

# VIDEA

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## EVALUATION REPORT YEAR 1

Written by the Students Commission of Canada

### Project Description

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Indigenous Wellness Wednesdays aims to create a safe space for Indigenous youth to focus on defining their own wellness and healing journey, a topic that has received little support in the past. It is a weekly virtual meeting where Indigenous facilitators, elders and knowledge keepers engage youth in shared meals, check-ins, and Indigenous-focused healing sessions that include tarot card readings and pow wow bootcamps. Due to its virtual nature, the program can reach those living in rural communities, those with caregiving responsibilities, those coping with their battles with substance use, those with mental health struggles and/or disabilities, and those who may be combatting homelessness. Indigenous Wellness Wednesdays aim to encourage Indigenous youth to define their own wellness and pursue a longer and healthier life.

### Methodology

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VIDEA has collaborated with the Students Commission of Canada (SCC) through their Sharing the Stories (StS) program, which offers customizable evaluation for non-profits serving youth. Together, they are working to ensure that the VIDEA continues to support First Nations, Metis, and Inuit youth. The purpose of this report was to evaluate the impact of programming on the lives of these youth participants. For this evaluation, VIDEA used a qualitative tool (youth focus group) to evaluate the impact of programming.

The qualitative results showed that youth were provided with a safe space and the tools that they needed to discuss wellness, connect with different Indigenous communities, and learn from each other. This weekly virtual meeting allowed youth to connect and make meaningful connections with people with shared lived experiences.

Overall, the program succeeded in creating a safe space for Indigenous youth to openly share their struggles and relate to each other via discussing their mental health and well-being. It gave them a sense of belonging; they collectively understood the struggles being shared as well as how important physical and mental well-being is.

# Youth Focus Group

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VIDEA held a focus group with youth participants (n=24) in order to gain insight on their experiences and the impact of programming. The following qualitative analysis illustrates the key themes which came up, as well as the number of times each theme was mentioned, and quotes taken from participants.

## ***Increase in Wellness and Mental Health (23)***

This program gave Indigenous youth the opportunity to focus on their wellbeing and make it a priority. Youth realized the benefits of Wellness Wednesdays to their overall physical and mental health. This weekly program session allowed youth to disconnect from their everyday struggles and focus on themselves.

*Decolonizing and indigenizing our ways of healing and being together, I think is really beautiful.*

*Just allowing myself to be happy and allowing myself to be happy with other indigenous people.*

*It's like a really good mental break from everything else that I'm doing in life that are stressing me out.*

*I needed a place where I could just like come from my wellness.*

## ***Meaningful Shared Experiences (19)***

Wellness Wednesdays allowed Indigenous youth to connect and openly talk about their shared experience. Through sharing stories with other Indigenous youth, they were able to connect and have a sense of belonging. Having experienced similar traumas, youth were grateful to have this group as a support system.

*I needed a place to go, to come see people who look like me, who sound like me, who share the same thing.*

*It's been really comforting and very supportive. Knowing that like, you're not alone.*

*Other people just kind of understand that without having to explain my lived experience too hard.*

*I grew up within an intergenerational family. So finding out that there's more than us out there that went through a lot of trauma. It was really helpful.*



## **Learning Opportunities (21)**

This program allowed Indigenous youth to learn about different Indigenous cultures and from each other. They were exposed to different cultures, treaties and traumas. Sharing experiences was a learning opportunity for everyone. It has allowed youth to have different perspectives and grow.

*I wouldn't have the same outlook as I do now. Because I've learned a lot from a lot of people.*

*I wanted to be more involved in an indigenous community.*

*It's really nice to hear other speakers and from different like treaties.*

*It feels good to support people in their learning, or just be here and feel supported in my learning.*

## **Safe Spaces (12)**

This program created a safe space for youth to discuss Indigenous topics and share their stories. This space made youth feel supported and heard. They were able to discuss tough subjects and feel supported and comfortable in the process. They were also able to show vulnerable emotions and be true to themselves.

*To just be able to have a space to show up authentically, and a space to have a good ugly cry.*

*A place that's safe, a place that's welcoming with familiar faces every week.*

*We can go through things that are heavier topics as people might not understand and being able to have this kind of safer space even though it is virtual, it makes it more accessible.*

*I don't know we just don't do that we don't pick on each other and try to do that we keep each other safe and keep our learning safe and our healing journey safe.*

*I wanted a space where I can be unapologetically Indigenous.*



# Discussion and Conclusion

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Overall, VIDEA has had a positive impact on the lives of youth by providing them with a safe space to discuss Indigenous-focused wellness and mental health, learn from one another and share their lived experiences.

The report overall showed that participants' wellness was improved through the sharing of meaningful lived experiences in a safe space. Youth wanted a place to connect with people without having to go in-depth about their trauma to explain why their wellness has been deeply affected. These weekly virtual meetings gave youth the opportunity to connect with other Indigenous youth, exchange information with one another, and share their lived experiences with one another, all of which positively improved their mental and physical wellbeing.

Throughout this report, it is evident that the VIDEA succeeded in creating a safe space for Indigenous youth to prioritize their wellness. Youth voice gathered in this baseline report can help to better understand the reality of these youth, the impact of such a program, and can help to develop and improve similar programs that are beneficial for these youth. When the youth were asked their dreams for this program, many wanted to create wellness workshops, build a buddy program, visit other Indigenous territories and even start a book club to learn more about mindedness and Indigenous writers. Notably, some youth expressed a desire to see additional in-person meetings being introduced to further supplement regular virtual meetings. Our recommendation is to discuss the present results with youth in the community to see if this data portrays what they are experiencing.

