another while creating change. It is a way of healing, a way of maintaining our well-being. Community care, in other words, is essential for the cultural safety of every generation.

Community care can serve many purposes, as pointed out by SLT:

When an individual can't feel comfortable seeking care within the healthcare system—it is then that the community serves its greatest purpose. . . . The stronger and the closer the community is, and the tighter its people are together, the more care and support can be sought and provided. This community bond can translate into multiple types of care such as: mental support, support and care of our Elders, our young, the support of pregnant women and of newborn children, support for the lonely and the ill, support for the sad and the angry, support for those who are lost and those who need guidance, support for those who just need an ear to talk to and a shoulder to lean on.

Thus, community care is many things to youth and offers multidimensional support at the individual and community levels. It is not defined as just one thing and is not used by youth in just one way.

Explicit criticism was made of current self-care approaches as being inappropriate and harmful, especially those that highlight Western methods and ways of thinking. FTJ, in the creation retreat, explained:

As an Anishinaabe, I find that, like, "self-care" . . . it doesn't really align with Anishinaabe values because, like, it's not "self-care" that we need, it's "community care". Because it's like, even if, you know, I didn't grow up in the community, I've always depended on it and like, that's the reality that comes with being Anishinaabe.

A key component highlighted by one youth is how community care offers cultural continuity. CBT explained the comfort of being part of a broader community and culture that continues to flourish:

Hey, I ain't the only one, you know. I ain't the only one to think: "My God, I should be learning how to bead or how to speak Innu or how to do all kinds of cultural stuff". You know, it's about coming back and looking at what others are doing, to realize it's still going on strong.

She considers that "returning to the roots" is kindling that works in ways that are both imaginary and real. Similarly, AIL said cultural continuity and well-being cannot be achieved without community.

I think, especially in Indigenous well-being, it is really that kind of connection, reconnection, back to our roots, our ancestors, our family, and our communities. None of that can be done alone. I think that is why community care is so important. . . . You know, learning a language, I mean, in a sense, you can't do that alone. And when you are learning, you are also thanking all those who have been teaching you, and all those before who have been able to pass that down, to the point where now you can learn it. . . . Like, it is so important, community is at the center of it all, and one cannot happen without the other. Well-being cannot happen without having your community there.

Indeed, well-being and healing are interconnected with community care, as SLT described.

It goes hand in hand with healing. You have to keep in mind that despite the isolation that you can feel in the city, or during the pandemic which makes it even worse, there's always a community waiting for us somewhere. And what matters is the healing that comes with going back to recharge our batteries.

While identifying the critical role of community, young people were also aware that their connection to community might vary a great deal. The make-up of a community and its availability in the first place, especially given an increasing number of urban Indigenous, are not given. Connection to a community can therefore be a challenge. SLT, born and raised outside his community, reflected on these variations:

It can be very difficult to keep a connection with the community, and even more difficult to reach out and initiate a first contact. . . . Reaching out to the unknown can be intimidating, and from personal experience, many people who do still struggle with imposter syndrome. It can be hard to understand that, as a member of a First Nation, you have the right to belong to that Nation, to its community, and to immerse yourself in its culture.

#### *5.2. We Are Pushed by Our Ancestors and by the Community around Us, While Having the Opportunity to Choose Where We Want Our Path to Go*

Alongside recognizing community care as foundational, the postcard depicted Indigenous youths' views on what supports well-being. Two elements stood out: youths' agency in their well-being and the type of support favoured.

At the centre of the postcard, there are two people in a canoe. One, a young person, sits in front and points ahead while the second, who is older, paddles from the back. JB described the significance of the image:

At the front, it's a youth that's kind of like leading, deciding where they want to go. In a way making their own path. And then an Elder in the back that's guiding and that's kind of pushing. Like you know, with the paddle, the one that's paddling and that's kind of like pushing in the direction that the youth is leading. But not like dictating what the youth should be doing. Kind of like letting them take the lead. And just like having that Elder ancestral support. And carrying traditions along.

Young people are portrayed as being actively engaged in their well-being, not mere recipients of services. SG said, "You are the one making the decision to undertake the journey. You know, ultimately, it's not the intervention itself, but you're the one making the decision to heal here". This agency includes a relational aspect: an individual's well-being is integrally connected to the collective well-being. There is a dynamic relationship between the two, as explained by VP:

If the people have a good understanding of our culture, well, then there's going to be individual wellness that's going to create collective wellness. You know, like, . . . one influences the other. . . . You know, community influences the individual, but a person also has the capacity to influence a community.

