



Ten Years After the Release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report:

Laidlaw Foundation's Journey and Renewed Commitments

A reflection on how Laidlaw Foundation has acted on its commitment to the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) and The Philanthropic Community's Declaration of Action (2015).

LAIDLAW
FOUNDATION



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Laidlaw's Land Acknowledgement

WE ACKNOWLEDGE that Laidlaw Foundation is located on the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Wendat, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Anishinaabeg, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This land, known as Tkaronto, has long been a gathering place and home to Indigenous peoples who continue to steward these territories despite the ongoing impacts of colonization.

WE ALSO RECOGNIZE that the Foundation's philanthropic resources were built through industries that thrived during the expansion of colonial Canada, industries such as lumber and land development, at a time when Indigenous Nations were being forcibly displaced through policies like the Indian Act, the reserve system, and residential schools. Laidlaw's wealth, like that of much private philanthropy in Canada, is deeply tied to land dispossession and structural inequities that continue to harm Indigenous communities today.

WE ARE MINDFUL of broken covenants and strive to make them right, with the land and with each other. This land and the Nations to whom it is home were subject to the One Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the land and its resources. Other Indigenous Nations, Europeans, and newcomers were later encouraged to observe this covenant in the spirit of respect, peace, and friendship.

WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE. Many of us have come here as settlers, immigrants, newcomers in this generation or generations past. We also acknowledge those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly as a result of the transatlantic slave trade, and we honour and pay tribute to the ancestors of African origin and descent. We acknowledge that we are settlers, and we stand in solidarity with the Indigenous peoples. We recognize our roles as individuals in the work of reconciliation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ALONE, HOWEVER, IS NOT ENOUGH. Land acknowledgement does not replace land back, where Indigenous communities reclaim jurisdiction over their traditional territories and resources, restore Indigenous governance, and stewardship practices. Acknowledgement must be accompanied by unequivocal support for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO CEDE POWER, to invest in Indigenous youth and community leadership, and to continue learning from those most impacted by colonial systems. At Laidlaw Foundation, we accept this responsibility, and we commit to building relationships based on reciprocity, respect, and truth as part of our ongoing journey toward reconciliation.





SECTION ONE

Introduction: A Candid Reflection

“Without truth, justice and healing, there can be no genuine reconciliation. Reconciliation is not about closing a ‘sad chapter of Canada’s past,’ but about opening new healing pathways of reconciliation that are forged in truth and justice.”¹

– **Truth and Reconciliation
Commission of Canada, 2015**

THE YEAR 2025 marks a decade since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its final report, calling on all sectors to confront Canada’s colonial legacy and work toward meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

This milestone invites Laidlaw Foundation to reflect on its own journey of acknowledging the origins of its wealth, reckoning with historical harms, and committing to continued transformation.

In this report, we will

- summarize the origins and evolution of Laidlaw Foundation;
- describe the changes initiated by the TRC’s Calls to Action;
- synthesize what those closest to the work at Laidlaw have learned on the Foundation’s journey to date; and
- consider what comes next and invite fellow foundations to walk with us.

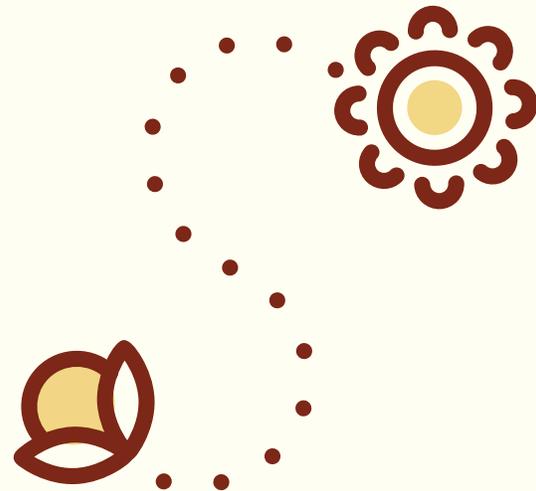
The voices of staff members, advisors and grantees peppered throughout the report testify to the impacts of this journey.

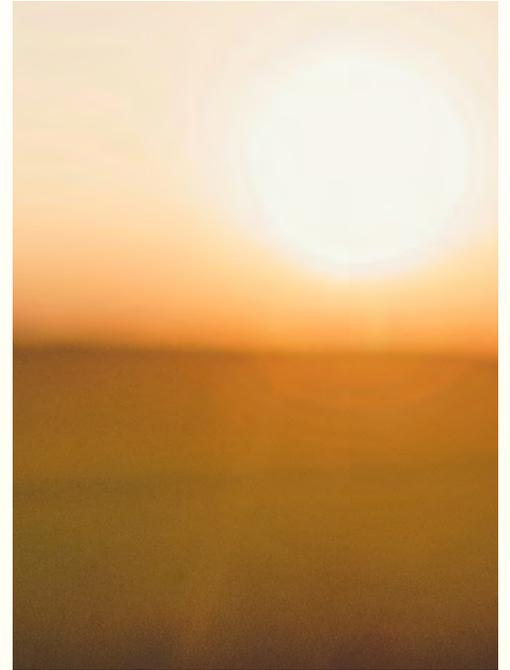
LIDLAW FOUNDATION AFFIRMS,

unequivocally, that Indigenous sovereignty is foundational to justice in this country. We recognize Indigenous Nations as self-determining peoples with inherent rights to govern their own lands, lives, laws, and futures. Any meaningful engagement in reconciliation must begin with this truth and with a deep respect for Indigenous leadership, knowledge, and autonomy. Philanthropy in Canada has been shaped by the same colonial structures that dispossessed Indigenous peoples and continue to influence today's social and economic realities. We acknowledge that the philanthropic sector, our own institution included, has benefited from this system, and we must actively work to challenge and dismantle it. Reconciliation is not a charitable act; it is a responsibility grounded in justice, accountability, and the redistribution of power and resources. It calls for concrete actions that shift power, support Indigenous governance and organizing, and amplify Indigenous voices, especially those of young people. It means funding long-term work that is defined by Indigenous communities themselves, not by external agendas or timelines. Over the past 10 years, our journey has been one of learning and unlearning, fostering relationships, listening, and adapting to the expressed needs of Indigenous communities across Ontario. In the process of developing our Indigenous strategy, we made mistakes and unintentionally offended friends and allies. But throughout this, we have been fortunate to have the support, guidance, and patience of Indigenous advisors and colleagues, to course correct and right relations, which will come through in our account of our experiences over the years.

THIS REPORT OFFERS

a candid reflection on Laidlaw Foundation's response to the TRC's Calls to Action and uphold the commitments outlined in The Philanthropic Community's Declaration of Action. It explores the challenges, lessons, and transformations that have emerged through collaboration with Indigenous youth, communities, and leaders. By sharing these reflections and stories, we at Laidlaw Foundation reaffirm our commitment to learning and improving with humility and care. Reconciliation cannot be achieved by checking boxes or issuing one-time payments, but by building relationships rooted in trust, accountability, mutual respect, and acknowledgement of historical injustices. It requires listening deeply, showing up even when it feels uncomfortable, and acting on what is heard. True reconciliation is inseparable from Indigenous sovereignty and must be rooted in solidarity, not saviourism. It is ongoing work. It is slow work. **It is necessary work.**





SECTION TWO

Laidlaw Foundation's Origins & Evolutions

To understand how far we have come and how far we still have to go, we must look back at Laidlaw Foundation's roots and the historical context that has shaped our work.

The Laidlaw Family

The Laidlaw family's presence in Canada began in 1819 when they arrived from Scotland. They settled in Esquesing, Ontario (now Halton Hills), where they purchased 200 acres to farm and build their homestead. This devoutly Presbyterian family constructed Boston Church, named after Reverend Thomas Boston, which became a central gathering place for the family and local community. The area became known as the "Scotch Block" due to the many Laidlaw family members living there.

This early settlement took place on lands traditionally stewarded by Indigenous peoples, whose ongoing presence and rights remain an essential part of this history.



The Family Business

In 1871, Robert Laidlaw founded the R. