



**SUPPORTING  
TRUTH AND  
RECONCILIATION:  
HIGHLIGHTING AREAS OF  
IMPROVEMENT FOR LAND  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS IN  
CANADA**



**Carleton**  
UNIVERSITY



**SUPPORTING TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION:  
HIGHLIGHTING AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT  
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April 10, 2023



**CAOT - ACE**  
Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists  
Association canadienne des ergothérapeutes



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## INTRODUCTION

### Background of Project

A fourth-year Health Sciences student from Carleton University was supervised by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) to complete a site-specific field placement research project from September 2022 to April 2023. Upon placement commencement, the student highlighted their interest in addressing health inequities experienced by Indigenous populations in Canada. The student was provided a general project direction by Métis and non-Indigenous members of the OT Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Task Force aimed to provide guidance, based on a review of available information, to improve land acknowledgements. The need to focus on areas of improvement for land acknowledgements in Canada has been supported through consultation with occupational therapists (OTs) at several OT conferences, including the annual CAOT conference, and during OT and Indigenous Health Network (OTIHN) meetings. As such, the contents of this project act as a means to address and respond to land acknowledgement-related inquiries.

Upon the release of the Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), Action 92 called upon institutions in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). To comply with UNDRIP, the report states that Canadian corporations must: (1) meaningfully consult Indigenous communities before developing buildings, (2) ensure equitable access to employment and educational opportunities, and (3) introduce education for staff on the history and rights of Indigenous Peoples, including information on Indigenous governance, Treaties, and residential schools. Due to Action 92(3), increasing inquiry by OTs, and the student's interest in supporting Indigenous health, the OT TRC Task Force recommended the student develop a project focused on areas of improvement for land acknowledgments as a response to UNDRIP and the TRC Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

### Purpose of Research

This research was conducted to share views of Indigenous Peoples in relation to both academic and grey literature and offer Indigenous perspectives alongside non-Indigenous reflection and guidance on how to improve land acknowledgements in Canada. By offering CAOT with guidance on how to improve land acknowledgements, this research aims to better support the process of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.

While this report acts as the primary distribution format for this research on land acknowledgements, the information in this report will also be condensed and presented orally (via slideshow) among CAOT staff and members of the OT TRC Taskforce in April 2023.

### Project Objectives

The three main objectives of this research project are as follows:

1. Identify current themes within academic and grey literature from Canada and Australia regarding the improvement of land acknowledgements to better support the process of Truth and Reconciliation.
2. Identify perspectives and recommendations from 3-4 Indigenous community members relating to the improvement of land acknowledgement in Canada through real-time interviews.
3. Compare findings from academic and grey literature to that of real-time interviews to identify potential inconsistencies or gaps in knowledge and provide Indigenous perspectives alongside non-Indigenous reflection and guidance on how CAOT may improve land acknowledgements and better support the process of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.

Please note that the term *Indigenous* is used throughout this report in reference to First Nations and Métis (and Inuit where applicable) populations in Canada, however this term is understood to be limiting in that it does not adequately account for the diversity of the various unique identities that are embodied across Canada.

However, readers are encouraged to identify the preferred names of relevant and/or local Nations when discussing Indigenous Peoples and should instead refer to each specific Nation only by their preferred name.

The terms *settler* and *non-Indigenous* have both been used throughout this research process and report, but do not necessarily define the same populations.

However, as described by âpihtawikosisân in chapter 2 of *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada*, the word *settler* is used specifically to identify "non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority" (âpihtawikosisân, 2020).

The term *non-Indigenous* is used to describe people living in Canada who may not have settler descendants, or used as a descriptor for opposing populations when discussed specifically in comparison to Indigenous Peoples (âpihtawikosisân, 2020).

## METHODOLOGY OF PROJECT

### The research process: Academic and grey literature

When developing the scope of academic literature to be used in conducting the first objective of this project, it was crucial to include relevant literature from both academic and grey sources as important Indigenous perspectives have historically been left out of many academic literature publications addressing Indigenous health and wellbeing (Lines & Jardine, 2018). Therefore, Google Scholar, Google Search, and YouTube were used to assess the current scope of academic and grey literature pertaining to the improvement of land acknowledgements.

It should be noted that this informal literature search initially included a secondary focus on intergenerational connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers. While this secondary focus was included with the aim of better informing research on Truth and Reconciliation, it was later removed to narrow the scope of research (as discussed below). Though a formal literature review was not conducted, relevant search terms have been displayed in Table 1 regarding the improvement of land acknowledgements in Canada.

**Table 1. Relevant search terms used in Google Scholar, Google, and YouTube to identify academic and grey literature on the improvement of land acknowledgements in Canada.**

("Indigenous" OR "Métis" OR "First Nations" OR "Inuit" AND ("Canada" OR "Australia") AND ("Land Acknowledgement\*") AND ("improvement" OR "areas of improvement" OR "improve" OR "concern\*") AND ("Truth and Reconciliation" OR "Truth" OR "Reconciliation")

Following an informal literature search, a collection of 10 academic and grey literature sources were used to identify five main areas of improvement in relation to land acknowledgements in Canada and seven main areas of improvement regarding connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Canada. Moreover, six additional sources of grey literature provided supplementary information to inform this research, including content relevant to both land acknowledgements and intergenerational connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Once the five areas of improvement in relation to land acknowledgements and seven areas of improvement regarding intergenerational connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers were identified (see Table 2), further research was conducted to identify specific examples of each improvement area in practice, as well as any potential actions taken by Canadian governments and/or organisations to address relevant concerns. In doing so, six more academic and grey literature sources were identified to support the need for further research and action regarding the improvement of land acknowledgements and connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Canada. Based on these collective findings, the five key improvement areas were reduced to three areas of improvement to be focused on throughout this project, and all information on intergenerational connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers was removed. While the student researcher initially wanted to include as many areas of improvement as possible, reduction was necessary due to the time restraints of the field placement.

After the identification of these 24 resources, all relevant information was reorganised based on the three areas of improvement to be addressed within this report, including identification of improvement area, exemplification of need for improvement, identification of current resolution strategies (including positive and negative outcomes), and potential recommendations for further improvement based on Indigenous perspectives alongside non-Indigenous guidance through research and discussion.

**Table 2. Key areas of improvement identified through academic and grey literature on land acknowledgements and intergenerational connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, with the three areas of focus for this report bolded.**

Key areas of improvement for land acknowledgements	Key areas of improvement for intergenerational connections to Indigenous Elders
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Lack of genuineness (i.e., box-ticking exercise)</b></li> <li><b>2. Attempt at settler’s innocence (i.e., strictly a symbolic gesture)</b></li> <li><b>3. Lack of traditional Indigenous practices (i.e., Western focus on who first “owned” the land)</b></li> <li>4. Lack of consideration for the impacts of colonialism (i.e., limited critical thinking)</li> <li>5. Lack of truthfulness</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of recovery of Traditional Elder role after colonization</li> <li>2. Colonial imposition of what healing looks like</li> <li>3. Lack of importance on Elder teachings</li> <li>4. Lack of connection between tradition and Youth</li> <li>5. Isolation of Elders</li> <li>6. Failure to address the impacts of residential schools</li> <li>7. Burden of “older people” who are not considered Traditional Elders</li> </ol>

### The research process: Creation of interview questions

Following the reorganisation of academic and grey literature findings, the information presented under each of the three areas of improvement were used to create three questions to be asked during real-time interviews with three to four diverse Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Due to the time restrictions of this project and project objectives, completion of a formal ethics process was not required. Therefore, the interview process follows a “Do you agree? Disagree? And why?” format reflective of previously established findings of academic and grey literature. By formatting each interview question in this way, the interview process is consistent with CAOT guidelines. However, because of the traumatic history of colonialism in Canada towards Indigenous Peoples it was also necessary to format each interview question through a trauma and violence-informed lens to stay within the CAOT guidelines and conduct real-time interviews without the need for ethics approval.

Following further discussion of the interview-ethics guidelines with two Métis co-chairs of the OT TRC Taskforce, it was decided that providing summaries of current literature findings to each participant may be counterintuitive to the ethics process. Therefore, the final informal ethics process to be upheld in each interview consisted of an in-depth introduction by each researcher present to allow each interview participant the opportunity to learn and ask questions about who each non-Indigenous researcher is, about their family history and where each researcher came from, as well as why each researcher is participating in this project. In providing transparent introductions, both Métis co-chairs of the OT TRC Taskforce who were consulted felt ethics was more appropriately addressed before conducting interviews with Indigenous Peoples and/or Elders.

In order to ensure all interview questions maintained clear, trauma-informed formatting consistent with the findings of academic and grey literature, the interview questions and their supplementary back-

ground information were contabulated into a 2022-2023 Student Field Placement Project Proposal. The proposal draft was revised nine times prior to conducting interviews to include suggestions from the non-Indigenous student researcher and two field placement supervisors, one non-Indigenous CAOT staff member, as well as the Métis co-chairs of the OT TRC Task Force. Following revisions, the questions were re-formatted once more to include background information on the Indigenous, pan-Indigenous, or non-Indigenous nature of the research team, funding, and/or participants of each academic or grey literature source that was used to directly support the creation of interview questions.

Notably, it was during these revisions that the original scope of the project was reduced to only include information on areas of improvement for land acknowledgements in Canada – rather than including both land acknowledgements and areas of improvement among connections to Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Canada. It was also decided during the revision process that out of the four questions to be asked in interviews, all questions were to be re-organized and revised to create three final interview questions. Each interview question can be seen in Table 3 alongside their supplementary academic or grey literature background, and information on the inclusion of Indigeneity within each academic or grey literature source used to formulate each interview question.

**Table 3. Summary of three interview questions alongside supplementary information on relevant academic and grey literature findings, including background for each question and Indigeneity within the research process of each source.**

Interview question	Background from research	Background of research sources
<p>1. Do you feel that land acknowledgements could be more effective in supporting the journey towards Truth and Reconciliation in Canada if they were approached differently by non-Indigenous community members? If so, what do you think this approach should look like?</p>	<p>To address concerns over a lack of genuineness in land acknowledgements, some Indigenous community members have recommended that readers of a land acknowledgement take further steps to learn about the historical significance of both the land and Nations who originally took care of it prior to making their acknowledgment (Reys, 2022).</p>	<p>Shelley Reys AO is a Djiribul woman, Indigenous to Far North Queensland, Australia. Shelley Reys is an Indigenous specialist, strategist, and service provider; and has worked in Reconciliation for 30 years as the CEO of Arrilla Indigenous Consulting where she provides guidance to those navigating Indigenous identity within the Australian workforce. The work of Reys was presented in lecture format at a Tedx event. While this presentation used the TED conferencing format, it was organized independently by a local community.</p>
<p>2. In your experience with land acknowledgements in Canada, do you feel that land acknowledgements have been successful in supporting the journey of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada?</p>	<p>According to my research, many Indigenous individuals perceive Canada’s current approach to land acknowledgement statements as nothing more than a “symbolic gesture”, a “box-ticking exercise”, or an “attempt at settler’s innocence”, while others may disagree (Wark, 2021).</p>	<p>Joe Wark is an Anishinaabe PhD student at the School of Social Work at Memorial University of Newfoundland, who is originally from Frenchman’s Head, currently referred to as Lac Seul First Nation. The work of Wark was published with no conflicts of interest in the Curriculum Inquiry, an international journal focused on curriculum studies and studies of the educational experience.</p>

<p>3. This question is very open-ended; is there anything else you would like to share about land acknowledgments, Indigenous culture, or the ways in which Canadian institutions support Truth and Reconciliation in Canada?</p>	<p>According to my research, many Indigenous Peoples see land acknowledgments as a way to appreciate their relationships to those sharing the land, including animals and nature itself; thank the caretakers of the land; and proclaim one's holistic connection to the land. However, the decision to introduce land acknowledgments has been criticized, as it may be seen as a Truth and Reconciliation initiative that does not align with the current needs or traditional practices of Indigenous communities in Canada (Purvis, 2018; Turato, 2020).</p> <p>According to my research, the loss of Indigenous language has also been highlighted as an issue that reduces the ability to support Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, with some Indigenous community members identifying the use of traditional language and connecting with Elders to be of equal importance in facilitating support towards Truth and Reconciliation (Rowe <i>et al.</i>, 2020).</p>	<p>The work of Purvis was created based on a 2017 workshop at the Institute for the Sociology of Law in Onati, Gipuzkoa, Spain. Though no Indigenous background could be identified for Dr. Purvis, he holds a PhD relating to legal studies and currently teaches three courses through the Department of Law &amp; Legal Studies/Institute of Political Economy at Carleton University: Introduction to Public International Law; International Law of Armed Conflict; and Race, Ethnicity, and the Law. The work of Purvis was published in the Onatio Socio-Legal Series, forthcoming – The Policy of Cultural Rights: Socio-legal Perspectives on Cultural Diversity.</p> <p>Miguel Turato acted as the project manager for this work. All from Sheridan College, the research team for this project consisted of Dr. Bethany Osbourne, Dr. Ferzana Chaze (Professors in the Faculty of Applied Health and Community Studies), Elijah Williams (Manager of the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support), five student research assistants from the Social Service Worker Program, one from the Community Worker Outreach and Development Program, one from the General Arts and Sciences Program, and one from the Creative Writing &amp; Publishing Program. Moreover, this research centralized participation from Indigenous Community Builder and Member of the Sheridan College Board of Directors, Stephen Paquette. The work of Turato <i>et al.</i> (2020) was published by Sheridan Source on YouTube.com and was supported by the Sheridan Centre for Mobile Innovation.</p> <p>Work by Rowe <i>et al.</i> (2020) was conducted by a pan-Indigenous team of Cree and non-Indigenous researchers who interviewed Indigenous Elders about the needs to support wellness of older adults in their communities. This research was funded by Canada Research Chair, Indigenous Knowledges in Social Work; the University Research Grants Program – University of Manitoba; and the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Social Work Northern Research Fund.</p>
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**The research process: Real-time interviews**

To conduct real-time interviews, two main avenues were pursued to recruit interview participants. Due to the time restraints of the student field placement through which this research was conducted, the student researcher hoped to recruit 3-4 participants from diverse Indigenous backgrounds across Canada. Therefore, the Carleton University program to Request the Presence of an Indigenous Elder was explored, and the two Métis members of the OT TRC Taskforce who had supported the research student alongside their supervisors also connected with a few previously established Indigenous Elders and colleagues in hopes to assess interest in interview participation. After a few weeks of searching, it was determined that recruiting interview participants through Carleton University would not be feasible given the time restraints of the student field placement, as a research grant and further ethical review would be necessary. Fortunately, three Indigenous Elders showed interest through discussion with the Métis OT TRC Task Force co-chairs and connected with the student researcher via email to schedule virtual interviews.



Of the three participants recruited, all individuals identified themselves as Indigenous Elders, and resided in Manitoba (two participants) and Nova Scotia at the time of their interviews. The first Elder to be interviewed was Albert McLeod, an Indigenous Cultural Facilitator with ancestry from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the Métis communities of Cross Lake and Norway House in Northern Manitoba. Albert has over 30 years of experience as a human rights activist and currently specialises as a consultant regarding Indigenous Peoples, 2Spirit identity and history, as well as cultural reclamation and cross-cultural training through the company 2Spirit Consultants (McLeod, 2022). The second participant to be interviewed was Michael Yellow Bird, a current Dean and Professor at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Social Work and co-author of the book, “Decolonizing Pathways towards Integrative Healing in Social Work” (Clark & Yellow Bird, 2022). In his book, Michael discusses six themes of holistic healing in the context of decolonizing current social work frameworks through use of storytelling, and discussions of social memory, historical trauma, and traditional environmental knowledge of Indigenous Peoples (Clarke & Yellow Bird, 2022). The last Elder to be interviewed was Ann LaBillios, an Indigenous woman from Ugpi’ganjig in New Brunswick who is certified in Mindful-Based Stress Reduction, has 12 years of experience as an Addictions Counsellor at the Eel River Bar Health Center, and currently studies as a student and works as an Elder in Residence through the Human Right and Equity Services office at Dalhousie University (Torrealba, 2022).

Prior to conducting each interview, the student researcher established with each participant that a financial honorarium and a gift of their choosing would be offered to each participant for their support in this research journey. Therefore, the student researcher obtained, wrapped, and sent traditional ceremonial tobacco by mail to each participant who requested it, before obtaining virtual honorarium invoices from each participant for financial record keeping at CAOT.

When conducting each interview, an in-depth introduction was provided by the student researcher and one of her non-Indigenous supervisors who was present to silently take notes throughout the discussion. The supervisor introduction was not completed in-depth only in one case where the Elder requested it to be skipped due to interview time restrictions. Following each introduction, the student researcher then posed each question and actively listened to and reflected on each response before moving to the next question. During each response, the student researcher remained as silent as possible to allow in depth discussion on behalf of each Elder and responded with comments or small follow up questions where appropriate to further facilitate personal reflection on each response. Before ending each interview, the student researcher obtained verbal and/or written consent (via email) from each participant to have their names and backgrounds acknowledged in this report.

## **CONTEXT OF RESEARCH**

### **History of colonization in Canada**

When reflecting upon the traumatic events of Canadian history in relation to the colonization of Indigenous Peoples, it is clear that the introduction of discriminatory legislation, policy, and residential schools all played significant roles in assimilating Indigenous culture in the past and continue to impact the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples in Canada today. During the process of colonization, Indigenous communities were forced to deny their traditional practices; intellectual knowledge; ceremonial knowledge; economic markets; laws and forms of governance, all while being subjected to severe physical disease, abuse, psychological distress, and dominating foreign practices (Bastien *et al.*, 2003).

While the first residential school opened in the 1880s, residential schools originated in Western Canada before plaguing virtually the entire country (excluding Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and New Brunswick), with more than 80 schools open during the 1920s (Stanton, 2011). Under instruction

of the Canadian government, Indigenous children were forcefully removed from their homes and placed within residential schools, which centralised the assimilation of Indigenous culture. From the prohibition of traditional practices of spirituality, culture, and language, to the allowance of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children, residential schools have left a severely detrimental and intergenerational impact on Indigenous communities in Canada, and have since been referred to as, “*Canada’s greatest national shame*” (Stanton, 2011).

Though the last residential school in Canada did not close until 1996 in Saskatchewan, the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was founded in 1991 after Chief Phil Fontaine began publicly validating other Residential School survivors by openly discussing the trauma he had endured within the system. One year after the statements from Chief Fontaine reached the public, 178 public hearings were held across 96 communities to allow survivors to share their traumatic experiences within residential schools. While the Canadian government feared admittance of liability for such a harmful and traumatic history, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was formed to address litigations by Indigenous citizens who had survived residential schools (Stanton, 2011).

### **Colonialism and Occupational Therapy**

The Canadian government is not alone in its mission to address the truth of its colonialist history and take meaningful action towards reconciliation between Indigenous and settler populations. Similarly, to the Canadian government and other health professions, occupational therapists (OTs) in Canada operate within a Western system of healthcare that was historically founded upon colonialist ideologies (Jull & Giles, 2012). While this does not mean that all or any OTs registered in Canada aim to perpetuate oppressive mechanisms of health provision, critical analysis argues that without consistent examination and reflection of the foundational beliefs embedded into the practice of occupational therapy (OT), oppressive systems may *unintentionally* continue to operate in ways that perpetuate their historically oppressive frameworks (Jull & Giles, 2012; Spade, 2012). Therefore, the goal of this subsection is to highlight historical and modern-day practices, relevant to OT in Canada, that may continue to perpetuate the development of health inequities across Indigenous Peoples when compared to non-Indigenous populations in Canada. To identify just a few statistics representing the health divide among Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada, it should be noted that Indigenous Peoples are reported to have disproportionately shorter life expectancies, as well as a heightened risk of illness and suicide when compared to non-Indigenous populations, and many of these health inequities may be seen as consequences of both historical and modern-day colonialism (Jull & Giles, 2012).

Notable through history and current practices, Canadian legislation and policy pertaining to jurisdictional rights to healthcare play a massive role in the poor outcomes of Indigenous health and well-being seen in Canada (Jull & Giles, 2012). Stemming from the Indian Act of 1876, a federally legislated policy, Indigenous Peoples of different nations, as well as living on and off reserve, have historically experienced unjust classification and treatment within the healthcare system. Across Canadian provinces and territories, Indigenous Peoples were given varying accessibility to healthcare resources depending on their capacity to be classified as “registered Indian” by non-Indigenous governments. The Indian Act of 1876 permitted federal control over Indigenous lands, meaning registered Indigenous Peoples living on reserves became eligible for federally funded healthcare. However, this policy does not support all Indigenous Nations or Peoples equally, forcing many unregistered and/or Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve to be faced with limited accessibility to necessary resources (Jull & Giles, 2012). This inequitable distribution of necessary resources can be seen historically, as Indigenous Peoples placed into the “unregistered” category were (and often still are) only eligible for limited, uninsured healthcare programs offered by the federal government. Accessibility especially differs among Inuit and Métis populations, both of whom were not normally recognized under the

Indian Act, and the latter of whom remained ineligible for any comprehensive, federally funded healthcare benefits (Jull & Giles, 2012).

While the creation of the Indian Act of 1876 is often seen as a historical inequity, the need for OTs to reflect upon the long-standing consequences of Canada's history of disproportionate healthcare distribution is becoming increasingly more common in the literature (Jull & Giles, 2012). As jurisdiction and classification of Indigeneity is so heavily embedded into the origins of Canadian federal healthcare policy, OTs must recognize that the provision of the Indian Act of 1876 *continues* to perpetuate limited, variable accessibility to healthcare resources across Indigenous populations in Canada. This means that OTs should inherently recognize the limited or denied access to OT services disproportionately experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada when compared to non-Indigenous counterparts (Jull & Giles, 2012). OTs may work with Indigenous clients who are registered or unregistered, living on or off-reserve – making the understanding of this political history crucial to providing the most effective, affordable, culturally-safe care possible in Indigenous populations in Canada.

For example, in 2007 it was reported that Indigenous children with disabilities are more likely to experience disproportionately unmet needs when compared to non-Indigenous children of the same age (Jull & Giles, 2012). More recently, an integrative review assessing the role of OT in Indigenous contexts in 2020 concluded their major theme to be the continuance of OTs in Canada to carry personal biases and assumptions into their relationships, interactions, and treatment of Indigenous clients (White & Beagan, 2020). In this context, reflecting upon generational inequities between Indigenous health and accessibility to healthcare in comparison to non-Indigenous populations – inequities that stem from the oppressive frameworks underlying the history of Canadian healthcare, may allow OTs to better listen to, understand, reflect upon, and offer support when addressing needs of Indigenous Peoples that may otherwise go unrecognized by settler populations (Jull & Giles, 2012).

### **The importance of Truth and Reconciliation: Adoption of land acknowledgements**

As citizens and organizations in Canada continue to reflect and discuss the harmful nature of their past, many governments and institutions across the country have begun adopting various methods to support the process of Truth and Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The single method to be assessed in this report is the usage of land acknowledgement statements prior to hearings, events, or announcements across Canada. In order to address and reconcile colonialism-derived traumas among Indigenous populations, land acknowledgments have been adopted by many organizations in hopes to, “name that which has been previously ignored” and offer respects to Indigenous Peoples who continue to experience the consequences of colonialism today. In this way, the adoption of land acknowledgments has been perceived by many Canadians as the beginning of Truth and Reconciliation – by naming the original land inhabitants, institutions are beginning to address the dark history of colonization that led to predominantly non-Indigenous possession of traditional Indigenous land in Canada (Robinson *et al.*, 2019).

To address the implementation of land acknowledgements in Canada, three areas of improvement have been highlighted based on the findings of academic and grey literature (shown in Table 2), including (1) a lack of genuineness (i.e., the perception of using land acknowledgments as a “box-ticking exercise”), (2) a promotion of settler's innocence (i.e., the use of land acknowledgments strictly as a symbolic gesture), and (3) a lack of traditional Indigenous practice (i.e., Westernised focus on “who owned the land” rather than Indigenous practice of appreciating the land and its original caretakers). By using these three improvement areas as guidance, alongside the diverse perspectives of three Indigenous Elders acting as interview participants, this report aims to reflect on and provide Indigenous perspectives alongside non-Indigenous guidance and recommendations for CAOT staff members to improve their understanding of and participa-

tion in land acknowledgments. Through this mechanism of Indigenous perspectives alongside non-Indigenous guidance, this report hopes to promote land acknowledgements that better support the process of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.

## FINDINGS

### Overview of academic and grey literature findings

When assessing academic and grey literature for areas of improvement regarding land acknowledgements in Canada, it was important to not only identify Indigenous perspectives on the issue, but also actions taken by institutions, governments, and/or Indigenous Peoples in Canada to further personal reflection on the importance of identifying these improvements when applied in practice. Therefore, the following section will highlight the relevant findings for each of the three improvement areas of focus, while also providing information on how these improvement areas may have impacted Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous experiences since the introduction of land acknowledgement protocols in Canada.

#### Improvement area #1: A lack of genuineness

While land acknowledgements were originally adopted into Canadian practice as a sign of respect towards Indigenous Peoples and admittance of harmful colonialist histories, increasing concern among Indigenous Peoples exists within literature that suggests the use of land acknowledgements in practice may be counterintuitive to the original goal of supporting Truth and Reconciliation in Canada (Wark, 2021). The work of Anishinaabe PhD student Wark (2021) highlights the importance of identifying the intention behind land acknowledgements when discussing the work of various Indigenous students and faculty members who have been trying to promote the acceptance of land acknowledgements within Canadian institutions for decades. In contrast to the ease of the Canadian government to oversee the introduction of institutional land acknowledgements through creation of the TRC, Wark (2021) reminds us that many Indigenous students and faculty worked tirelessly to have their voices heard in the same context over many years in recent history. However, while the TRC was tasked with encouraging the use of land acknowledgements prior to public hearings and events in Canada *as a measurable action to support Truth and Reconciliation*, the students and faculty referred to by Wark (2021) – who worked very hard to gain recognition for the importance of land acknowledgements, had different priorities in mind. Rather than blindly equating all land acknowledgements to progress towards Truth and Reconciliation, many Indigenous Peoples prior to the TRC fought for the introduction of land acknowledgements in institutional settings as a means to, *“expose historical and contemporary violence, challenge the myth that settler’s found empty land waiting to be occupied, and voice the failure of genocidal colonial policies to eradicate Indigenous peoples”* (Wark, 2021).

As discussed by Wark (2021), it could be argued that the goal of these Indigenous students and faculty to use land acknowledgements as a reminder of the resiliency and strength of Indigenous Peoples in the face of historical and modern-day colonialism *was* reflected in the initial mission of the TRC to support Truth and Reconciliation through use of land acknowledgements. However, the story of Hayden King, an Anishinaabe writer working for Ryerson University in 2019, was highlighted by Wark (2021) to provide further insight into how this original mission of Indigenous students, faculty and the TRC continue to be neglected across some institutions in Canada through a lack of genuineness when presenting land acknowledgements (Wark, 2021). After writing a land acknowledgement for the Toronto-based university, King declared his regret for providing such an in-depth script to the institution and its presenters. While King provided Ryerson with a complete land acknowledgement including descriptive pronunciation guidelines, he later discussed the harm in providing non-Indigenous readers of land acknowledgement with all materials necessary to present a “supportive” statement regarding the land. As summarised by Wark (2021) from the

thoughts of Hayden King, providing such scripted land acknowledgements removes the need for anyone besides the writer to genuinely interact with the materials being discussed. In the context of land acknowledgements, Wark (2021) argued that the allowance of limited genuineness may allow readers to mindlessly recite pre-written statements intended to reflect remorse and accountability for genocidal histories that are both highly violent and recent in nature. However, when presenting such intimate information from a place of uninformed, or disingenuous intention, the work of Wark (2021) highlights that land acknowledgements may easily become a “box-ticking” exercise for Canadian institutions to participate in as a protocol for their TRC commitments, rather than being used as an opportunity to reflect upon and take accountability for the dark history of colonization in Canada or offer genuine respects to Indigenous Peoples (Wark, 2021).

Similarly, Wark (2021) reflects upon the work of Vowel (2017), a Métis scholar, to identify similar concerns over the use of land acknowledgements in Canada that lack appropriate levels of genuineness. In discussing the loss of transformative potential facing the use of land acknowledgements in Canada, Vowel (2017) highlights a lack of critical thought towards Indigenous experiences as a perpetrator of land acknowledgements that lack genuineness. As discussed by Wark (2021), without critical thought into the purpose of introducing land acknowledgement statements and the contents being described within them, settler populations may be granted some of the social privileges that come with proclaiming accountability and reconciliation, without putting in the effort required to understand the importance of Indigenous land acknowledgements and genuinely move towards a more truthful and reconciled community. Without genuinely acknowledging the importance and role of Indigenous communities through history in Canada, Wark (2021) argues that the creation of land acknowledgements may continue to limit progress towards Truth and Reconciliation by allowing settler populations to recite land acknowledgements from uninformed lenses that continue to ignore the significance of Indigenous culture, community and extensive resiliency within a society that was built upon mechanisms of oppression and targeted violence towards Indigenous Peoples (Wark, 2021).

While the work of Wark (2021) highlighted areas of concern regarding genuineness surrounding land acknowledgements, other grey literature sources directly identified actions taken by Canadian governments that may have reduced or enhanced perceptions of genuineness within their land acknowledgements. Reflecting on the words of Menominee scholar Rowland E. K. Robinson, some Indigenous Peoples may feel that land acknowledgements often fail to align with the actions of non-Indigenous institutions (Wark, 2021). As stated by Robinson, the lack of genuineness exemplified by a lack of consistency between institutional words and actions may be interpreted by some Indigenous Peoples as, “*We stole it [your land] and we feel bad, but let’s keep it effectively the same*” (Wark, 2021).

### **A lack of genuineness in practice: Examples of inconsistent words and actions**

Exemplifying the ideas of Robinson *et al.* (2019) and originally reported by the Toronto Sun (before being removed from their publication archives), the unanimous declaration of Vancouver as an unceded territory of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish Peoples by the City of Vancouver has been identified as an example of the lack of genuineness in the intentions of non-Indigenous institutional bodies when making land acknowledgements. As highlighted by Indigenous rights activists in the media of June 2014, the first declaration of unceded territory by the City of Vancouver was followed shortly thereafter with a statement from Councillor Andrea Reimer ensuring property owners and investors of Vancouver that the declaration would not influence the legalities of their investments due to historical un-involvement of the City of Vancouver in treaty negotiations. Due to their lack of involvement in treaty affairs, Indigenous Peoples in Vancouver may continue to be neglected from discussions of land distribution even in the presence of the City of Vancouver’s declaration – clarifying Reimer’s statement to investors and exemplifying a lack of genuine action to match the words expressed in the City’s declarative announcement, according to H.G. &

Hamilton (2015).

To further exemplify a display of unmatched actions and words, shortly after the release of both the City of Vancouver's declaration and Reimer's statement regarding property investment, the Assertion of Aboriginal Land Title was ignored by the City as homeless individuals residing in Oppenheimer Park – a population of mainly Indigenous Peoples, were evicted and removed upon City request (H.G. & Hamilton, 2015; Wark, 2021).

### **A lack of genuineness in practice: Examples of attempts to support Reconciliation**

Following these events in Vancouver, the British Columbia (BC) government formulated a new reconciliation agreement in July of 2022 between themselves and Stz'uminus First Nations Peoples in hopes to better align their actions with the intentions described through land acknowledgements across the province of BC (N.D., 2022). Through their new reconciliation agreement, the BC government established their commitments to work on community priorities, economic development, and land transfers relevant to Stz'uminus First Nations Peoples across the province. To bring these commitments to fruition, the BC government agreed to fund up to \$28.5 million for the occurrence of land transfer agreements over several years, as well as \$3 million in immediate funding for financial benefits, and the acquisition of private lands within the band's territory. Furthermore, the BC government agreed to fund \$10 million over the next five years to support Stz'uminus First Nations Peoples in leading remedies among key Crown regions within the Ladysmith Harbour (N.D., 2022).

To further address inconsistencies in their land acknowledgement commitments and actions towards Indigenous Peoples and land distribution, the City of Vancouver released an UNDRIP strategy in October of 2022 (City of Vancouver, 2022). In section 3.8 of the UNDRIP, titled "Disposition of City-Owned Lands/Repatriation of Lands to Nations", the City of Vancouver states their commitment to work with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsiel-Waututh Peoples to identify lands of cultural, economic, and socially significant Indigenous priority to support an end goal of reclamation of these lands by respective Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, section 3.9 identifies the City's commitment to identify ways in which Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsiel-Waututh Peoples can be included in discussions of lease signing by the city (City of Vancouver, 2022).

### **Improvement area #2: Used as an attempt at settler innocence**

Drawing again from the work of Wark (2021), some Indigenous Peoples have identified concern over the use of land acknowledgements as an attempt at settler innocence, defining the concept of "settler moves to innocence" as strategies used by settler populations to, "*absolve themselves from implication in the colonial project without having to make substantial changes*" (Wark, 2021).

Through his research, Wark (2021) explains that without a genuine and explicit explanation as to why a land acknowledgement is being presented, responsibility for the purpose of the acknowledgement itself cannot be taken or properly addressed. The findings of Wark (2021) argue that this superficiality has led land acknowledgements across Canada to be seen as an attempt to ignore or erase the violence of colonialism within Canadian history. In creating these beliefs, land acknowledgements in Canada continue to be seen as limited in their critical thinking, further validating concerns that the perceived disingenuousness of current land acknowledgements may threaten the reality of Canadian history (Wark, 2021). For example, findings by Wark (2021) highlight the harmful nature of wrongfully suggesting peaceful or civil treaty negotiations between the Crown and Indigenous Nations during gestures of Truth and Reconciliation, as reflected in some land acknowledgements across Canada. Inaccurate acknowledgements of peaceful treaty negotia-

tions may be seen as harmful because, as the limited body of literature including accurate accounts of treaty negotiations continues to grow, research increasingly suggests it to be highly unlikely that many Indigenous communities fully understood the terms of treaty negotiations between themselves and the Crown, nor were Indigenous communities frequently provided with consistent or accurate information or support regarding these agreements (Wark, 2021). Furthermore, while some land acknowledgements continue to mention treaty negotiations in their statements, findings suggest that these acknowledgements exemplify attempts at settler innocence as they fail to address the historic reality that Indigenous nations (especially those in the prairies) were often starved, abused, and/or withheld of necessary information, leading to forced “participation” in treaty negotiations with the Crown (Wark, 2021).

### **Attempts at settler innocence in practice: Examples of inadequate reflections of history**

As argued by Wark (2021), phrasing land acknowledgments in ways that situate settler populations as guests upon land that was fairly submitted to the Crown by Indigenous Peoples perpetuates a perception of land acknowledgements as a “settler move to innocence”. Drawing again on the words of Hayden King to strengthen his argument, Wark (2021) discusses the territorial acknowledgement presented at the 2019 Pride Toronto event in Ontario, Canada. The acknowledgement read, “**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: *What is that? Let us journey together...***” before telling readers to connect with and spiritually introduce themselves to the land (CBC, 2019). While the land acknowledgement urged readers to, “build a relationship with Mother Earth that provides for all our relations”, Hayden King, other Indigenous attendees, and online followers of King identified the statement as a prime example of the use of land acknowledgements as an attempt at settler innocence (CBC, 2019; Wark, 2021). Without any mention of Indigenous Peoples, or truthful discussion about the colonialist history underlying the mission of supporting Truth and Reconciliation, King saw the territorial acknowledgement at Pride Toronto to be an “*acknowledgement repurposed to validate Canadian presence while removing Indigenous Peoples from the discussion*” (Wark, 2021). In this way, the claims of Anishinaabe writer and educator Hayden King were highlighted by Wark (2021) to identify concerns of the use of land acknowledgements as an attempt at settler innocence as perceived by some Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Conducted prior to the Toronto Pride incident, Wark (2021) also draws on a research study held in a student-based environmental group at the University of Toronto (UoT) aimed at identifying student perceptions of Indigenous Peoples following the introduction of land acknowledgements in their institution (Fitzsimmons Frey, 2018). While research by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT, 2019) and others (Asher et al., 2018; Jenzen, 2019) suggest the introduction of land acknowledgements to foster increasing respect and relationships of solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, research findings from the UoT study by Fitzsimmons Frey (2018) failed to draw the same conclusions. In contrast, students within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) reported daily requirements of land acknowledgements conducted by their schools to be performative and reminiscent of a “box-ticking” exercise (Wark, 2021). Due to disingenuous reciting of land acknowledgements, it was found that students within TDSB often developed views of Indigenous Peoples as, “*victims*” and “*part of the past*”, rather than building foundations of respect (Wark, 2021). Research suggests that land acknowledgements within the TDSB and other Canadian school boards may move innocence onto those reciting the acknowledgement rather than onto historically innocent Indigenous Peoples, with one middle-school aged survey participant defining land acknowledgements as, “*heartless, robotic apologies*” (Wark, 2021).

Reflection on research performed at TDSB was used by Wark (2021) to further exemplify ways in which current land acknowledgements may be more concerned with proclaiming settler innocence than adequately supporting Truth and Reconciliation in Canada. While the TDSB introduced land acknowledgements as a supportive step towards Truth and Reconciliation, their institutions were faced with concern from

Métis populations upon hearing acknowledgements that inaccurately named original territorial inhabitants (Wark, 2021). Following statements from the TDSB acknowledging Métis Peoples as traditional inhabitants of their now-situated land, Métis historian Jesse Thistle identified Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat Peoples to be the original land inhabitants in Toronto. In doing so, Thistle also identified the harm posed to Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat Peoples as they continue their fight for adequate land recognition (Wark, 2021). Argued by Wark (2021), wrongful acknowledgements when conducting land acknowledgements further support settler innocence as it allows Canadian institutions to support benevolent national reputations without truthfully addressing the colonialist history that underlies Truth and Reconciliation. In this way, Wark (2021) argues that wrongful land acknowledgements may act as attempts at settler innocence by uplifting settler populations through superficial mechanisms of supporting Truth and Reconciliation while directly reducing and/or ignoring the work of Indigenous Peoples who have been trying to achieve respectful and accurate land recognition for decades.

### **Attempts at settler innocence in practice: Recommendations for improvement**

After discussing the ways in which land acknowledgements have been perceived by some Indigenous Peoples as attempts at settler innocence, Wark (2021) also reports on current recommendations within research on how to move away from superficial, innocence-seeking acknowledgements. Thus, it was found that true reconciliation may not be achieved solely through acts like land acknowledgements, rather through acts of land returns, financial rectification, renegotiation and/or destruction of treaties, and genuine recognition of Indigenous self-determination (Wark, 2021).

While findings suggest the continuous downplaying of colonial violence to be necessary to maintaining positive political reputations in Canada, Purvis (2018) argues that Canada may move closer to genuine Truth and Reconciliation upon increasing their willingness to address deeply rooted political biases within society. In doing so, Purvis (2018) suggests that institutions in Canada may finally address the biased political frameworks that allow the state body to play a large role in perpetuating the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from adequate respect and recognition (Purvis, 2018). These findings align with the conclusions of Wark (2021), who ended their discussion by highlighting that, *“the erasure of Indigenous presence in the settler state is not a grand conspiracy”*. With this statement, Wark (2021) continues to identify the roles of the state, society, and individuals in perpetuating settler colonialism and its harmful consequences, as, *“the national subject and national narratives are mutually reinforcing”*. Argued further by Purvis (2018), the development of sovereignty (or the authority to govern) was originally designed for strategic use in Western society relating to domestication, control, and the reinforcement of political power and abuse. Therefore, Purvis (2018) identifies the propagation of preferred languages and systems of government, as well as the historical framing of various sacrifices and traditions to be key perpetrators of settler innocence. Though less focused on land acknowledgements in particular, the work of Purvis (2018) identifies concern over deeply rooted systemic injustice to be central to genuinely progressing Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.

### **Improvement area #3: A lack of traditional Indigenous practice**

Alongside a lack of genuineness or use as an attempt at settler innocence, research suggests that some Indigenous Peoples see land acknowledgements in Canada to be negligent of traditional Indigenous practices or protocols (Wark, 2021). Because of their lack of consideration for traditional Indigenous practices, research suggests that some Indigenous Peoples may see the adoption of land acknowledgements as an attempt to colonize and/or appropriate a traditional Indigenous practice (Wark, 2021). However, since these land acknowledgements often fail to consider Indigenous tradition – and oftentimes recite scripted statements or misinformation as discussed above, Wark (2021) argues that some Indigenous Peoples see disingenuous land acknowledgements as an attempt to, *“legitimise stolen land”* as opposed to showing respect for land and original land inhibitors.



Moreover, the work of Shelley Reys – a Djiribul Indigenous specialist, strategist and service provider of Far North Queensland, Australia suggests that by continuing to promote disingenuous land acknowledgements that fail to consider traditional Indigenous practices, non-Indigenous populations will continue to develop increasing concern over individualising or altering land acknowledgements. To paraphrase the argument of Reys (2022), *“When someone is too afraid to say something wrong, they may become increasingly more comfortable repeating the same statement over and over again”*.

## **Understanding traditional Indigenous land acknowledgements**

To better understand the significance of traditional Indigenous land acknowledgements, the following section includes research findings from academic and grey literature that exemplify (to my best understanding as a non-Indigenous person) the differences between traditional Indigenous land acknowledgements and current institutional land acknowledgments in Canada.

Drawing from the words of Lindsay Brant – a Haudenosaunee Mohawk Educational Developer and Indigenous Pedagogies and Ways of Knowing at the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Queen’s University, land itself holds a far more significant meaning than placement and ownership (Brant, 2020). Lindsay describes the importance of her relationship to the land as it connects her back to the first ancestral teachings she learned relating to gratefulness, respect, and responsibility (Brant, 2020). According to Brant (2020), she was taught from a young age that land must be respected in all aspects of creation. When looked at in this way, Brant (2020) identifies the importance of nature and land in supporting human survival, as she was taught from youth that this dependence places humans as the least important aspect of creation. Therefore, Brant (2020) discusses the depth of significance as she acknowledges the land – land that she and all of her ancestors recognize they have been completely relying on for survival since creation. In her words, Brant (2020) reflects on land acknowledgements by saying, *“We give greetings and thanks to all aspects of creations because we realise how important they are to our own lives, connections, and connections to our ancestors”*. Elaborating further on this idea, Brant (2020) identifies her reflection upon people, relationship building, and the significance of the land to her ancestors as key to conducting a respectful land acknowledgement. As many Indigenous nations travel across different regions over time, Brant (2020) highlights the respect given by Indigenous Peoples to the territories of other Indigenous groups – respect not only for the land itself but also for the culture, transitions, and *“ways of doing”* adopted by each nation whose territory they may cross. In a similar nature, Brant (2020) urges non-Indigenous populations to,

*“Consider your positionality, place within the land you’re in and your connection to the people and groups you’re sharing space and time with – being respectful of that by taking time to get to know the land, people and all of creations and the aspects that you share in your life. I hope you take the time to consider what the land means to you and your life here on earth.”*

Furthermore, the words of Stephen Paquette – an Indigenous Elder, Director of the Board of Governors and member of the Indigenous Education Council at Sheridan College, highlights similar themes of respect and appreciation within traditional Indigenous land acknowledgements (Paquette, 2020). In his discussion of land acknowledgements, Paquette reflects on the teachings of his Elders in saying, *“It’s not about acknowledging whose land it belongs to because in the Indigenous worldview, we never owned the land – we were simply caretakers of it”*. Exemplifying the message of Lindsay Brant, Paquette continues to describe the importance of appreciating relationships over that of land ownership often displayed in institutional land acknowledgements across Canada (Paquette, 2020). Rather than ownership, Paquette highlights the significance of reflecting upon relationships to other people sharing the land, with mother earth, with animals and plant life – in doing so, Paquette (2020) feels a land acknowledgement better aligns with the traditional Indigenous worldview that recognizes the importance of each aspect of nature within the food

chain, with medical developments, and within the use of these foods and medicines for survival and ceremony. Furthermore, Paquette (2020) discusses the importance of giving thanks to water and the teachings it may carry through interaction with the sun, moon, and distant relatives and relationships referred to as, “*star people*”. Once again reminding listeners that many Indigenous nations processed nomadic living behaviours and frequently shifted across different regions, Paquette (2020) identified the importance of acknowledging more than the nation who may live on it; rather than releasing statements of land ownership, Paquette (2020) argues a need to reflect upon and acknowledge one’s gratefulness and appreciation for the opportunities, resources, and relationships a region of land may have offered to oneself and one’s ancestors.

### **Lack of traditional Indigenous practices: Recommendations for improvement**

The words of Shelley Reys, a Djiribul Indigenous specialist, strategist and service provider of Far North Queensland, Australia provides clearly exemplified insight into how non-Indigenous communities may better align with traditional Indigenous practices when creating land acknowledgement statements (Reys, 2022). Even though Reys is not Indigenous to Canada, her work provides a general foundation which may be used as reflective guidance for pan-Indigenous nations lacking Indigenous practices within their land acknowledgements. During her discussion, Reys (2022) identifies the difference between a “*welcoming*” and an “*acknowledgement*”, clarifying that the latter should be used by a guest upon land (i.e., settler populations when speaking to Indigenous Peoples). Furthermore, Reys (2022) defines a land acknowledgement as a “*Beautiful, respectful pause of thanks – thanks to the people who have looked over the land and water, on behalf of us, for thousands of years*”. Once again reiterating the messages of Brant (2020), Paquette (2022), and Reys (2022) clearly outlines two key steps to consider before creating a land acknowledgement:

- (1) Ask, who are the traditional inhabitants?
- (2) Ask, what is my personal connection to this land?

After reminding listeners that step (2) must be done in a personal, authentically reflective manner, Reys (2022) concludes her discussion by highlighting that a personal statement is bound to have more meaning than an impersonal one, and that a meaningful gesture is far less likely to devolve into box-ticking criteria than those of disingenuous nature.

### **Overview of real-time interview findings**

Upon meeting virtually with each interview participant and Indigenous Elder, the student researcher began the discussion with an in-depth introduction about their family history, connections to relevant regions of land and their original caretakers (i.e., each Indigenous group that originally inhabited each geographical region), and reasoning for how and why the student has been conducting this specific research. Where appropriate, the non-Indigenous research supervisor in attendance also provided a similar introduction before allowing each participant the opportunity to introduce themselves. Following introductions, the student researcher posed each interview question before actively listening to each response – only adding commentary where appropriate to allow open discussion, reflection, and clarification between researcher and interview participant.

First to be interviewed was Albert McLeod, who spoke with the researcher for a total of approximately 25 minutes. Two weeks later, Michael Yellowbird was interviewed for an approximate total of 45 minutes. Just a day after the second interview, Ann LaBillois participated in the final interview for about 1.5 hours. After taking time to reflect upon the discussions and ideas presented in each interview, the student researcher organised key themes derived from interview findings into three subsections: question 1, question 2, and question 3, as identified below. Of the findings discussed below, the majority of quotes presented are

paraphrased to the best abilities of the student researcher through reflection on scribed notes taken by the research supervisor during interviews, as well as personal reflection by the research student.

### **Question 1: A lack of genuineness**

To begin each interview, the first question posed was, “*Do you feel that land acknowledgements could be more effective in supporting the journey towards truth and reconciliation in Canada if they were approached differently by non-Indigenous community members? If so, what do you think this approach should look like?*”.

#### **Participant 1: Albert McLeod**

In discussion with Albert, this question brought about a few different ideas. Initially, Albert took a moment of reflection before identifying that while land acknowledgements across Canada are quite diverse – with some reflecting on historical harms and others solely acknowledging their presence on the land of traditional Indigenous communities, the overall use of land acknowledgements in Canada can be seen as a useful and helpful tool. Though mentioning the cynical nature of some land acknowledgements and the desire of some Indigenous Peoples to see land returns as opposed to verbal acknowledgements, Albert positioned the use of land acknowledgements as not only beneficial for everyone. Not only did Albert see land acknowledgements as beneficial to the Indigenous communities that originally and currently reside in various regions of Canada through increasing recognition, but also for the non-Indigenous communities that are given the opportunity to participate in land acknowledgements. Rather than using them as symbolic gestures that lack genuineness, Albert described land acknowledgements as being used as a tool to reinstall traditional Indigenous practices into Canadian society. Specifically, Albert described this reinstatement through the original use of land acknowledgements by Indigenous Peoples as a means of introduction upon meeting one another. According to Albert, land acknowledgements provide an opportunity for members of differing communities to listen and engage with one another. In detail, Albert identified land acknowledgements as a way to learn about the folklore (i.e., the do’s and don’ts of the world), traditions (i.e., intergenerational passing of knowledge that aids in self-discovery) and taboos (legends learned by the age of 10 through storytelling) that are unique to each Indigenous nation. Moreover, Albert identified land acknowledgements as an opportunity for Indigenous nations to deny engagement with differing communities. In this way, Albert discusses land acknowledgements as a formal greeting which can be denied without any perceptions of disrespect by opposing nations, usually because a nation is too busy to engage with another at a certain time (i.e., busy hunting, so cannot socialise at this time). Through this reflection, it was clarified further that land acknowledgements act as a pivotal piece of the “*narrative and conversation about decolonization and recolonization*” as stated by Albert.

When reflecting further on the importance of the traditional use of land acknowledgements, Albert discussed the ways in which many traditional Indigenous communities travelled throughout North America through trade routes, highlighting the depth of understanding carried by Ambassadors in regards to differing cultures, diplomacies, and more. In this discussion, Albert once again clarified the importance of land acknowledgements in carrying on traditional demonstrative culture across North and South America as mentioned above (i.e., the use of land acknowledgements as a respectful greeting and introduction). Because of this, while Albert initiated his conversation with the cynical nature of land acknowledgements, he reflected again on the idea that all land acknowledgements are different. For example, where controversy exists over the inclusion or exclusion of certain Indigenous nations across land acknowledgements in Winnipeg, Albert stated that, personally, he would include certain nations that are currently being deemed controversial. Even though certain nations may not have been traditional inhabitants of specific land regions and therefore would be excluded from many current land acknowledgements, Albert described that if the nation resides there

now, he sees it as necessary to include them in land acknowledgements. This idea stems back to the use of land acknowledgements as a tool for introduction and engagement across differing nations, clearly identifying why Albert would include currently residing nations even if they did not originally inhabit the Winnipeg region.

### **Participant 2: Michael Yellowbird**

Upon being asked if land acknowledgements could bare more effectiveness if approached differently by non-Indigenous community members, Michael took a clear stance that while land acknowledgements may act as a “*window dressing*” in terms of Truth and Reconciliation, he felt strongly that land acknowledgements could be more effective upon the adoption of different approaches. Reflecting on the “*apologies for wrongdoing*” that some of his colleagues have taken part in, Michael described land acknowledgements as an acknowledgement and less of an apology. This lack of remorse or apologeticness – as reflected directly in the name “land acknowledgement” when compared to the adoption of “apologies for wrongdoing”, was perceived by Michael as a, “*need to go further*” with the content of land acknowledgements and the extent to which history, truth, and reconciliation are discussed.

Drawing from ideas of apologeticness, Michael discussed a need to increase the level of factual, historic reflection encompassed in current land acknowledgements as a means to take Canada another step closer to genuine attempts at Truth and Reconciliation across the nation. Diving into factual accounts of history in Canada, Michael highlighted the understanding that blessings were once given out by the Catholic Church to promote the “*doctrine of discovery to any Christian nations that could take land from non-Christian nations*”. Stemming from this reality, Michael urged that the historical, systemic push for, “*civilized v.s. uncivilized*” perspectives on past land distribution must be reflected upon and discussed, in the current day. Therefore, Michael stated that while land acknowledgements are important, “*the next stage is to sit down and figure out how to make land acknowledgements more relevant, as well as subsistence and factually true*”.

When reflecting on what it currently means to listen to or recite a land acknowledgement in Canada, Michael pondered the idea that while the statements are read to acknowledge the presence of an individual or institution, “*on someone else’s land and that they are not the original stewards,*” he rhetorically followed up with the question, “*Land acknowledgement about what? If you’re on someone else’s land that changes the context of the relationship*”. In this discussion, Michael highlighted the idea that while land acknowledgements may, “*sound nice and are an acknowledgement*”, the statements often fail to, “*operationalize*” their commitments. When elaborating on his concern, Michael offered a very realistic mock conversation to exemplify his message,

*“If this is your land and it’s stolen and I’m on it, what does that mean? I can work with you on this land but you’re not going to get it back. I will help you compensate for your loss.”*

*“But what does that mean you are going to do for me?”*

In continuing this exemplification, Michael responded to his own question with, “*Pledge to do this... pledge to do that*”. However, according to Michael, these pledges are not often identified in land acknowledgements, and even less often implemented with commitment to follow up on their results. Through his understanding, it is necessary to work alongside Indigenous Peoples to update Truth and Reconciliation priorities. In doing so, Michael urged that it is crucial for actions to be collaborative and cooperative in nature to enable Truth and Reconciliation commitments to strongly align with the wants and needs of Indigenous communities, first and foremost.

Following his discussion of realigning Truth and Reconciliation priorities, Michael highlighted the need to reflect on use of the term, “land acknowledgement” in this context, wherein settler populations use the statements to acknowledge presence on unceded territories. Linking back to his mention of the change of context that occurs when residing on stolen land, Michael felt it necessary to, “*change the title... don’t call it a land acknowledgement. Call it a Reconciliation Statement about land and ownership and that something was stolen, and we are on it*”. In approaching land acknowledgements from a true position of reconciliation, Michael felt that these “*Reconciliation Statements*” should offer a substantive, factual, 4-5 point plan of action regarding one’s commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. To provide guidance for those reflecting on how these points may be created, Michael asked, “*What exactly are you going to do? What can you offer?*” and reminded that, “*highlighting collaboration and working with Indigenous Peoples is not specific enough*”.

### **Participant 3: Ann LaBillois**

When asked about the potential to increase the effectiveness of land acknowledgements if approached differently by non-Indigenous community members, Ann first reflected on the implementation of land acknowledgements at Dalhousie University, where she works as an Elder in Residence. Drawing from her experience within the institution, she noted that while land acknowledgements have emerged within the University, “*for a while it was confusing as to whether we should be saying land acknowledgements at all*”. Following her statement of confusion surrounding land acknowledgements at the University, Ann described her observation that only the people speaking in presentations would first recite the acknowledgements. During these acknowledgements, Ann reflected on her stance that, “*the simplest and clearest way is the best way*”, describing that “*it is nice to hear them recognize that it [the land being acknowledged] was surrendered, unceded territory. It is great to recognize the land, but it is important to recognize the people when we talk about culture*”. To elaborate further on the importance of culture when acknowledging land, Ann reminded that,

*“The Creator places people on the land and that part of the land becomes their culture; food, medicine, clothing, and how they did their ceremonies all had to do with the land on which they were placed. It is also important to remember that peoples have existed here forever, as well”.*

From this discussion, Ann shared, “*I would like to hear more of that... ‘We are grateful... that people have allowed us to come and be present on this unceded land and territory’*”. When reflecting on why she felt that way, Ann followed up with, “*To me, that is more heartfelt than just memorising... to really be grateful that you are able to come to the land*”. Stemming from her perceived lack of heartfelness when acknowledging land but remaining optimistic regarding the importance of land acknowledgements, Ann stated that, “*[Indigenous] People are forgotten, and on the sideline... but at least now there is recognition; a way of honouring Indigenous Peoples who have been living and working here... to recognize the land as it is, or what is left of it*”.

### **Question 2: Used to promote settler’s innocence**

To begin each interview, the first question posed was, “*In your experience with land acknowledgements in Canada, do you feel that land acknowledgements have been successful in supporting the journey of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada?*”

### **Participant 1: Albert McLeod**

Upon being asked the second question, Albert quickly stated, “*Yes, it is*”, alluding to his understanding of land acknowledgements as being successful in supporting the journey of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada. Through reflection of the history of education in Canada, Albert highlighted the work of Justice Murray Sinclair in identifying the importance of not only considering the impact of residential schools on Indigenous Peoples, but also considering the Indigenous-related education being offered to non-Indigenous Canadians throughout the history of residential school operations. In doing so, Albert reflected on the idea that, “*People didn’t know they were living near reserves or a residential school... and most would go by one and not know it*”. Drawing from this understanding, Albert argued that land acknowledgements provide a direct opportunity to “*fill in the gaps*” regarding information that was excluded from mainstream education and social understanding in Canada over the last 100-200 years.

In discussing the history that has been lost on Canadian education systems for centuries, Albert reflected on the presence of Indigenous Peoples in building the initial foundation of Canada. More specifically, Albert identified that Indigenous Peoples were present during this time, and therefore have highly relevant experiences to the foundations of Canada. Albert recognized the contributions of Indigenous Peoples in World War I and II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, to name a few. In this discussion, Albert highlighted the importance of using land acknowledgements as a tool to educate people in Canada, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, on the unknown histories of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In doing so, Albert felt that land acknowledgements could be pivotal in reducing myths or wrongful understandings of treaty negotiations between Indigenous Peoples and the Crown. Albert highlighted how wrongful assumptions of treaty negotiations can be harmful as they create negative stereotypes towards Indigenous Peoples among non-Indigenous society, however with accurate historical reflection in land acknowledgements, it may become understood that the limited number of benefits currently offered to Indigenous Peoples acts merely as a poorly-compensated “*rent*” that Canada must pay to Indigenous Peoples for colonising Indigenous lands and attempting to assimilate Indigenous culture.

Through conversation about unknown history in Canada and the “*rent*” currently being paid to Indigenous Peoples, Albert asserted that, “*land acknowledgements facilitate the awakening.*”, alongside reports from the TRC and other relevant organisations – notably created for Canadians and not for Indigenous Peoples, to, “*set history right*” and fill in the historical gaps in knowledge that have been created by and promoted through colonialism. While Albert reminded listeners that it will take over 140 years to “*catch up*” on Indigenous housing needs, he clearly positions Canada’s future as being, “*allied with Indigenous Peoples’ future*”, stating that land acknowledgements should continue to be used as they align with necessary demonstrative culture and allows an opportunity for Indigenous nations to be honoured by name. Reflecting again on the idea that all land acknowledgements are different, Albert highlights the usage of various land acknowledgements to act as a formal oration upon meeting different nations, providing a space to, “*apologise for times of colonization and commit to doing better,*” or more generally, to allow non-Indigenous communities to, “*create a positive relationship with Indigenous Peoples.*”

### **Participant 2: Michael Yellowbird**

When reflecting on the question of effectiveness of land acknowledgements in supporting Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, Michael was quick to respond quite bluntly with, “*No idea. I am a data guy; I don’t see it. I talk to a lot of people and read a lot in the press, but I don’t see movement in areas. Indigenous groups and Chiefs are not really seeing anything that has been gained.*” Following this response, Michael began discussing the various factors and statistics that pushed him toward his answer.

*"Indigenous Peoples experience the lowest levels of life expectancy, lack of water, tremendous amounts of racism, increased amounts of prosecution of Native men and women, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, there are many examples of sensational cases. There's nothing that I can see regarding land acknowledgements having an impact on reconciliation. I can make a statement, but if there are no teeth to it..."*  
(You are encouraged to finish the sentence).

Even more specifically, Michael identified the case of an Indigenous woman being murdered in Winnipeg and placed in a local landfill for months under knowledge of the police. In this example, Michael clearly highlighted the deeply rooted nature of systemic injustice against Indigenous Peoples as a reminder that statements of acknowledgement nearly act as, *"one finger plugging one hole in a water balloon filled with numerous different leaks."* Furthermore, Michael continued his reflection of systemic injustice through analysis of the rights of Indigenous peoples on a judicial court level, *"Many are involved in judicial systems and high levels of court (like welfare for Indigenous children), but it is hard to get institutions to change their behaviours towards groups unless they get sued or get a court order and are forced to make changes."* Stating, *"that's how the system works,"* Michael reflected on the idea that while land acknowledgements may be significant to some, *"there's way more stuff going on,"* before addressing the challenges that arise in trying to pin-point one entity or solution, *"It's hard to say that one thing is going to have that power [to make change]... the courts have power and the provinces are ordered to cooperate."*

Before moving onto the next question, Michael took a moment to reflect on the interconnectedness of not only land acknowledgements, but Truth and Reconciliation in general. Stemming from his last quote, Michael continued, *"That's society as a whole,"* before identifying that through intersectionality and the hierarchical nature of society, Indigenous populations are often placed in worse situations than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Moreover, Michael referred to climate change as an example of the interconnectedness of current Reconciliation issues, claiming that, *"The Arctic shelves are melting. Trying to get people to understand that they need to stop using plastic and burning fossil fuels is difficult, leaving people victims of progress."* Referring to the "progress" of land pollution and technology adoption so heavily supported by colonialist frameworks, Michael reminds that, *"Big picture items are huge"* in the context of this discussion. To conclude his response, Michael left researchers to reflect upon the following statement: *"The direct cause of these issues is humans, and the consequence is extinction. Does this do any good? All of these aspects need to be part of the equation."*

### **Participant 3: Ann LaBillois**

Upon being asked about the current effectiveness of land acknowledgements in supporting the journey of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, Ann paused for a moment before responding, *"Unfortunately, not... it [the adoption of land acknowledgements in Canada] is very new."* While Ann did acknowledge the importance of the statements in offering an opportunity of recognition for Indigenous Peoples, she also mentioned that *"It's been within the last year that I started to hear people talking about land acknowledgements. I believe it is helpful in promoting recognition but to say it has been successful... I can't say that yet because it is too new."*

When reflecting on the ways in which she understood land acknowledgements to be perceived in her university environment, Ann stated that, *"People are beginning to question how it [land acknowledgements] is being presented, but it is still just a start. It is a first step to recognize the land and the territory that people are in."* Providing further clarity, Ann reminded that, *"Truth and Reconciliation is a lifetime journey,"* acknowledging that, *"We talk about truth and there's a lot to be said about the truth that instead gets covered up."* These claims were further supported by her recollection of personal experience, as Ann described

her thought process upon first encountering the ways in which information is taught at the university level in Canada, *“I never realised that universities were institutions. There is a lot about the truth that has to be talked about... but what are you really trying to say?”* In this discussion, Ann reflected on the fast-pace of teaching in Canadian universities, as well as a lack of importance placed on truly digesting and comprehending the large amounts of academic material being prescribed by each course instructor. During her experience as a student, Ann remembered asking her professors why so much material was packed into such a short time, and why there were so few opportunities to reflect on and discuss course materials in detail. To her surprise, Ann recounted her professors responding with statements like, *“I understand your concern, but you just need to get through the exam and then you can forget it.”* However, to Ann, this felt highly counter-intuitive as her foundations of learning were far more supportive of deeply addressing concepts and inquiries until all questions have been clarified and all messages have been understood, than what was reflected in her experience as a university student. Expanding on the importance of being able to learn the truth and ask questions to further develop one’s worldview, Ann reinforced that, *“This is the journey of Truth and Reconciliation. We must support the students with language and focus on healing the staff of these institutions... because credentials after a name do not mean that someone has worked on themselves and found peace with themselves.”*

Tying her ideas back to the success of land acknowledgements, Ann posed both a statement and a question, *“If the land is ill, we will be ill... but how do we help the land, the water, the air? It takes a big commitment to truth... how can I really help?”* Reflecting on the importance of patience when learning, reflecting, and addressing concerns, Ann reminded that, *“We get souped up into this worldly stuff and we get lost... and then we forget.”* In elaboration, Ann continued, saying, *“I like to say that we live in a world of illusion... because everything is a whole and affects everything else. We must look at it differently to really know what we are doing.”* Based on her lived experience, Ann provided a personal example of what it might mean for someone to begin, “looking at it differently” as referenced in her previous quote. Reminding the interviewer that she does not know the things her ancestors knew, Ann reflected on an experience that brought her significantly closer to her ancestry, *“I didn’t know about my ancestors, but I felt really good when I sat next to a tree... and when I learned of my ancestors, everything started to make sense.”* Exemplifying how her worldview has shifted throughout her life, Ann stated that in those moments in connection with nature, she realised,

*“Everything is alive and breathing with us... like the moon and the stars. Once we can finally realise how connected we are... we are the land, we are the animals, we are the greens that grow, we are part of the trees... and there is water inside of us too, we can start to see things differently and progress in Truth and Reconciliation.”*

Following her personal account, Ann concluded by reminding that while, *“land acknowledgements are not truly successful, they are the very first step in the journey of Truth and Reconciliation.”*

### **Question 3: Lack of traditional Indigenous practices**

To conclude each interview, the final question asked was, *“Is there anything else you would like to share about land acknowledgments, Indigenous culture, or the ways in which Canadian institutions support Truth and Reconciliation in Canada?”*

#### **Participant 1: Albert McLeod**

When asked the open-ended final question, Albert reflected on the differences between the practices of colonialism and Indigenous culture. While Albert identifies Indigenous Peoples as, *“understand[ing] the cycle of creation and re-creation,”* he identified colonialism as a catalyst that has *“compromised the future*



*of everyone.*” Specifically acknowledging the treatment of land and progression of climate change following the instigation of colonialism, Albert situated colonialism as being exponentially harmful due to its continual ability to, *“move forward with no plan”*. Albert reflected that Indigenous Peoples have been utilising and living on the land for thousands of years, however upon initiation of colonialism, all futures become compromised through the *“suppression of knowledge and intoxication of technology.”* This idea was tied back to the lack of planning within colonial practices, as Albert discussed the lack of critical thought for long-term implications of colonial actions – for example, Albert mentioned the increasing rates of forest fires which may be easily avoided through traditional Indigenous practices, as well as the poor planning that is exemplified through the on-going multi-year displacement of Indigenous flood refugees in hotels following catastrophic climate changes.

In contrast, Albert identified the significance and respect for long-term survival within Indigenous land acknowledgements specifically, arguing that this knowledge and wisdom should be used in tandem with science and technology to encourage acknowledgement of colonial action and their consequences to the natural world. Without marriage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous practices, Albert identified concern over the ability of land acknowledgements to bring awareness to the importance of creation, re-creation and climate change through rhetorical questions like, *“Will people listen?”*, *“What is our contribution to ending global warming?”* and, *“What is the cost of resource extraction?”* In posing such questions, Albert alluded that without Indigenous consultation and respect for traditional wisdom, colonialism may not know its limits. Without a plan of action, Albert humorously argued that colonialism may continue to, *“build more iPhones and cars”* in its attempt to end climate change, as a lack of respect for creation and re-creation may continue towards exponential creation, *“just because we can,”* instead of taking a step back to reflect on the consequences of colonial action and appreciating the knowledge offered by differing cultural traditions.

## **Participant 2: Michael Yellowbird**

When asked if there was anything else he would like to share, Michael first identified a critique regarding land acknowledgements, before diving into a concept he referred to as, *“The critical mass”*.

In terms of criticism, Michael felt it necessary to mention that while, *“Truth and Reconciliation actions have been laid out very clearly,”* he believed that they, *“are really not happening,”* To combat this concern, Michael stated that there should be a significant increase in involvement surrounding non-Indigenous understanding of history and Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, reflected in the quote, *“Change can happen within a generation, but it is not currently happening at school-age levels. Kids should be studying this and the history and should be rewarded for coming up with solutions.”* Michael reminded that the *“roadmap [for Truth and Reconciliation action] has already been laid out,”* such that children should be, *“encouraged to come up with creative solutions.”* In conclusion to this concern, Michael urged that, *“people need to be trained on how to push the machine to the finish line.”*

However, this conceptualization of increasing momentum and passion regarding the journey to Truth and Reconciliation in Canada sparked the idea of a *“critical mass”* to Michael, who began discussing a potential solution in creating a mass of individuals to execute real change. Reflecting on the removal of various monuments and statues across North America in recent history, Michael was optimistic in his understanding that, *“We need a society where there are critical numbers and levels [of people] where we see actions flip into happening”*. Michael continued to argue that *“Once there are enough people, actions will happen. When there is a critical mass, all of the corporations start to change. At that point, communities have power, and that’s what it takes.”* Reflecting on the civil uproar caused by the public murder of George Floyd in the United States, Michael reminded that, *“It is a fight to get these things aired, so people need to engage in movement... in a drastic event.”* In reference to the use of technology and social media to so quickly create

a critical mass following the unjust passing of George Floyd in 2020, Michael stated that, *“People do a lot with emotion... people care, and what happens? If we give them repeated exposure to discomfort, [they cannot ignore that] something needs to be done.”*

Stemming from ideas of human compassion, connection and *“the critical mass”*, Michael also discussed concerns that, *“there is so much that blocks us,”* in reference to the ability of whole societies to, *“get lost in consumerism”*. From this concept, Michael urged that consumerism often, *“takes our minds and hearts out of place”*, leaving individuals disconnected from the intersectionality of human experience and, *“addicted to places or products.”* Therefore, Michael believed that some sort of *“matrix”* is in need of design which forms physical connections between the various relationships that he had discussed. For example, Michael posed that such a matrix, *“Needs to be visual, with bubbles, to connect healing to genocide to residential schools to the TRC and so on.”* In his experience, Michael recommended the use of mindfulness to allow settler and Indigenous populations to *“reconcile through compassion and conversation.”* In conclusion to his interview, Michael left interviewers with the conceptualization that, *“Practising mindfulness – and not just talking, can lead to huge rises in human compassion,”* reminding once more about the need for a *“critical mass”* of compassionate individuals to create genuine, actionable change.

### **Participant 3: Ann LaBillois**

When asked to answer the more open-ended interview question, Ann tied the concept of, *“waiting”* into the conversation. Reflecting on her facilitation of talking circles for students at Dalhousie University, Ann explained that, while some young people participate, *“others less so because they have grown up in this world... and are waiting until they are ready to join the circle, even though they are always welcome.”* Referring to the unawareness of their connections to lands, ancestry, and the spiritual world as understood in Indigenous culture, Ann recalled the importance of word choice and communication, stating that, *“We were given a tongue... which is a very powerful tool. It can take the human heart and either rip it out, or lift it up.”* In reference to the students in her talking circles, Ann’s actions support this claim as she explained the use of her gift of verbal communication to, *“hold onto students and lift them up”*.

Similarly, Ann re-connected her ideas of *“waiting”* back to the institutional world that makes up Canadian universities, reflecting once more on her experience as a student, *“The academic world does not have a lot of empathy and compassion. I want to know what I am learning, but at this [fast] pace, I can only memorise and get through exams”*. Highlighting the importance of patience in institutional settings, Ann continued, saying, *“Something needs to be done about the pace of schools... if somehow, they could level off and still provide good, basic education. People need to really experience the information.”* Linking the need to slow the pace of Canadian education systems, Ann argued that the use of physical books – something not often experienced by current and upcoming generations, may naturally offer more space for students to, *“experience the information”* more so than using unnecessary technological avenues when learning.

Upon discussing the need to more deeply, *“experience the information”*, Ann pointed out that, just like slowing things down within Canadian institutions,

*“It is a part of Truth and Reconciliation to allow certain things... For example, the Indigenous class here [at Dalhousie University] is not intended to fail you, but to have you experience something. Students in this class are asked to write paper assignments that are heartfelt... They are to sit with the information for a while and then express it from the inside. [This teaching strategy] is more compassionate, and because of it, students look forward to going to class and learning.”*

Drawing from her perceived need to increase compassion within the institutions of Canada, Ann referenced the same interconnectedness mentioned in question 2,

*"[Encouraging compassion] allows you to go back to your childhood and remember things that make you happy. Without it, we get caught up and complain about everything. But if we complain, we are going to become very ill. If you have a well mind, you have a well body and your environment will be well. If your mind is distressed, the body and environment will become distressed too."*

In mentioning the importance of childhood, Ann again connected to the importance of asking questions in achieving Truth and Reconciliation, stating that, *"Our thoughts, emotions, and reactions occur every second. That's why it is so important to have talking circles to allow people to come together and feel safe."* As she continued, Ann reminded that, *"A problem shared, is a problem cut in half"*, before discussing the importance of sharing in the traditional practices of her ancestors. In describing its significance, Ann stated, *"I believe that's what our ancestors did before hunting, gathering, or ceremony... they would gather and allow whatever it is that needed to be talked about, to come out."* However, Ann clarified that in this process of release, *"We don't need answers. We just need to release to feel things clearly... because most of the time we don't like to feel anything, especially sadness, which often turns into anger or shame."* Tying these ideas back to the importance of traditional Indigenous practices when conducting land acknowledgements, Ann described that her ancestors likely,

*"Sat with the land so that they would know the truth and how to take care of it. To know the truth we must sit with the pain... because that trauma was an event that happened and that trauma is now how we reacted to that event... how we choose to care for it with every cell of our being."*

In concluding her remarks regarding land acknowledgements, Ann mentioned the depth to which, *"We are hungry for peace."* To recommend strategies of moving forward in genuine support of Truth and Reconciliation, Ann continued, *"Canadian institutions must heal themselves, and individuals and institutions must ask what they can do for the universe each day,"* arguing, *"We have the tools... nature keeps producing despite what we do to it."* In encouragement of the healing necessary to successfully participate in land acknowledgements, Truth, and Reconciliation, Ann asked, *"All great spirit, help me learn the lessons that you have placed in every rock and tree... [We] need to learn to truly listen, and to see beyond what is directly in front of us... to see the whole."* Regarding the need to slow pace within Canadian institutions, Ann explained that *"In life, there is time for everything... but the world seems to chop time up. We don't have time to sit and think about things... time is structured that way and it is very rigid."* Finally, Ann left researchers with the final words, *"No one has to forgive and forget... you can forgive but you do not forget. We are all able to gather... we were born to be happy and well and take care of each other on this earth... because the earth takes care of us."*

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Key Takeaways**

#### **Comparison of findings**

##### **A lack of genuineness**

First discussing the findings of academic literature in relation to the perceived genuineness of land acknowledgements in Canada, the work of Wark (2021) exemplified a theme of desired transparency between Canadian institutions, non-Indigenous, and Indigenous Peoples in Canada. As Wark (2021) highlights

varying intentions behind Indigenous-led (i.e., exposing historical violence and allowing Indigenous-led space to discuss historic and current truths) and institutionally led (i.e., measurable action of supporting Truth and Reconciliation) land acknowledgements in Canada, it is clear that many Indigenous Peoples in Canada remain unsatisfied with their perceived effectiveness of land acknowledgements in creating genuine progress towards Truth and Reconciliation. Reiterating this consensus, the discussion of Hayden King's land acknowledgement experience highlights the lack of progress made by non-Indigenous community members in developing their understanding of accurate historical information, and in developing their appreciation for Indigenous traditions, customs, and cultures – even when this engagement style may be beneficial to Truth and Reconciliation, positively impacting non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples alike (Wark, 2021). Similarly, the actions of the City of Vancouver and Andrea Reimer surrounding their respective declarations of unceded territories and legal indifference relating to property ownership exemplify the lack of progress among non-Indigenous institutions and individuals in ensuring in-depth understanding of the importance of maintaining consistency between genuine words of acknowledgement and genuine actions of Truth and Reconciliation (Wark, 2021). These distinct examples also reiterate the message of Métis scholar, Vowel (2017), which the work of Wark (2021) describes as lacking critical thought towards Indigenous experiences throughout the past and present social, political, and natural climates in Canada. Without deeply and holistically understanding the truth of Canadian and Indigenous histories, Vowel (2017) and Wark (2021) argue that settler populations will continue to be exempt from questioning, learning, and embodying the genuine attitudes and efforts required to progress the journey of Truth and Reconciliation.

While Albert, Michael, and Ann all offered widely ranging perspectives on the perceived effectiveness of land acknowledgements in Canada, both Michael and Ann offered insights reminiscent of the findings of Wark (2021). Upon being asked their opinion on the effectiveness of land acknowledgements in supporting Truth and Reconciliation, both participants offered comments that reflect a need to “dig deeper” into the factually accurate truths of history in Canada before land acknowledgements can become an instigator of actual reconciliatory progress. According to Michael, the inability of Canadian land acknowledgements to “dig deeper” stems from lack of discussion regarding the indoctrination of “*civilized vs. uncivilized*” societies by the Catholic Church during the years of direct colonization, while Ann viewed the lack of substance within land acknowledgements as stemming from the world's, “*chopping up of time*” that leaves individuals without space to truly engage with, ask questions about, and, “*experience the information*” being presented to them about history, Truth, and Reconciliation in Canada. For Michael, it was understood that this de-centralisation from the truth often lead to de-operationalization of institutional commitments to Truth and Reconciliation by allowing non-Indigenous communities to participate in land acknowledgements and recite vague pledges of support without requiring their heavy collaboration alongside Indigenous Peoples who are willing to offer informed guidance on social and political restoration.

Similarly, to the regret experiences by Hayden King as described by Wark (2021), interview participant Michael Yellowbird also reflected on the significance of reciting land acknowledgements by challenging presenters with the question, “*Land acknowledgement about what?*” Just as King came to understand his supportive actions as harmful in their ability to allow land acknowledgment readers an opportunity to opt out of self-learning about true histories in Canada (Wark, 2021), Michael highlighted the distinction that proclamations of being situated on unceded territories should not entail the same acknowledgement criteria as those being presented between traditional Indigenous nations. Instead, Michael urged for non-Indigenous institutions to adopt “*reconciliation statements*” as a means of properly addressing the intended meaning behind the sentiment. Reflecting almost identically to a quote highlighted by Wark (2021), Michael took the message of “*We stole it [your land] and we feel bad, but let's keep it effectively the same*” one step further by adding the questions, “*What does it mean? What does that [land acknowledgement] mean you're going to do for me?*” before describing his desire for a four- to five-point plan describing the specific, detailed ways in which sentiments of reconciliation statements will be feasibly actioned.

Understanding that Hayden King was displeased with the lack of accountability for genuine reflection placed on non-Indigenous land acknowledgement presenters, Ann offered insights that aim to counteract this concern by encouraging both accountability and reflection. While Ann did appreciate the adoption of land acknowledgements as a “baby step” in the direction of genuine Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, she also urged non-Indigenous communities to lessen their use of memorisation by instead sitting with relevant information for as much time as needed before creating their acknowledgements. In doing so, Ann felt land acknowledgements may become more heartfelt, allowing institutions and individuals to truly reflect on their gratefulness and connectedness to land as opposed to continuing the – granted more abstract but still prominent, erasure of Indigenous Peoples and history from Canadian society.

Opposingly, participant Albert McLeod offered insights onto the perceived effectiveness of land acknowledgements that differed from that of Michael, Ann, or majority of research findings. In this understanding, Albert viewed land acknowledgements as inherently beneficial in supporting Truth and Reconciliation, providing a worldview that aligned with the original intentions of Indigenous students and faculty who strived to encourage the adoption of institutional land acknowledgements prior to creation of the TRC (Wark, 2021). While he did acknowledge and validate more negative views of land acknowledgements held by other Indigenous Peoples, Albert also identified that land acknowledgements offer benefits to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada through their use as educational tools that encourage appreciation of traditional Indigenous practices. However, as Albert continued to describe the ways in which land acknowledgements may be used as a tool of opportunity, there is reason to believe – based on academic literature and the other interviews conducted, that some of these uses may not be implemented to the capacity necessary to produce positive, short-term changes (Wark, 2021). While Albert identified traditional Indigenous land acknowledgements as opportunities for individuals of differing communities to connect through learning about folklore, traditions, and taboos of the different nations they meet, majority of findings from this report suggest an increasing perception that either (1) these customs are not often accounted for in institutional land acknowledgements (Wark, 2021), (2) where these customs are implemented, they are not done in a genuine manner (Wark, 2021), or (3) these customs must be deeply modified to account for the different relationship dynamics that are consequent of colonialism and the situation of institutions on unceded territories, as reflected in conversation with Michael Yellowbird.

Nonetheless, Albert remained consistent in demonstrating the importance of land acknowledgements to support Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, as he felt as though they should be used, with less significance placed on aspects of housekeeping (like which nations should or should not be included in acknowledgements of certain regions), to continue the promotion of education surrounding Indigenous history in Canada. Though the two offered drastically different comments, Albert’s view of land acknowledgement seemed to align with Ann’s belief that the simplest and clearest presentation of land acknowledgements may be the most effective approach adopted by non-Indigenous communities and institutions. Also worth noting, is that even with the diversity of response, all three interview participants urged the importance of educating all peoples in Canada, regardless of Indigeneity, on accurate, empathetic accounts of history across the country as a mechanism to not only encourage, but ensure genuineness, compassion, and humanness among those institutions and communities participating in land acknowledgements as a mechanism to support Truth and Reconciliation.

While academic research findings also presented recent, promising commitments from the City of Vancouver as a gesture of reconciliation between the City and Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsilhqot’in Peoples in the region, findings from the following sections have posed arguments and distinctions regarding why Indigenous Peoples may not feel as optimistically about recent commitments as the City of Vancouver may have expected. Without negating the importance of legal recognition for Indigenous Peoples in terms of land distribution, cultural expression, and accessibility to necessary funding and resources, the following

sections will re-connect to this City of Vancouver example to highlight perspectives in which many Indigenous Peoples feel land acknowledgements and “words without actions” continue to pose serious threat to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous nations across Canada. In connection with the findings of interview question one, the following sections will continue to discuss the City of Vancouver example similarly to Michael Yellowbird in his argument that Canadian institutions have been permitted to readily pledge their support to Indigenous Peoples without adequately following through (or up) on the actions outlined within each commitment.

### **An attempt at settler’s innocence**

Reminiscent of some of the remarks described above from both academic and grey literature as well as interview findings, Wark (2021) defined “moves to settler’s innocence” as mechanisms used by settler populations to reduce (or remove) implications of colonialism without the requirement of making substantial change. Stemming from findings related to genuineness, Wark (2021) took findings one step further, arguing that the acceptance of superficiality (as opposed to genuineness) within land acknowledgement strategies has led many Indigenous Peoples to perceive the sentiment as attempting to erase – or at least, ignore, the violent history of colonialism that continues to penetrate the frameworks of Canadian institutions and negatively impact the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. To exemplify, Wark (2021) discusses the importance of accurately describing historical treaty negotiations, as findings suggest that some Indigenous Peoples may perceive discussions of treaty negotiations as invalidating to the abuse and injustice experienced by the original Indigenous caretakers of land in present-day Canada.

While Albert once again presented a perspective significantly different from that of interviewees Michael or Ann, findings from his interview present an under-discussed connection to the importance and success of land acknowledgements in relation to settler’s innocence. In elaborating on his perceived effectiveness of land acknowledgements, Albert made a point to highlight that while Indigenous communities may feel stripped of the truth or that institutions are acting cynically inconsistent in their words and actions, majority of non-Indigenous communities have been – granted perhaps not equally, stripped of the truth of their history as well. In the quote, “*People didn’t know they were living near reserves or a residential school,*” Albert once again exemplified the importance of prompting education through land acknowledgements, even if they are sometimes perceived as an attempt at settler innocence. Moreover, similarly to Michael in response to interview question one, Albert described the critical significance that Indigenous Peoples may offer in “*filling in the gaps*” of this previously neglected (or hidden) history in Canada. In this way, the pledges released by the City of Vancouver are not seen by Albert as an attempt at settler innocence, rather as a necessary “*rent*” that must be paid to Indigenous Peoples for allowing the city to unjustly claim and degrade traditional, sacred lands. In support of land acknowledgements to encourage progress towards Truth and Reconciliation, Albert viewed land acknowledgements as the first step in (1) asserting a genuine apology, (2) creating a positive relationship with Indigenous Peoples, and (3) facilitate an awakening among societies in Canada necessary for Reconciliation to continue.

However, findings from discussion with Michael offered another unique perspective, as Michael began answering the question by self-identifying as a “*data guy*.” Reflected in the block quote of Michael’s interview question two response, Michael clearly aligned himself with the belief that actions like land acknowledgements – and even some of the pledges and commitments made by Canadian institutions like the City of Vancouver example, have yet to provide evidence that supports effective progress towards Truth and Reconciliation. Describing increased rates of morbidity, unsafe water, racism and discrimination, violence and prosecution of Indigenous Peoples that have existed consistently since the introduction of colonialism, the perceptions of Michael on the effectiveness of land acknowledgements align with academic and grey literature findings. Specifically, in his assessment of the lack of beneficial change actioned by land acknowl-

edgements in support of the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, Michael's perspective supports the findings of Wark (2021) and Fitzsimmonds Frey (2018). If land acknowledgements have failed to promote success and acceptance between settler populations and Indigenous Peoples as described by Michael, it is clear that there may be clear reasoning behind land acknowledgements being truly perceived as "*box-ticking exercises*," or mechanisms that place Indigenous peoples as "*victims*" and "*part of the past*" among school-aged children within the TDSB (Fitzsimmonds Frey, 2018). Further, Michael accredited these injustices to the requirement of court orders and lawsuits being necessary to instigate actionable change at the institutional level, again contributing to the belief that pledges by the City of Vancouver may not be enough to adequately support Truth and Reconciliation – and even if these proclamations are enough, they are certainly not perceived as coming from a place of genuineness or compassion.

While all three interview participants offered differing perspectives, all three interviewees re-iterated that the process of Truth and Reconciliation is not short-term, but requires long-term, genuine attempts to reconcile the past before measurable progress can be made. In this way, Ann offered grace to the land acknowledgement at Toronto Pride in 2019, which was used as an example of inadequately reflecting history as an attempt at settler innocence earlier in this report. While Ann understood land acknowledgements to be relatively new within the institutions she frequents, she highlighted that many people still remain unsure about their position within the land acknowledgement process and how it should be conducted. Arguably, this was reflected in the 2019 acknowledgement that failed to mention Indigenous Peoples – which may be perceived as (1) an attempt at settler innocence as described by Wark (2021), or (2) an error stemming from uninformed entities as described by Ann. While this conceptualization presents a period of grace for individuals to seek education and learn from their mistakes, Ann also pointed out the importance of discussing the *whole* truth within Truth and Reconciliation, alluding to the validation of upset over the removal of Indigeneity from the acknowledgement in Toronto 2019 (Wark, 2021). However, Ann also made it very clear that mistakes like this one – whether intentional or not, require patience and space to be genuinely resolved. Reflecting on her experience within Canadian institutions, Ann highlighted the need for institutional systems to slow their pace in order to allow genuine, deep reflection on concepts relevant to Truth and Reconciliation, while also providing the space to have any inquiries or uncertainties accurately and compassionately answered regarding historical and current aspects of Indigeneity, colonization, and Truth and Reconciliation. In this way, it is clear that if children within the TDSB, reflected in the work of Fitzsimmonds Frey (2018), were provided space to compassionately inquire and learn about Indigenous Peoples and their history they would not have such harmful and powerfully negative perceptions of Indigeneity, land acknowledgements, and the process of Truth and Reconciliation. Similarly, while uninformed and/or misguided perceptions of Indigeneity could be combatted with a slowed pace and increased compassion in academic and institutional spaces as discussed by Ann, inaccuracies in land acknowledgements highlighted by both Wark (2021) and Fitzsimmonds Frey (2018) may also be reduced with an increased focus on accurate and compassionate education, as significantly identified by all three interview participants.

Undeniably, the urgency of all three interview participants to focus on accurate and compassionate education for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations as a means to increase effectiveness of land acknowledgements and overall, Truth and Reconciliation is reflected in the recommendations for improving critiques of settler innocence reported by Wark (2021). In this exemplification, Wark (2021) and Purvis (2018) provided perspectives similar to that of Michael Yellowbird by describing the importance of each social level – the state, society, and individuals, in perpetrating harmful health and wellness outcomes upon Indigenous populations while prioritising the comfort and success of settler populations, albeit intentionally or not. According to Purvis (2018), there is a perceived need to – without sounding dramatic, deeply re-evaluate and re-construct Canadian institutions such that they do not continue to unintentionally promote the colonialist frameworks they were built on. While Albert, Michael, and Ann approached the conversation from less of an abolitionist perspective, all three interviews resulted in strong recommendations to re-eval-

uate institutional behaviours and outcomes alongside trusted and willing Indigenous Peoples to “tease out” the harmful aspects of Canadian systems that continue to go unaddressed (and often unnoticed) by settler populations who have and will never face the adverse consequences that institutional decisions continue to inflict onto minority populations due to their roots in colonialism (Purvis, 2018). In the literature, these recommendations were often presented in the form of measurable and just redistribution of land. For Albert, this recommendation came in the form of building alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations through the use of land acknowledgements to facilitate accurate and compassionate education. According to Michael, this meant encouraging education on “*big picture*” elements in hopes to exemplify the interconnectedness of life. Whereas from Ann’s perspective, she saw encouraging individuals to, “*look at things differently*” as a way to reinstate interconnectedness, compassion, and empathy at the institutional level in Canada.

### **A lack of traditional Indigenous practices**

While the work of Wark (2021) highlighted Indigenous perspectives wherein land acknowledgements may be seen as attempting to, “legitimise stolen land” or colonise and/or culturally appropriate traditional Indigenous practices, all three interviewees offered opposing perspectives. It should be noted that the interview question corresponding to this research finding was quite open ended, such that it did not specifically ask about opinions on traditional Indigenous practices within land acknowledgements. However, the open-ended nature of interview question 3 did provide suggestions to potentially explain why land acknowledgements have not caused measurable, actionable change for the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples since their institutional adoption in Canada.

While Albert did not discuss the “legitimization of stolen land,” he felt it necessary to identify differences between colonial and Indigenous practices. Highlighting that colonialism tends to, “*move forward with no plan*” in opposition to the cyclic nature of Indigenous life, Albert’s comments reflected the perspective of Lindsay Brant that too much emphasis is placed on traditionally irrelevant aspects when considering Indigenous land acknowledgements (Brant, 2020). Where Brant (2020) expressed the importance and interconnectedness of each individual to the land where they and/or their ancestors reside, Albert exemplified the contrasting worldviews built by colonialism that “*compromised the future of everyone*” due to colonial obsession with “*suppression of knowledge and intoxication of technology.*” While not directly referring to land acknowledgements, Albert did promote the idea that colonial practices are highly disruptive to health and wellbeing and could quickly begin remediation upon the appreciation and adoption of traditional Indigenous practices in Canadian institutions. However, just as he compared colonial tendencies to traditional Indigenous practices, Albert urged the encouragement of a marriage of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous practices among Canadian institutions, such that the benefits of both technology and tradition may be employed across all populations without participation in unplanned, exponential, and unnecessary technology development and usage “*just because we can.*”

Like Albert, Michael also felt the discussion of technology to be relevant here, however his perspective pertained to the use of media and technology to promote change through a collectively conscious movement. Similar to Albert, Michael in no way saw technology as inherently negative, but encouraged its use alongside activism for Indigenous rights relating to land, health, and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples. Just as Albert had previously acknowledged the importance of educating non-Indigenous populations both accurately and compassionately on the truth of history in Canada, Michael argued the power of raw human emotion in instilling discomfort and subsequent change. Where Albert questioned if people would listen to the important messages within traditional Indigenous ways of being, Michael urged that upon development of a “*critical mass*” – specifically one established through emotion and compassion, to encourage repeated exposure to discomfort until the threshold of actionable, measurable change can be met. In promoting such



a critical mass, Michael reminded that opportunities for change exist within every upcoming generation, but actionable movement and measurable change only become feasible when accurate, compassionate education is initiated upon introduction into Canadian school systems.

While both interviewees offered differing perspectives, both Albert and Michael related their discussions back to the inability of colonialism to appreciate the importance of Indigenous practice, as well as an “*intoxication*” or inability to re-connect to one’s humanness due to material, political, or physical pollution – highlighting the importance of respecting and appreciating the strengths of Indigenous culture when supporting lands, Peoples, and Truth and Reconciliation.

Similar to the discussions of Brant (2020) and Paquette (2020), Ann provided more context into understanding the meanings behind traditional Indigenous land acknowledgements, as well as suggestions as to how non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples may increase their connectivity to both their peers and the land. Where both Brant (2020) and Paquette (2020) highlight the importance of connecting not only to one’s natural environment but also to their ancestry and interconnectedness to all that exists in the universe, Ann offered very similar depictions when describing her relationship to land, land acknowledgements, and addressing the truth not only externally, but within oneself as well. Moreover, where the work of Reys (2022) suggests reflection on two specific aspects of traditional land acknowledgements, Ann presented more abstract, widely applicable suggestions for improving the genuineness and accuracy of land acknowledgements in a traditional sense. Rather than providing questions for land acknowledgement presenters to pose among themselves like Reys (2022), Ann repeatedly reiterated the importance of slowing down institutional paces and providing spaces – in her case, this meant talking circles, to allow deep reflection about history, Truth and Reconciliation, and one’s personal connectedness to the land on a collective or group level. Reminiscent of the “*critical mass*” idea posed by Michael, Ann emphasised the power in feeling safe in one’s ability to inquire, both individually and in group settings, in encouraging compassion, humanness, and peace. Instead of providing clear guidelines, Ann described the deeply reflective, deeply personal journey necessary not only to adequately implement Indigenous practices in the context of land acknowledgements, but also to promote the acceptance and appreciation of compassion and humanness among Canadian academia, research, and institutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDANCE

### **Allowing space to address “*suppression of knowledge & intoxication of technology*”**

Drawing from the findings of Wark (2021) and in conversation with Michael, Albert, and Ann, it is my understanding that a crucial aspect of acknowledging different lands in Canada is to first acknowledge the truths not only of our history, but also those that continue to permeate the present, often undiscussed and almost always underappreciated. While Wark (2021) and Vowel (2017) described the importance of critical thought in discussions relevant to Indigenous experiences in Canada, the conversations held during interview sessions undoubtedly reiterated this idea. Albert articulated this importance through the conceptualization that colonial harms stem from the tendency of settler populations to become engulfed in the “*suppression of knowledge and intoxication of technology*”. Because all three of the conversations eventually identified climate change as a significantly relevant topic to the discussion, I believe that our land acknowledgements should not only discuss truths of the past, but also those of the present that are highly relevant to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture but are not often advertised as such.

From all three interviews, there was at least brief mention of the fact that Indigenous Peoples lived alongside the land for centuries before colonization and subsequent climate change began. To me this is an interesting idea to reflect on – climate change is an undeniable and measurable change that has detrimen-

tal impacts for everyone, but through respecting, appreciating, and reflecting on the importance of land was avoidable by Indigenous Peoples. Clearly, this leaves the tendencies of colonialism responsible for the harmful realities of climate change – as described in conversation with Albert, Michael, and Ann, as well as many of the grey literature sources assessed. However, I think it is important to reflect on these concepts in connection to other harmful outcomes that must only exist as a consequence of colonialism. Just as Michael described the disproportionately negative health outcomes that have been inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples since the rise of colonialism, it is important to reflect on why and how these statistics came to be, as well as how and why they continue to exist during the age of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.

I want to reiterate however, that an opportunity to address a necessary truth should never be a bad thing – and if it feels like a bad thing, it is highly beneficial to ask yourself why. The best conceptualization of this idea can be drawn from reflection on my conversation with Ann. After discussion of her childhood and personal self-discovery, Ann frequently linked back to the concept of “*waiting*.” While this idea can also be applied to my next recommendation, I cannot stress how relevant it feels here as well. In particular, Ann discussed her perception of the recent discoveries of mass unmarked graves of Indigenous children who were forced into residential schools across Canada as initially one of sadness and grief before it quickly turned into joy. This was hard for me to understand at first, because, from my perspective, such a discovery was rightfully advertised as a moment of guilt, shame, and mourning across the country. However, the more I thought about our conversation, I began to feel more clearly about the message behind Ann’s share. In describing why she felt joy, Ann stated that the children were, “*waiting for us*,” as if they knew that it was in that specific moment of site excavation that we – as a nation, were collectively ready to face such a truth. For this reason, Ann felt an uncontrolled joy... “*they found us right when they needed to*” and I remember her saying it with a smile. For Ann, this was the same uncontrollable joy she felt after a moment – reminiscent of an epiphany in my experience, that allowed her to break free from childhood traumas that had clouded her worldview throughout adolescence and adulthood. Though Ann was working on addressing her traumas, she fully believed it was not the work she had been doing that instigated monumental changes in her mindset, rather it was simply her time to “*look at things differently*” – the universe knew that it was her time to experience the realisation, and was therefore “*waiting*” for the duration of Ann’s life prior. Relating to my personal experience, I understand past periods of irrationality or confusion in my life to be some of my waiting periods – the times in the past that I now look back on with a complete inability to re-encapsulate myself in the same, old mindset because something about my worldview has permanently been changed. Whether we accredit these shifts in perspective to the development of our prefrontal cortexes or to the universe concluding its period of “*waiting*” for us (which arguably, are quite literally the same thing), digging deeper into the mechanisms of either trigger should only make it more clear that neither explanation is definitively or completely explainable (as even the greatest chemists and physicists will reach a point so deep in their molecular analysis that the reasoning for each mechanism can no longer be explained). Ann stated that, “*we live in a world of illusion*.” To me, this comment was a reminder that even scientific discovery itself is merely a social construction by human beings to facilitate uniform understanding on a large scale – so rather than focusing on why or how things are happening through use of socially constructed tools, I believe it is massively important to disconnect yourself from colonially-crafted desires for identifying explanations and defining expectations – and instead focus on experiencing your thoughts and surroundings from a child-like position of appreciation and openness, void of any pre-established expectations or needs to “make things make sense.”

Now think about that in the context of Truth and Reconciliation, and why I urge the act of addressing truth as never being a bad thing. If instead of seeing land acknowledgements as a requirement to be met in dedication to commitments to the TRC they could be seen as an opportunity for genuine and necessary growth on a personal and institutional level, I believe that accurate truths may be more adequately addressed across Canada. In the same way that Albert confidently saw land acknowledgements to be an effective tool

for educating both non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples in Canada, institutions and individuals – particularly those who are non-Indigenous, should see land acknowledgements not as a pressurised situation (which is likely to occur when you pre-establish expectations and try to fulfil colonial desires of explanation), but as a signal of the end of their “*waiting*” period and a commensal of their opportunity to learn about the history that was also lost on modern-day settler populations.

While the paragraphs above focus particularly on the positionality of non-Indigenous populations in accurately addressing the truth, Albert, Michael, and multiple academic and grey literature findings also identified the positionality of Indigenous Peoples in ensuring truths are accurately included across land acknowledgements and institutions in general. To do so, the majority of research findings (if not all) highlighted an undeniable need to support cooperation, collaboration, and in the words of Albert, “*a marriage*” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, cultures, and ways of living in order to achieve true, genuine Reconciliation. More specifically, Michael supported not only the introduction of accurate historical accounts regarding colonization and Indigeneity within Canadian school systems from a young age – a concept that seems like a great start especially when reflecting on the work of Fitzsimmonds Frey (2018), but also serious collaboration between Canadian institutions and willing Indigenous Peoples to ensure the wants and needs of Indigenous Peoples remain prioritised within all institutional actions, and not just their gestures of Truth and Reconciliation. Moreover, as highlighted by Albert, Michael, and Ann, Indigenous Peoples have a rich history of existence exceeding that of settler populations, and should therefore be the first and most significant source of information regarding accurate truths about history in Canada.

In summary, it is my best understanding that to allow space to accurately address past and recent histories in support of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, individuals must first reflect on a deeply personal level about their positionality within this history and truth. As highlighted in conversation with Ann, it seems highly counterintuitive to attempt to address external truths when those that exist internal to oneself are yet to be accepted. Without the ability to engage in vulnerability even just in your mind, the probability of enacting accurate, truthful change externally will be lessened. Therefore, my greatest encouragement for non-Indigenous populations in allowing space to address the truth is to first find peace with the truths that may be hard to face within yourself. In doing so, I hope that you may understand and accept the harm that not only Indigenous Peoples, but also that you have experienced due to colonial tendencies like expectation and explanation. In this way, reflection may encourage appreciation and compassion – traits identified by all interview participants as inherently necessary to Truth and Reconciliation, for the benefits offered to your personal health, wellbeing, and worldview when Indigenous ways of living are embraced within an individual, a community, and an institution.

If genuine vulnerability can be achieved within yourself – something that is naturally meant to take a great deal of time, reflection, and discomfort, then I believe that authentic, human connections can be used to facilitate the compassionate relationships, both at the personal and institutional level, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations necessary to enable honest, safe conversations regarding accurate histories and truths that exist across Canada. Building upon Ann’s use of talking circles among students of Dalhousie University, or Michael’s reassurance of the power of human emotion, it is necessary to introduce compassion, empathy, and humanness within academia and institutions across Canada as a means of certainty when addressing history, truth, and reconciliation in land acknowledgements and all other contexts.

### **Allowing space to “*experience the information*”**

Drawing from the previous recommendation, alongside space to address accurate truths there must also be space to, “*experience the information*” as verbalised by Ann during our conversation. While personal reflection and acceptance of uncomfortable truths is a serious aspect of adequately promoting Truth and

Reconciliation through land acknowledgements in Canada, findings from all three interviews and multiple academic and grey literature sources also place urgency on the allowance of individuals to learn about accurate historical accounts in a slow-paced, safe environment that encourages inquiry and truly centralises the promotion of deep understanding among Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. While Albert highlighted the importance of land acknowledgements in “*facilitating an awakening*,” other findings suggest that this facilitation may only be possible where individuals are: (1) introduced early to accurate information both in past and present contexts of Canada’s relationship with Indigenous Peoples, and (2) given the opportunity to deeply reflect on the information, discuss their uncertainties, inquiries or concerns, and feel completely safe and comfortable to do so.

While Reys (2020) reminded that individuals who approach a topic in fear – in fear that they may say or do something wrong, they will become more comfortable blindly repeating scripted messages, it is extremely important for Canadian institutions to facilitate environments of acceptance and opportunity, as opposed to imposing pre-established expectations and explanations onto their members that may not be entirely clear to everyone. Based on my research and experience over the last eight months, I feel it entirely necessary to prioritise the creation of spaces within every room wherein concepts of Indigeneity, colonialism, history, truth, or land acknowledgement are discussed, that enable feelings of safety and compassion among attendees. In doing so, I believe that like the talking circles facilitated by Ann, Canadian institutions may begin to effectively promote inquiry among their members that not only enhances engagement in conversations surrounding accurate, historical truths, but also removes any fear from the hearts of their members and encourages passionate, deeply rooted participation in the learning process.

Because Ann described her experience as a university student to be extremely face-paced without opportunities for deep learning and reflection as it is encouraged in Indigenous culture, it is important to reflect on what habits, beliefs, or uninformed truths a person may form from participating so fully in practices derived from colonial tendency. During our conversation, I had time to discuss a few of my personal takeaways with Ann, based on our conversation. During this time, I was able to share with Ann my personal understanding of how harmful this face-paced institutional nature may be, and described my view of this tendency as promoting blind compliance among individuals in Canadian society – specifically among those granted a particular level of status for their high educational achievements. Reflecting on Ann’s comment about the lack of relatedness between one’s academic credentials and level of personal reflection and self-security, I felt it was important to highlight the ways in which fast-pace learning encourages massive groups of people to consume carefully-crafted information without question – especially without challenging questions that may pose discomfort. To this, Ann agreed, stating “*the future looks bright*” if that is what I was able to draw from her insight. Therefore, I feel it is crucially important to reflect on the ways in which past and current frameworks of Canadian institutions may act as barriers to empathy, compassion, and accurate understanding, rather than encourage them.

During interviews, the idea of exposing individuals to accurate information as youth was a common theme, with Michael suggesting that while the “*roadmap to Truth and Reconciliation has been laid out*”, actionable change is not being seen and youth are not being properly encouraged to implement upcoming interventions. Without allowing children the space to understand information accurately and on a deeply human level comprised of compassion and empathy, conversation with Michael suggests that the only promoters of visible change will remain the same ones we see today – instead of passionate activism and movement for the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples, Michael argued that it remains only court orders and lawsuits that currently hold actionable power. In this way, allowing space for all institutional members – or anyone who is interested, to truly engage with material relevant to Indigeneity, colonization and Truth and Reconciliation on a level that promotes genuine inquiry and collective action (through development of a “*critical mass*”) may use compassion and empathy to not only better acknowledge the significance of lands on which they reside, but also to promote a necessary marriage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of being that inherently supports Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.

## Allowing space for “the critical mass”

Stemming from the previous recommendation, Michael felt that if students were encouraged to be passionate and innovative when discussing land acknowledgements and/or Truth and Reconciliation, that Reconciliation efforts may finally be transformed into measurable, positive outcomes for the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples. In having this conversation Michael consistently referred to the need for a “critical mass” surrounding issues of importance, like promoting accurate information regarding Indigenous and settler history through land acknowledgements or the marriage of differing ways of being, as described above. This concept of the critical mass seemed highly relevant to my research findings, as both Albert and Ann also alluded to the necessity of collective engagement on a mass scale. For Albert, this was through use of institutional land acknowledgements to accurately educate individuals on the history of life in Canada, and for Ann this was through relatively smaller scale talking circles to promote compassionate and safe discussions surrounding the realities of settler colonialism and Indigeneity. Whereas Albert discussed this educational opportunity in terms of teaching individuals about lost history and the threats our past and current socio-political climate pose to present and future life on earth, Michael discussed the critical mass in terms of shedding light on realities of discomfort among non-Indigenous communities. Just as Ann felt it necessary to sit with information that makes us uncomfortable as a means to not only understanding ourselves better but also our ancestry and worldviews, Michael felt that to encourage this level of reflection on a mass scale, technology – and more specifically social media, should be leveraged by compassionate individuals to promote emotional connections.

Though it was not explicitly stated by all other interviewees, Michael emphasised the power that is held within human emotion through discussion of the uprising in Black Lives Matter activism following the circulation of footage online that offered a raw, emotional look into an undeniably unjust human experience. To link back to a quote from Ann regarding the lack of compassion and humanness seen within Canadian academia, I am confident that the encouragement of vulnerability, compassion, and empathy across Canadian institutions may act as a step towards the creation of actionable, measurable change regarding Truth and Reconciliation. The link to land acknowledgements may not seem entirely clear here, but it is important to remember that Truth and Reconciliation is a never-ending journey that requires a deeply rooted, emotional connection between reconciling parties. Think about it this way – you would never expect a friend to deeply forgive you after a serious breach of trust, especially if your apology was written and reviewed by someone else... and even more so if the apology failed to accurately address your actions and positioned the trust-breaching event as peaceful and mutually consenting. In the same way, it is important to spend personal time learning about the realities of history and colonialism in Canada, reflect on how this continues to impact yourself and others, and seek clarification for things you may not understand, all before attempting an apology, or in this context, a land acknowledgement.

Similarly, conversation with Michael brought about ideas of changing terminology for settler populations from “land acknowledgement” to “reconciliation statement” as a means to better align the term with its intended contents. While most academic and grey literature highly supported in-depth personal reflection on historical and present-day connections to the land and peoples who may have cared for it over time, Michael also felt it necessary to include a 4-5 point plan of action to identify specific, measurable steps that will be taken by an individual or institution alongside their land acknowledgement to show genuine compassion and better fulfil their commitments to the TRC. This idea ties back to the concept of the critical mass, as I believe that promoting compassion, awareness, and spaces for deeply-rooted inquiry through engagement with an institution that has immersed themselves in the importance of addressing accurate information and the reflective nature necessary to genuinely support the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples would also encourage increased engagement from individuals, Indigenous or not, who are interested in learning about

the truth of the realities in which they or their ancestors have existed in. However, I also believe that in doing so alongside clearly identified, feasible strategies of support that have been informed by the guidance of willing Indigenous Peoples, would promote not only better land acknowledgements, but would garner a more trusting, positive relationship between individuals and Canadian institutions. In doing so, members of society may feel more comfortable actioning plans of support (combatting the claim by Reys (2022) that fear of making an error will refrain people from verbalising their unique ideas and increase compliant behaviours), encouraging measurable changes that currently leave some Indigenous Peoples to perceive land acknowledgements as “box-ticking” exercises that encourage settler innocence without ever actioning beneficial change for Indigenous Peoples (Wark, 2021).

Just as Ann, Michael and various literature findings made it clear that compassion, empathy, comfort and connectedness can go a long way in terms of Truth and Reconciliation, and just as Albert stressed the importance of educating both non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities on their lost history, Canadian institutions should encourage and engage with critical masses of people that may be created or already exist surrounding various TRC topics to encourage a community of compassionate individuals who are willing to learn, reflect, grow, and promote beneficial changes even for groups of which they do not identify. In doing so, I fully believe that Canadian institutions may create a collective environment that does not impose pre-established expectations or try to explain things through colonial lenses, but is instead excited to engage with material from more open-minded perspectives that have proven to have significant benefit to Indigenous Peoples and their resiliency as a Nation throughout history, as reflected in conversation with Ann. By allowing space to share uncertainties and gain accurate clarification without fear of judgement, Canadian institutions hold the power to create critical masses of people that want to shift away from strictly colonial frameworks to more harmonious practices, by promoting appreciation, acceptance, and marriage of Indigenous ways of living alongside existing institutional strategies. Through such a critical mass, Canadian institutions may begin to truly move closer to Truth and Reconciliation by accepting the things they do not understand and opening their hearts to the level of vulnerability necessary for authentic growth that is always inspired by discomfort, as argued by both Michael and Ann. In doing so, institutions may allow the promotion of accurate understandings regarding Indigeneity, colonialism, and Truth and Reconciliation across Canada, eventually creating a natural movement to the explicit use of genuine, educational land acknowledgements that respect Indigenous tradition and finally begin to promote actionable change that has been perceived as non-existent by all relevant research and interview findings (Reys, 2022; Wark, 2021).

### **Reflections of my experience as a non-Indigenous student researcher and human being**

In reflecting on the last eight months of this experience, I want to start by thanking every individual who I have interacted with throughout this process. While all acknowledgements are listed at the beginning of this report, it is important for me to reiterate that as a fourth-year undergraduate student with no prior real-time interview experience, this would not at all have been possible without the help of CAOT and those three individuals who were kind enough to converse with me in an interview setting. Truly, I cannot describe how much this opportunity has meant to me.

While this research project has posed many challenges – from the retirement of my highly-connected supervisor to navigating the processes of ethics and virtual gift-giving, I have taken away two major insights (that have not yet been discussed) that I will undoubtedly work on integrating into my life moving forward.

### **Embracing opportunities, making mistakes & asking questions**

As a non-Indigenous 21-year-old person growing up in Canada, I was raised under colonially-derived ways of living that reinforce the contrary – however this journey has proven to me that making mis-

takes and asking questions are two undeniably beautiful and necessary aspects of the human experience. Throughout this project, the guidance I had received from the co-chairs of the OT TRC Task Force, Angie Phenix and Kaarina Valavaara before conducting interviews has been reflected upon and emphasised within my journey to ensure the utmost success of this research. Specifically, I had met with both Angie and Kaarina prior to the commensal of interviews in hopes to have two willing Indigenous members of the OT TRC taskforce to review my project proposal and “game plan” before heading into interviews with highly educated and insightful Indigenous Elders and community members. During this meeting I had a lot of questions, often pertaining to how I should address certain concepts, ensure ethical approval, and not unintentionally disrespect any participants or concepts in the process. However, it was in this discussion that Angie highlighted the concept of making mistakes as being a good thing. While I like to think I have believed this to be true ever since it was heavily reinforced by my school-age French class teacher, it was not until reflecting on the concerns that I had highlighted that I realised the positionality of my focus. Instead of removing any expectations and going into our meeting openly and appreciatively, I had felt nervous – but instead of sitting with my emotions, allowing them to exist, and removing any self-expectations to rid all nerves through obtaining explanations, I allowed myself to fall into colonial tendencies, and pressurised the situation through pre-establishing expectations and giving into my desire for explanation. However, through discussion with Angie and Kaarina, I began to realise that the only way my upcoming interviews would be successful, is to remove all biases – not only those that may exist within myself, but also any expectations that an erroneous comment or conceptualization on my end would result in feelings of disrespect among interviewees.

Even more so, this concept was further reiterated during the interview process, wherein – surprise... mistakes were made! While I remember feeling as though I made the most mistakes in my first interview due to my heightened nervousness entering a new environment, after completing all interviews I no longer saw any of my decisions or comments as mistakes at all. Even where things may not have went as planned in my first interview for example, this only (1) reminded me that I am alive – as the pace of my heartbeat rose, I was given a reminder that my body, just a small aspect of our very interconnected universe, is working its magic just as it was meant to; and (2) taught me a lesson for the next interview to come. Keeping in mind Angie’s advice, I was able to pursue even a moment of uncertainty with the utmost confidence as I knew it would only provide beneficial opportunities if I was willing to embrace them. These experiences were then later reinforced by my final interview with Ann, who had the most time allotted out of all interviewees and therefore provided in-depth discussion on the beauty of “*waiting*.” Through Ann’s comments about waiting, I was able to reassure myself that no matter how big or how small the realisation – whether it be resurrection from deeply-rooted childhood trauma or being briefly educated on an uninformed perspective, it was always meant to happen in the moment that it occurs for you. For me, this allowed me to move through interviews and report writing in confidence because even if a mistake is made, and so long as my intentions are genuinely pure, the universe is only trying to tell me that this means of correction – whether through personal epiphany or external education, was meant to find me in this form, at this exact time. Therefore, the interactions I have experienced throughout this journey will continue to impact my personal life and academic career going forward as I now understand the importance of embracing all forms of education, and how significantly the inclusion of compassion and authentic humanness within research, academia, and institutions can influence development, growth, and passionate, deeply rooted understanding.

### **If you don’t think it’s relevant, you’re not done thinking about it**

Due to the frequency at which I have urged deeply rooted reflection throughout this report, I only feel it is fair to describe my own reflective experience. Though I do consider myself well versed in my understandings of open-mindedness and interconnected thought, this research project presented me with new insights into the ways in which information is presented and how I draw conclusions about the interconnectedness of a topic.

Whereas in other forms of expression between people there exists obvious room for interpretation, I

find it uncoincidental that colonial tendencies continue to prioritise the value of language over that of visual arts or other forms of knowledge translation media. Similar to my discussion with Ann regarding the training of students within Canadian institutions to comply blindly, this research journey has encouraged me to think that the dominating use of English language within Canadian institutions is wildly intentional. Because I believe that some Canadian institutions support the blind compliance of academics based on my interview with Ann, I also suggest that the strict use of English language also discourages deeply rooted reflection on more abstract realities that exist in society. For example, where one may not understand the deeply significant connections made to climate change by all three interview participants when discussing potential areas of improvement for land acknowledgements in Canada, based on conversations with both Ann and Michael, colonially-derived institutions in Canada may not be interested in describing and discussing these connections at the level necessary to make a positive, new connection within an individual's worldview.

In contrast, Ann highlighted an Indigenous-led course at Dalhousie University that does not focus on memorisation or making information concise to fit a particular timeline, rather the students are given space to deeply explore, inquire and reflect on materials before being asked to write compassionate pieces of work that reflect more accurate, well-informed versions of each student's worldview and perspective development. In the same way, I feel that I have reflected deeply on these ideas since the end of my interviews and have since developed an understanding that all things – meaning from the neurons firing in my brain to the molecules that comprise my laptop to the star dust in space, are highly connected. Even more so, this experience has granted me the belief that regardless of a person's background, regardless of their current position, every individual has the ability to perceive the interconnectedness of varying concepts so long as they are granted the space necessary to offer them feelings of safety, compassion, and patience when developing their understanding. Stemming once again from Ann's concept of waiting, it is with time, openness, and appreciation that an individual may finally experience their moment of clarity on any given topic.

### **Limitations of research & future directions**

Though there are highly valuable insights contained within this report, it is necessary to identify the limitations that exist within this research. Beginning with the project proposal, the majority of research student guidance was delivered by two non-Indigenous CAOT staff members. With that being said, there are undeniably aspects that have been excluded from this research that may be deemed more valuable or urgent than the aspects that three non-Indigenous individuals had decided to include. As described in the methodology section above, the exclusion of multiple academic and grey literature findings was decided solely by the non-Indigenous members of the research team, acting as one example where limitations may lie. The removal of certain items was necessary given the time restraints of this project, which acted as another limitation to research.

Because the research student was only assigned to CAOT from September 2022 to April 2023 and the research project direction was not provided until October 2022, the research student was given a very short time frame between those months to recruit and build relationships with Indigenous interview participants. Due to these time restraints, only three interview participants were recruited and while each individual holds a unique and diverse background relating to Indigeneity and Canadian institutions, it is crucial to note that this sample size is far smaller than preferred. Due to the small sample size and short notice offered to recruited participants, a collective time of about 160 minutes of interviewing occurred, which is not ideal given the interconnectedness of subtopics within the topics of land acknowledgements and Truth and Reconciliation.



Moreover, time restraints on the student field placement restricted academic and grey research findings to an informal literature search as opposed to a formal assessment. In addition, the short time span of project development did not leave appropriate time for formal ethical approval to be achieved, which acts as a limitation both in the ways interview questions could be posed and how interview discussions were conducted. Instead, the research team followed advice from accredited CAOT staff and two Métis members of the OT TRC Taskforce to provide introductions containing in-depth background information on each researcher who was present for each interview. While research participants were perceived to be comfortable by the research student before and during interview discussions, it is unclear if this form of ethical protocol impacted the experiences of or insights offered by each Indigenous interview participant.

Therefore, future research should focus on replicating research findings through conduct of ongoing interview style discussions with willing Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members to ensure accuracy of the information being presented. Similarly, future research should be routinely conducted alongside Indigenous Peoples to ensure updates in perceptions are monitored such that commitments to the TRC, gestures of Truth and Reconciliation, and growing compassion among institutions remains up to date with the most recent insights being offered by Indigenous Peoples. Lastly, future research should provide more than eight months to conduct fully thought-out research on Indigenous Peoples in general, as the process of ethical approval, participant recruitment, and interview compensation is known among Canadian institutions to be a lengthy process, as described by research supervisors throughout the span of this project.

## **CONCLUSION**

After extensive assessment of academic and grey literature findings in tandem with insights offered through real-time interviews with Indigenous Elders and/or community members, it is clear that while land acknowledgements may be perceived as a beneficial tool of education for all populations in Canada, without focus on genuine reflection, compassion, and openness within academic and institutional settings land acknowledgements may not be perceived as positively as intended.

To address negative perceptions of land acknowledgements in Canada – including those who view land acknowledgements as lacking genuineness, promoting settler innocence, ignoring traditional Indigenous practices, or not adequately addressing the truth, Canadian institutions are encouraged to reflect deeply on their connections to the history of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada without fear of judgement for what they may or may not know. By promoting critical masses of people with desire to learn about colonialism and Truth and Reconciliation from a place of authentic intention, compassion for humanness, and willingness to make mistakes and grow, Canadian institutions may begin offering land acknowledgements alongside heartfelt research and reflection that uplifts Indigenous Peoples and ways of living. In this way, Canadian institutions may adopt mechanisms of Truth and Reconciliation that extend beyond a mere land acknowledgement and translate into measurable, positive change for the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In itself, it is clear that promoting such changes would not only benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, but would also provide a solution to the many inconsistencies between words of acknowledgement and actions of Reconciliation that are often reported as reasoning for such contention surrounding the current use of land acknowledgements in Canada.

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