Participants described the ideal form of support: "I'm here, thinking, it's alright if you need it, but I'm like, you make your own decisions". Another participant added: "She never just gave you the answer, but she led you to find them". (FGL). In other words, "You walk yourself through it". (MHC).

Young people called for a guiding role in which the young person retains the lead. The graphic facilitator, reframing what she had heard from the youth during the brainstorming session, stated:

The worker is not the one leading you to a target, rather, they follow you. They try to highlight your strengths, your knowledge, and there are ways to bring them out in you, but ultimately you are the one leading the way. And then, that allows you to take from that what you want because you're the one in control.



Indeed, the word *intervention* was rejected by young people as being inappropriate in describing the type of support needed. Instead, they placed priority on establishing a relationship of trust that requires care and time. The youth were highly critical of the rigidity of bureaucratic modes of operating, calling for a shift in how support is actualized. Youth spoke about the importance of relationships, not meeting some criteria but rather encouraging the ways in which they want support, not viewing the support needed for youth as a checklist.

In this way, there is a more equal relationship between the young person and the one providing support. ED summarizes this idea that the youth had expressed “Also, during the intervention, both are on the same level. We’re not talking about a client; we’re talking about a person”. Similarly, JB qualified: “They’re not the type of people who think ‘hierarchy.’ It’s more like they put themselves at the same level as you and often, they will tell you, ‘I’m just here to walk with you towards your healing’”.

On the postcard, the canoe is placed on a cross section of a tree trunk that shows three tree rings that name the many different supports that young people draw on. JB described it as:

In the middle, like next to the canoe, there’s all these little things there. Which are kind of mediums. . . . And there were like cure some of these things. That like some people put their individual worth more like drawing, journaling, lacrosse, hockey . . . like by smudging, these were all these different mediums, these different ways in which we were able to kind of, you know, even like be able to have care for ourselves.

Young people value approaches and ways of doing that not only reflect their culture and experiences, but also provide spaces for sharing. JB explained the power of circles and the supportive role of Elders:

There’s a lot of healing that happens in the circle, just by coming together, having access to an Indigenous methodology, having access to an on-site elder who also does opening and closing ceremonies, and who brings her teachings with her. And to simply have access to our culture, I think that it is key for this kind of journey.

Coming together with people who share similar experiences and realities supports healing and well-being. Familiarity facilitates understanding in ways that can provide “a better ‘insight,’ in a way, compared to a colonial system, let’s say”. VP also explained how meaningful these spaces can be:

To create a space that will bring me, for example, that will bring me a lot in terms of healing, to just share a space where, you know, we can create boundaries but where we don’t have to fear being vulnerable. You know, I think that the human approach is always, it’s also a need of—well, in my case, it’s a need to connect, and to talk, and exchange.

Several references were made to the circular aspect of support. “That’s what a community is too, a healthy community, it always gives back”. explained MHC. CBT referred to the cross section of a tree trunk as a metaphor to explain her vision, which is dynamic and non-linear, and which necessitates going forward and back to the centre.

You look at that circle, and in its centre, that’s us, that small dot. And the last one, you know. All the kinds of little rings that are created over the years, it’s still us, and then yes, we can put the focus on saying: “Okay, we’re going to go further, we’re going to keep going”. But nothing is stopping us from going back to the centre, to the essence, to journey back and forth throughout the years, through us, our past, you know. We don’t have to always focus on tomorrow, the future, we can simply focus on what’s best for us right now.

In encouraging a return to the centre, her vision calls for taking the time, persevering and accepting that youth know what is best for them. Even if it may take several tries to get to where they need, they will get there in their own time.

The journey though, as explained by AIL, is not an easy one. There are various obstacles and barriers that Indigenous youth in particular face on a daily basis.

As an Indigenous youth, there's so many obstacles. First of all, our voices are not being prioritized or valued at the level of someone who's an Elder. I mean, there's so many obstacles, in the different systems. . . . But I mean, you know, just the fact that so many of us are in this moment trying to reconnect because of all those barriers or obstacles that have stopped our families, our communities, from those kinds of connections. And that today, we're trying to jump over and break those barriers to be able to live our true selves as Indigenous people and as youth.

Many feel being a part of a community helps one see the good or the positive, as opposed to when one is alone and isolated. Making connections is considered nourishing. As VP shares: "Despite the obstacles, the barriers, or the challenges, there is always this concept of being able to, to be inspired, to see that there is beauty despite the bad".

