

VICCIY REPORT: PROVINCIAL YOUTH WELLNESS SUMMIT 2025



Photos above taken during the learning component of Lawrence A. Roy Jr's hoop dancing performance.

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ATTENDANCE OVERVIEW

Saskatchewan Polytechnic hosted the 2nd Provincial Youth Wellness Summit, held at Wanuskewin, from May 13th to 15th, 2025. A total of 62 grade 9 to 12 students and 14 chaperones from across 11 rural and remote SK communities attended.



Photos seen above are captured during the "Bison Walk" with Wanuskewin.



Above are some members of the VICCIY team who assisted with the summit.

ABOUT VICCIY

The VICCIY Initiative takes a holistic approach to promoting the well-being of Indigenous youth. Everything we do is carried out in collaboration with community partners and co-created with Indigenous youth. Our focus is on enhancing access to culturally responsive care, preserving Indigenous languages and traditions, and developing tailored resources using virtual reality (VR) technology to meet the unique needs of youth in rural, remote, and northern communities.



Lindsey showing two youths how to use a VR headset.

BACKGROUND

The Provincial Youth Wellness Summit is part of an overarching research project titled the Virtual Interventions and Community Connections for Indigenous Youth (VICCIY) Initiative.

The VICCIY Initiative is finding new ways to support Indigenous youth in living healthy lives by using virtual reality. We combine modern technology with cultural practices to strengthen the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of Indigenous youth. By working closely with communities, VICCIY helps provide youth with tools and opportunities that honour their traditions and support their well-being into the future.

BACKGROUND CONTINUED



The VICCIY Initiative uses a community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) approach, meaning project goals are shaped together with Indigenous youth and communities. This ensures the work is meaningful, relevant, and supported by those it is meant to serve. Through these partnerships, we have learned that youth wellness is best supported through a mix of in-person and virtual approaches.

Our research is guided by four main pillars: safety, identity, belonging, and community. We focus on supporting physical, emotional, psychological, and cultural safety through Indigenous-designed wellness workshops, resiliency training, role model connections, and support services. Virtual tools combined with face-to-face activities help youth explore and reconnect with their Indigenous identity. By engaging in safe, collective spaces that encourage relationship-building and self-determination, youth can develop a stronger sense of belonging and community.



*Scan or click QR codes for
short video overviews of the
VICCIY Initiative.*



<https://tinyurl.com/yfwkse4t>

<https://tinyurl.com/bdzkzbw3>



Summit attendees at the entryway of Wanuskewin.

SUMMIT BACKGROUND

The idea to host a Provincial Youth Wellness Summit was shaped by the voices of Indigenous youth, together with Saskatchewan Polytechnic researchers and community partners who shared a vision for supporting youth well-being. Early research and conversations with youth, Elders, educators, and community leaders highlighted a strong need for wellness supports that bring together both in-person and virtual opportunities. Face-to-face gatherings were recognized as essential for building trust, fostering cultural connection, and creating safe spaces for sharing, while virtual resources offered the flexibility to maintain those supports across rural and remote communities.

This annual summit was designed to offer a unique space where youth could meet and build friendships across communities, celebrate and strengthen their cultural identities, and be inspired by Indigenous role models. A variety of wellness strategies were introduced—from traditional practices to modern approaches—encouraging youth to discover tools that resonated with their own experiences.



Photos of Wanuskewin.

SUMMIT OVERVIEW 2025

As part of their registration, youth completed an activity selection form to rank their interest in the breakout sessions, ensuring their summit experience was tailored to their interests and needs. Each youth attended three of the 15 sessions offered. New this year, breakout sessions were also provided for chaperones—four shared with youth and four designed exclusively for their own wellness and learning.

We were grateful to have Willis Janvier as emcee, whose humour, icebreakers, and creativity brought great energy throughout the event. Alongside breakout sessions, group activities helped create shared memories: youth signed each other's white t-shirts as keepsakes, enjoyed a performance by Hoop Dancer Lawrence A. Roy Junior, and heard a powerful keynote from Saskatchewan Roughrider alumnus Dan Clarke on overcoming adversity and protecting mental health.

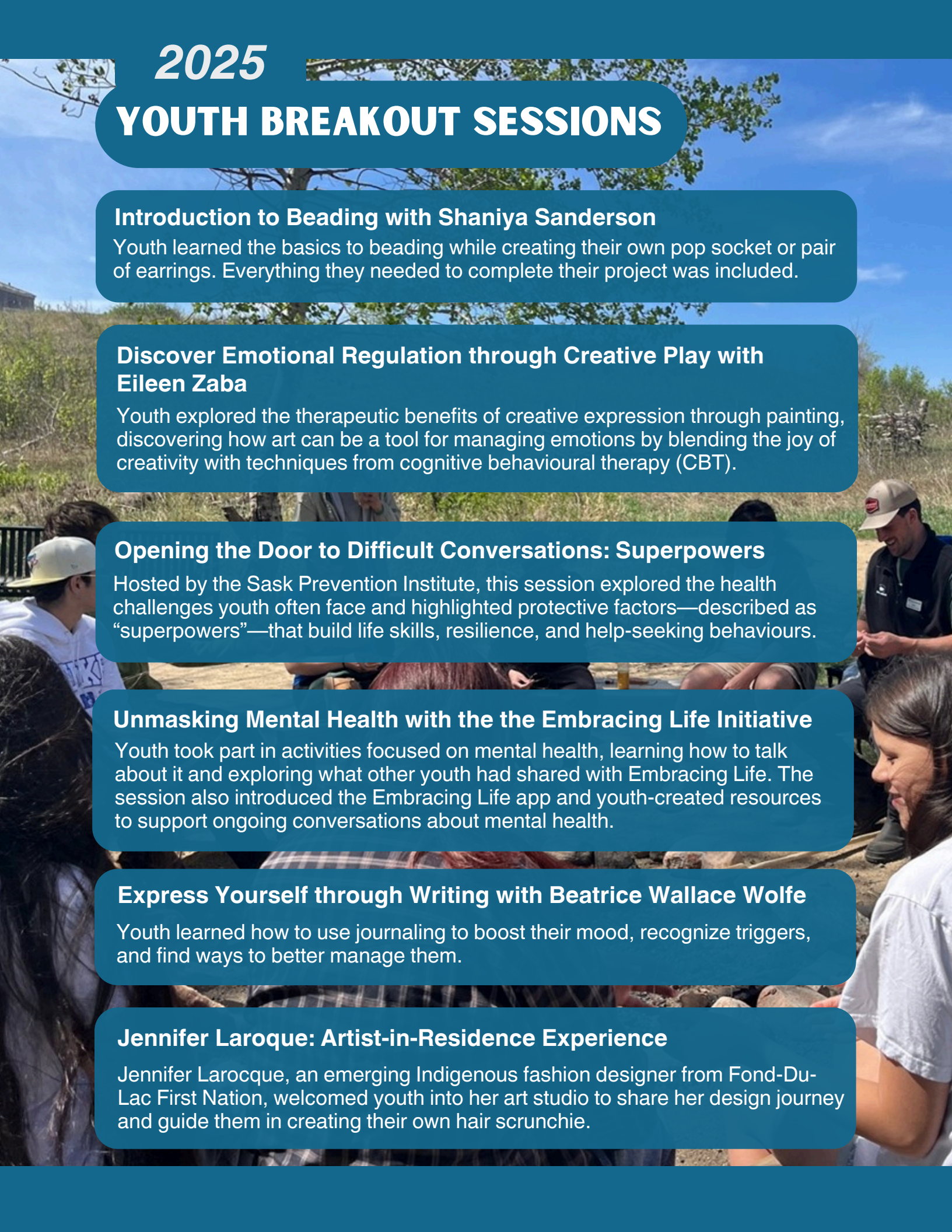
Videographers also captured 360-degree footage to create VR segments that will be uploaded to headsets, allowing youth to revisit the experience. The summit closed with a raffle draw, where youth won prizes to take home—including a VR headset grand prize.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Youth had 15 breakout sessions to choose from, ranging from cultural and creative activities to more serious topics. Based on feedback from last year, new sessions were also added to support chaperones' wellness and learning. Details about the specific breakout sessions can be found in the following pages.



Photos from: Embracing Life, T-shirt Exercise, Traditional Hunting Practices, and Hope/Recovery, Resilience sessions



2025

YOUTH BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Introduction to Beading with Shaniya Sanderson

Youth learned the basics to beading while creating their own pop socket or pair of earrings. Everything they needed to complete their project was included.

Discover Emotional Regulation through Creative Play with Eileen Zaba

Youth explored the therapeutic benefits of creative expression through painting, discovering how art can be a tool for managing emotions by blending the joy of creativity with techniques from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

Opening the Door to Difficult Conversations: Superpowers

Hosted by the Sask Prevention Institute, this session explored the health challenges youth often face and highlighted protective factors—described as “superpowers”—that build life skills, resilience, and help-seeking behaviours.

Unmasking Mental Health with the the Embracing Life Initiative

Youth took part in activities focused on mental health, learning how to talk about it and exploring what other youth had shared with Embracing Life. The session also introduced the Embracing Life app and youth-created resources to support ongoing conversations about mental health.

Express Yourself through Writing with Beatrice Wallace Wolfe

Youth learned how to use journaling to boost their mood, recognize triggers, and find ways to better manage them.

Jennifer Laroque: Artist-in-Residence Experience

Jennifer Larocque, an emerging Indigenous fashion designer from Fond-Du-Lac First Nation, welcomed youth into her art studio to share her design journey and guide them in creating their own hair scrunchie.

The background image shows a youth event. On the right, a person is wearing a vibrant, multi-colored traditional Indigenous regalia, including a beaded tunic and a feathered headdress. They are standing in a room with a wooden floor and a drop ceiling. Other people are visible in the background, some sitting at tables.

2025

YOUTH BREAKOUT SESSIONS CONT.

Online Overdrive – Wellness in a Digital World with Youth Speak

This youth-led interactive workshop engaged participants in conversations about how online use can affect mental health and well-being. Youth speakers shared personal stories to help others better understand their choices and how to use technology in healthy ways.

Hope / Recovery / Resilience by Joey Genereaux

In this session, Joey shared his personal story of how childhood trauma led to addiction, the impact it had on his hockey career and education, and the struggles he faced over 21 years of substance use. He also spoke about the strength it took to overcome these challenges and his journey from darkness to light.

Bison Walk Guide by Brad from Wanuskewin

Youth explored one of the traditional methods of bison hunting through the nēwo asinīyak Bison Jump. They learned about the spiritual relationship between Northern Plains Indigenous peoples and bison, and how the Wanuskewin bison herd is revitalizing both culture and the environment.

Speak For Yourself: A self-advocacy workshop led by SK Advocate for Children and Youth

Youth learned how to become strong self-advocates by exploring personal identity, understanding their rights, and practicing effective communication.

Traditional Hunting Practices with Brad from Wanuskewin

Youth learned about pre- and post-contact methods of trapping fur-bearing animals through real trap displays and demonstrations.

2025

SHARED BREAKOUT SESSIONS: YOUTH & CHAPERONES

Financial Empowerment; Building Your Basic Banking Knowledge with Innovation Credit Union

Youth joined an informal session on banking, saving, investing, credit, and budgeting. The workshop shared practical financial knowledge and included an engaging breakout activity on creating a budget.

#CreeSimonSays “May You Kiss a Cow” with Simon Bird

Indigenous Language Advocate Simon Bird gave a presentation on the importance of learning Cree, sharing how even one word at a time can be medicine for the soul and as meaningful as becoming fluent.

Wanuskewin: Traditional Dance Presentation

Youth and chaperones were invited to a celebration of Indigenous culture through dance, where they learned about traditional powwow dance styles while listening to the presenters' stories.

Saskatchewan Roughriders: Grow the Game- Football Fun

Summit attendees met members and alumni of the Saskatchewan Roughriders in an interactive workshop that introduced the basics of football.





2025

CHAPERONE BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Brave Spaces: Sharing, Listening & Growing Together with Pam Hutchings

Chaperones took part in a session that created space where honesty was strength and vulnerability was power. Together, they practiced holding space for one another by listening without judgment, speaking their truth, and building connections one brave word at a time.

Introducing the Next Phase of the VICCIY Initiative

Chaperones attended a special session about the upcoming wellness trial that builds on summit strategies through virtual reality (VR) technology to support student well-being. They also met the ACHWM team from the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), who shared their culturally grounded wellness assessment tool to help guide and evaluate the program. This session provided an opportunity to learn more and ask questions about how schools can stay involved.

Understanding and Supporting Indigenous Youth: A Talking Circle for Chaperones

Chaperones were invited to join a talking circle to reflect on how to better support Indigenous youth in their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Through shared stories, cultural teachings, and collective wisdom, the circle created a safe space to explore the role of identity, ceremony, and connection in youth resilience. Participants left with renewed purpose and practical ideas for uplifting the next generation.

Unmasking Mental Health with Adults & Helpers hosted by the Embracing Life Initiative

Chaperones engaged in activities around mental health, learning what Embracing Life has been hearing from frontline staff and exploring how to take a more preventative approach as natural supports in their work and daily lives. The session also emphasized the importance of caring for their own mental health.

DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

Youth who attended the summit were invited to complete a post-summit survey that asked about various aspects of their experience. In addition, they had the opportunity to share their perspectives and reflections in greater depth during closing sharing circles. Chaperones also took part in their own closing sharing circles to provide feedback and insights.

The following pages present the overall themes from the sharing circles, the survey results, year-over-year statistics, and impact statements that highlight the voices of both youth and chaperones.

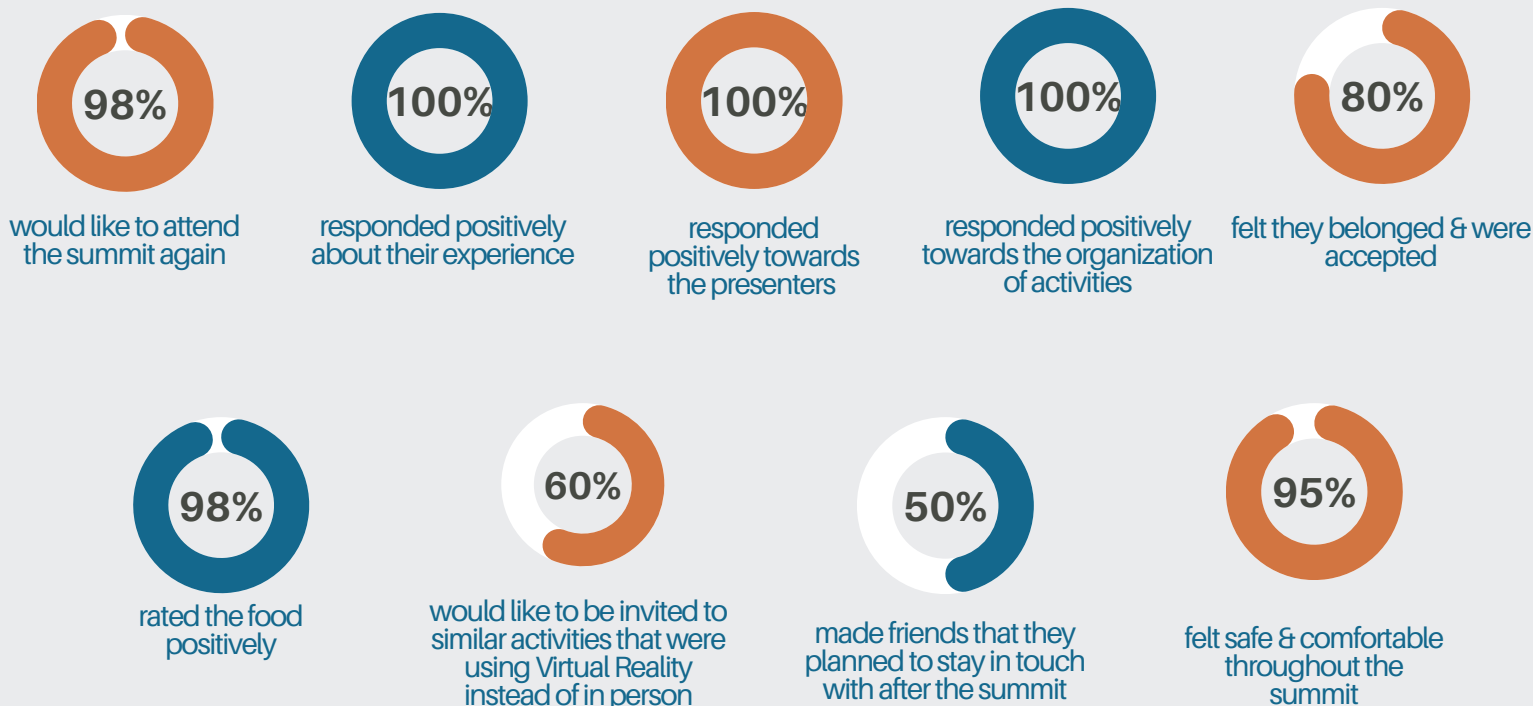
The themes that youth expressed included:

- The cultural, emotional, and educational lessons that could be applied within home communities to support wellness were identified as the most valued outcomes.
- When asked about wellness supports, many youth highlighted themes of autonomy, self-determination, and agency.
- A common theme among youth was the desire to bring the skills and knowledge gained at the summit back to their peers in their communities.

2025

VICCIY SUMMIT YOUTH SURVEY RESPONSES

The percentage of youth who...



YEAR OVER YEAR COMPARISON

When comparing the findings from the last summit to this year's, we found that ratings for overall experience, presenters, and organization of activities remained consistent at 100%. In addition, participants' overall interest in attending future events delivered through VR technology showed a slight increase compared to the previous summit.

IMPACT

Closing the summit with sharing circles as a means of data collection provided attendees with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and made space for forward-thinking surrounding how they will continue to engage in the wellness practices that were introduced at the summit once they return home. Attendees also discussed what resources they felt they needed to support their continued growth. Many attendees expressed appreciation for learning new skills and knowledge, inspiration to make good choices for themselves, and the desire to be a positive influence on themselves, their peers, and communities.

Reflections from youth about their experience, shared during our closing sharing circles, included:

I'd say the favourite part of the summit was going on the buffalo walk that we did, because I really connected there and I learned a few things too.

My favourite activity was the beading, we beaded earrings, and I learned how to bead.

The painting session was probably the most impactful for me. You can show more emotion through your paintings, but it's also a way that you can cope with your intrusive thoughts in different ways, how to healthily fix it. I guess it just helps with your intrusive thoughts.

My favourite part was journaling because she gave us a book to journal our feelings afterwards.

I can use the information on snares and teach my siblings. If we ever go out camping or something, I can grab some wire and then show them on how snares are set or other traps.

My favourite part was learning about the subset of cocaine and what you can do to help yourself and the loved ones you have.

IMPACT CONTINUED

His story was really, really heavy. It's really beautiful about how he just changed everything around and how he's doing so much better with his life. He was able to just leave the past in the past, and I find it really inspiring (youth reflection on Joey's presentation).

My favourite activity was the where you got to paint all your feelings.

My favourite activity was probably the Riders session.
Playing and doing some of the drills they showed us.
Kicking the ball or throwing the ball properly.

My favorite thing was the scrunchie making, because it was my first time making a scrunchie, and it was pretty fun to learn how to make it.

Getting to hear everybody laugh here and there, I will bring some memories along for a long time and hearing everyone's big auntie laughs.

I did the journaling one and it was fun. I want to find a better way to express myself, because sometimes words just don't really work.

The themes identified from the sharing circles reflected the youths' positive experiences with the sessions. Many emphasized gaining something they could bring back to their communities, a desire for greater self-determination, and an eagerness to share the lessons and skills they had learned with others at home.

IMPACT: CHAPERONES

Chaperones were provided with breakout sessions designed to support their own learning and well-being. They were also invited to share their perspectives in a closing sharing circle. In these discussions, chaperones expressed gratitude for having wellness sessions offered specifically for them.

“And then all of a sudden somebody was said ‘Hey, we got chaperone sessions’ I said ‘what? really?’ and immediately I went to Embracing Life. I really loved that there were sessions for chaperones; that was cool. ”

Chaperones emphasized the importance and value of summits like this for the youth in their communities, noting that even younger children could benefit from participating in similar events. They also highlighted the significance of specific sessions—such as Financial Literacy—which were seen as especially important for northern communities that often have limited access to this type of knowledge.

LESSONS LEARNED

This section highlights the lessons learned from the summit and identifies areas where we can continue to strengthen and improve our approach.

Registration:

We are continuing to work alongside communities to better understand the barriers and challenges that influence attendance. While 100 youth were confirmed to attend this year's summit, only 62 ultimately participated. With input and collaboration from communities, our team will be exploring a more streamlined registration process and improved ways of supporting attendance.

Longer Time Between Sessions and for Certain Activities:

Attendees noted that having more time between sessions would help with smoother transitions. Some sessions ran longer than expected, which extended breaks. Hands-on activities, such as crafting sessions, would also benefit from additional time so participants can complete their projects. For the next summit, we will review the scheduling and overall flow of the day to ensure adequate time for both transitions and activities.





Wanuskewin background and photos of summit attendees using the VR headsets.

NEXT STEPS

The next step for the VICCIY project is the launch of Phase 2 Research Trial. Partnering schools will recruit students to take part in a six-month trial of a real-time interactive Virtual Reality (VR) platform, with bi-weekly sessions running from November 2025 to April 2026. Between six and eight schools will participate, each identifying Community Wellness Champions to support youth in using the VR platform.

Building on this momentum, the next Youth Wellness Summit is scheduled for May 2026. At this event, findings from the trial will be shared, and youth, schools, and communities will come together once again to celebrate progress and shape future directions.

Benefits for Participating Schools & Youth:

- ✓ Promote youth mental health and wellness
- ✓ Build skills in innovative technology
- ✓ Strengthen community connections
- ✓ Receive comprehensive support from the VICCIY team



Youth on their way to the Traditional Hunting Methods breakout session.

NEXT STEPS CONTINUED

The annual in-person summit plays a vital role in strengthening connections among youth and empowering communities through capacity building and engagement. Looking ahead, we envision these provincial gatherings expanding to include more communities, further extending the reach and impact of the VICCIY initiative.

Together with our partners, we will continue to explore how both VR and in-person supports can be used to foster the well-being of Indigenous youth in rural and remote areas. Supporting chaperones and community wellness champions remains central to this work, as their involvement is key to sustaining youth wellness and community resilience.

Most importantly, we remain committed to listening to and learning from youth and communities. Their voices will continue to guide the direction of the VICCIY project as we move forward in creating meaningful, culturally responsive supports that strengthen wellness now and into the future.



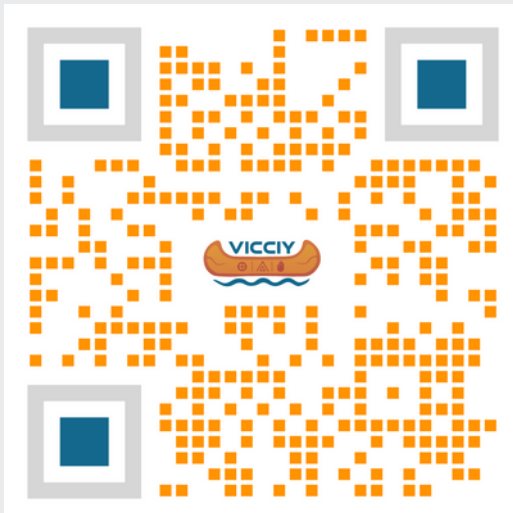
Virtual Interventions & Community Connections for Indigenous Youth

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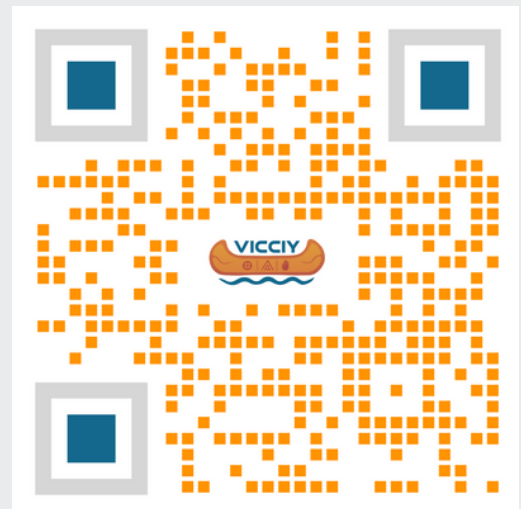
Visit our website to learn more, view visual galleries, and join our newsletter for important updates!

<https://vicciy.ca>

Scan the QR codes or click the links below to see 360 video segments from this year's summit.



<https://tinyurl.com/yaufjp6w>



<https://tinyurl.com/36yuuahh>

Move your cursor in the videos for a full 360° view!

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Mahsi cho; Kinanâskomitin; Pidamaya; Miigwech; Marsee; Thank You to our supporters and funders for making the Provincial Youth Wellness Summit possible.