Impact & Learnings of the Great Canoe Journey

Reconciliation through Education: A Youth Leadership & School Education Project (2018-2020)
The GCJ offered webinars, connecting classes across Canada online and engaging rural school classes.

Over two years, the Great Canoe Journey (GCJ) project, led youth (aged 7-18) on a learning journey where they discovered indigenous ways-of-knowing through the lens of traditional canoes and local waterways.

Trained by Waterlution, Youth Advisory Board (YAB) volunteers (age 19-29), where the local leaders of the GCJ, engaging school groups in reconciliation through education. Students were guided by indigenous traditional canoes builders, water walkers, knowledge holders, teachers and the YAB. Through activities, workshops and webinars students discover unique local cultures, waterways, and resources.
Youth Advisory Board (YAB)

Youth Advisory Board (YAB) volunteers engaged in GCJ development, partnership building, and in-school workshops, embarking themselves on a journey in learning about indigenous canoes, cultures, and protocols in their region.

Leadership Training:
- Workshop Facilitation
- Leadership & Working with Emergence
- Project Development & Event Planning
- Partnership Development & Fundraising
- Relationship Building & Networking
- Communications & Outreach

“Through my time with the GCJ Project I was able to cultivate and refine my leadership and communication skills.”

– Edmonton, AB based Youth Advisor Rosheen Tetzlaff

Volunteers age 19-29, trained by Waterlution

90 YAB
Trained and Leading in their Communities
We [the Anishinaabe people] believe that mother earth is whole - a living being. Water is the lifeblood veins of our shared mother”  
– Ojibway Grandmother Kim Wheatley

“If there is something you don’t know the trees can teach you, they are our ancestors too”  
– Mi’kmaq Canoe Builder Todd Labrador

Canoe Builders & Cultural Education

Traditional Canoe Builders
Indigenous canoe builders sharing place-based knowledge about traditional canoes, resources, and waterways used today, and by their ancestors.

Cultural Educators
Elders, emerging youth leaders, water walkers, and knowledge holders who co-hosted webinars and school workshops with the YAB.

Teaching Tools:
- Traditional Carving Tools & Canoes
- Traditional Stories & Personal Knowledge
- Samples of Harvested Canoe-making Materials
- Songs & Artifacts
- Videos & Research
Thank you to all who shared their unique teachings in the Great Canoe Journey.

Sturgeon Nose Canoe

Cedar Dugout Canoe

Birchbark Canoe
Teachers and Youth Group Leaders from across Canada were recruited to register their students/youth to participate in the Great Canoe Journey. They were guided through localized GCJ learning opportunities by Youth Advisory Boards Members.

“Thank you for this opportunity. It has certainly sparked an interest in all and made our learning more authentic.”

– Nancy Ryan, St. Matthew’s School (NFLD), Grade 3 Teacher

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Schools and Youth Groups Engaged!

“The Great Canoe Journey was a wonderful experience!”

– Amanda Kornaga, Churchbridge Public School (SK) Grade 8/9 Leadership Teacher
"I helped facilitate two back-to-back workshops in Québec with Métis canoe builder Christian Pilon, one for young students in grades 3-5 and the other for university undergraduates. Going from one workshop to the next, it was clear how the GCJ can engage youth of all ages; from elementary schools to colleges and universities, it really has something to offer everyone!"

– Ottawa, On based YAB Stephanie Woodworth
Reflections from Olivia Allen

Waterlution’s Project Lead for Youth Programs

The Great Canoe Journey created opportunities for 4200+ youth to draw connections between place and local indigenous livelihoods. It challenged youth to be stewards, allies, educators, and life-long learners. With a dynamic team of YAB volunteers, canoe builders and cultural educators across the country, the GCJ project explored the diversity of indigenous cultures in Canada. Learning about traditional canoes—about the materials, resources, and how they are constructed—as a gateway to endless learning. Youth light up while learning about the lands, waters, history, through a cultural context, specifically that of the local indigenous culture. It really opens up multi-layered circular learning opportunities.

With gratitude for each opportunity, I was present at many unique GCJ workshops across Canada, meeting many knowledgeable canoe builders. With their canoes discussing the material harvesting, the construction, the waterways navigated the canoe builders were also able to weave in further knowledge about truth, history, sustainability, trade, engineering, ecology, local resources, protocols, traditional medicines, water ceremonies, inequalities and so much more. The project invited children and youth to learn about the richmesses of Indigenous history, and personal stories from our indigenous partners shared truths about colonial impacts on culture and communities, together in workshops diverse youth explored what steps they can take individually and collectively towards reconciliation.
For many volunteers, teachers, and youth, who truly immersed themselves into these learning experiences, their unique learning journeys have just begun- and I can’t wait to see the new relationships and opportunities that lie ahead. Over the next few years, I believe many Indigenous Youth Advisors will become strong cultural educators, and many other Youth Advisors will be engaging in decolonization work, and standing for truth and reconciliation throughout their careers.

Speaking about reconciliation made space for many difficult and sometimes uncomfortable conversations. For myself, our close Indigenous partners, and our dedicated youth advisors, I can say that we hosted and navigated those conversations together with open hearts. A learning that was emphasized throughout the Great Canoe Journey was how important it is to maintain balance - dynamic voices and knowledge will create richer outcomes.

**Blending Content and Process:** Since inception, Waterlution has offered immersive training programs for young professionals to build technical & leadership skills, equipping them to address complex global challenges. Learn about national and international opportunities for water-loving young professionals at [www.waterlution.org](http://www.waterlution.org)
"My involvement with the Great Canoe Journey opened my eyes to the importance and necessity of integrating Indigenous knowledge into educational programming. It forced me to reflect more deeply on my own relationship to the lands and waters that I live and play on and inspired me to seek out opportunities to learn more about Indigenous cultures across this country. Practically, it gave me the skills and confidence to engage in more leadership opportunities, conduct outreach with enthusiasm and creativity, and develop meaningful partnerships with my community."

~Victoria, BC based Youth Kirsten Mathison
Thank you

Thank you to the Core Youth Advisors: Sarah Alexis - Kelowna, BC, ON, Christine Craig - Cobocun, ON, Melissa Dick - Toronto, ON, Felicity Feinman - Vancouver, BC, Ella Harvey - Toronto, ON, Cairo Huntingford - Vancouver, BC, Gina Jihyun Kwon - Toronto, ON, Danyka Leclair - Ottawa, ON & Campbellton, NB, Jackson MacPherson - Kelowna, BC, Kirsten Mathison - Victoria, BC, Noa Mayer - Vancouver, BC, Charlie Olmsted - Squamish, BC, Rebecca Osawamick - Wahnapiat First Nation, ON, Shamily Shanmuganathan - Brampton, ON, Alan Shapiro - New Westminster, BC, Emma Squires - Vancouver, BC, Rosheen Tetzlaff - Leduc, AB, Da Chen - Scarborough, ON, Charlene Claudio - Scarborough, ON, Haley Friesen - Langford, BC, ON, Jordan Hawkswell - Victoria, BC, Alice Henry - Vancouver, BC, Emma Hill - Toronto, ON, Emily Hines - Toronto, ON, Cairo Huntingford - Vancouver, BC, Danyka Leclair - Ottawa, ON, BC, Hayley O'Brien - Kamloops, BC, Catalina Parra - Vancouver, BC, Stephanie Pheasant - Wahnapiat First Nation, ON, Melany Sanchez - Vancouver, BC, Cheyenne Sego - Sagamok, ON, Raven Simpson - Greater Sudbury, ON, Taylor Smith - Port Moody, BC, Sydney Stevenson - Aurora, ON, Thiviya Thavanayagam - Brampton, ON, Rosamond (Rosy) Tutton - Kingston, ON, Selby Wilkinson - Vancouver, BC, Stephanie Woodworth - Ottawa, ON & Danielle Moore - Toronto, ON & Winnipeg, MB, The Cautious Optimist Project is in Memory of Danielle Moore.