Learning through cultural activities and traditions involves relating to community in the past and present. AIL stated:

When you are learning, whether it be beading or your own language, you are thanking all those who have been teaching you, and all those before who have been able to pass down that knowledge, to the point where now you can learn it. . . . at a community level, being able to walk in the bush and being able to even hear different teachings from family members, or from Elders in the community, has a huge impact on you and the larger community.

Several young people commented on the reciprocal aspect of sharing knowledge with Elders. "But to see a new generation of young people re-engaging with their community, that it gave [the Elders] immense joy, a big smile, I think it also helps them to heal in their own way," SLT reflected. He considered "this is a two-way healing".

While turning to Elders and older adults for guidance and knowledge, young people consider that their knowledges and experiences are also valuable. Youth can also be guides for other youth, an aspect that stood out during the creation of the postcard and the debriefing conversations.

### *5.3. The Postcard Was Seen as Something Very Simple and Effective*

The impacts of the postcard were multi layered. The simple fact of having chosen certain terms, colours, and images and then seeing them represented added another level of ownership and empowerment. Every element added was purposeful, selected to represent the healing journeys, ongoing connections, and hopefulness. JB explained what the colours symbolized for him:

I really like the how it glows. Like I feel like it kind of shows that we can still find ways to thrive despite those, not boundaries, but those obstacles and barriers. . . . But then there's the shine that comes out and kind of like, yeah, that glowing light. And I feel like the colours kind of remind a bit of the medicine wheel as well. Which kind of goes in the whole health and well-being and in healing.

The magnitude of the challenge is conveyed in the use of grey to depict high-rise buildings in the postcard's background, with words such as systemic, suicide, loss of references, abuse, and mistrust marked on the buildings. JB asserted: "The city kind of represents a displacement. Like being out of community". Community care pierces through this gloomy backdrop in the form of rays of sunlight, representing a source of hope to be nurtured.

In debriefing about the postcard, we also discussed the value and use of the tool. Participants felt the postcard was meaningful because it spoke to them individually but also had a broad outreach. JB stated:

For myself, when I look at this postcard, I see a part of myself. I recognize the obstacles that colonialism has put in my way, but I also recognize my growth through it. As a recently recovered addict, I've had my fair share of battles.

He further remarked: "I find this postcard to be a beautiful tool for non-Indigenous people as much as for Indigenous people who may be at the beginning of their journey".

Similarly, MHC stated: "This postcard could be useful to anyone who wants to promote it and provide information. It can be useful in non-Indigenous educational circles as well as in Indigenous circles in order to help inform".

After sharing the postcard with his fellow doctors in training, SLT reflected:

They thought it would go a long way to bring people closer. I believe the card is simple enough to not intimidate anyone, and instead inspire others in doing something similar. We don't need to move mountains; we only need to take the first step up the hill.

Thus, the postcard portrays an empowering perspective reflecting a pathway for well-being that is attainable for young people. SLT also made the point that:

The objective is not for the community to replace the healthcare system entirely and in all aspects. However, it can still offer support in a great many ways, including providing a certain level of care, and making its people feel safe and looked after.

SLT added that: "A postcard is a great start to inspire young people to know that there are resources, to know that they are not alone, and that there are many people working on these issues".

For MHC, what made the postcard meaningful was the participatory way it was created. She stated that the collaboration of young adults from different Indigenous Nations was an important aspect of the inclusiveness of the project:

The way in which the postcard was created is unifying. It can carry a message and meaning, because it is primarily a visual representation. There is an even more beautiful message behind this image.

She identified several values reflected in the process of making the postcard: "Respect for each other's points of view, in dialogue, in the active and concrete participation of many Indigenous people". She further considered how the postcard has broad applicability given varying interpretations of the contents depending on one's own context and nation.

I am always so impressed when I open up to other cultures and Nations. They have so much to teach us no matter the differences. It is in the differences that lies resolve. A resolve for what? A resolve to understand, to open up, to work, to collaborate together and so on.

Finally, the postcard serves to convey a forward-thinking view of Indigenous young people, who are connected to the past while moving creatively into the future. SLT spoke of this process as revival:

Everyone is trying, slowly but surely, to reappropriate the culture that we collectively have lost. We are in the midst of an Indigenous Renaissance, and the one true objective is to bring the people back together and knit back the web holding the communities tight and nurturing.

This idea was echoed by JB who referred to the notion of seven generations—that everything you do or the actions you take will affect the next seven generations. JB considered the possibility that we may be in the middle of this process, that the resurgence we are seeing is because of those who came before us, and that future generations will only create a bigger wave.

But what if we are in the middle of those seven generations? What if the work has been started and what we are seeing right now and the resurgence and the sudden like, revival of languages and culture and reconnection is just the work of those generations before us that have stated those seven generations?

Indeed, young people view themselves as activists; the simple fact of existing and being themselves can be a form of resistance. According to FTJ, activism and resurgence can also be seen through drawings or passing on knowledge to others.

Just sharing some personal knowledge with other youth, sharing my resources with other youth, sharing my knowledge, already, it would be a lot better than if I go on a . . . a radio show and then talk about Indigenous things, like. You know, like, just living your life as an Indigenous person, that's already . . . that's already a form of activism.

VP recollected that:

You know, as an Indigenous person, you're already changing the world by existing. It's like a tree, you can lose your leaves with the seasons, but you will always remain standing. And I think that this is really speaking a little bit to this concept of resilience and Indigenous resistance.

## 6. Discussion

Overall, this paper shows the significance of involving Indigenous youth in defining and sharing their experiences concerning approaches to well-being. Their highlighting of community care as a foundational aspect of well-being is meaningful not only to them, but as a way of better understanding the impact and role that a community can have. Not only does it further support the need to shift away from approaches to well-being and interventions that are individually oriented, deficit-based, and decontextualized, but also offers a pathway to reimagining youth work for Indigenous futures, which supports the findings of [Johnston-Goodstar \(2020\)](#).

The different ways of doing and being as portrayed in this project illustrate Vizenor's concept of survivance (1994) and resurgence, in that Indigenous youth are vocal in identifying the type of support that would best fit their needs and that reflects their experiences and perspectives. The emphasis placed on both cultural continuity and youth agency is noteworthy, as Indigenous young people recognize their individual role situated in the context of community in the present and past. They expressed the importance of the centrality of reciprocal relationships amongst Indigenous young people, their communities, and Elders and guides. They also consider the systemic barriers that impede their well-being, as portrayed in the placing of the city in gloomy colours, with the obstacles spelled out alongside the buildings. They reflect an understanding consistent with the social determinants of health ([de Leeuw et al. 2018](#)), which recognizes that health and social inequalities are rooted in structural elements, not in an individual's characteristics or behaviours.

The IYPAR process that unfolded provided a culturally safe space for Indigenous youth to engage as partners in the research process in ways that were meaningful and beneficial to participants. Too often, participatory processes neglect to include participants in aspects of research such as the sharing and/or dissemination of findings, and even less so when youth are involved. Participants placed in such a situation may not see themselves reflected in the results or understand the conclusions ([Liebenberg et al. 2019](#)). Yet, inclusion in this stage is critical to ensuring that knowledge creation is useful and remains beneficial after the research has concluded.

Our research points to the importance of specifically involving Indigenous youth in defining solutions, consistent with a shift called for by [Okpalauwaekwe et al. \(2022\)](#) and others ([FNCS 2019](#)). These youth expressed that being part of this process helped nurture solidarity, which, in itself, is a form of well-being and community care for them, as they are given little to no opportunity to share and help identify their own needs or to help

inform social change. Their participation in the creation and definition of their vision of well-being not only allows for their voices to be heard but also results in a tangible tool in the form of a postcard. Thus, while this research similarly conveyed a holistic view of well-being (Hayward et al. 2020; Ullrich 2019), the postcard sets this research apart because it positions community care at the center stage, and specifically illustrates how this holistic vision of well-being can be supported in ways that reflect Indigenous young people's current realities.

Throughout, relational accountability, a cornerstone of Indigenous research methodologies, was paramount (Wilson 2008). That was greatly enabled here by the fact that this project was done in the context of the Indigenous youth advisory committee of the YNC, which had existing relationships, sharing a common interest in changing the way research is done. Indeed, a limitation of this study is the small number of participants involved. Future research would be beneficial to help discover how other Indigenous young people relate to this image of well-being. The fact that the postcard has been well received by Indigenous youth organizations and workers suggests that the postcard is relevant and useful as a tool to inform the approach to practice and interventions and allows the space for alternative means of expression.

Throughout the postcard creation and promotion, we experienced a form of decolonization that was not merely about rejecting one view for another or going back to the past, but was instead about creating an alternative view of well-being that builds on Indigenous youths' lived experiences and their unique position bridging the past and future. The postcard portrays Indigenous youths' resourcefulness and a vision for moving forward that relies on a form of support that is less hierarchical and more reciprocal, and which considers the expertise and agency of Indigenous young people, as well as the support of Elders, community programs and activities, cultural practices, and youth workers, among others. This support is dynamic, context-specific, and multi-level, a consideration of relevance to other communities of youth and to the youth field in general.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All citations use the participants initials.

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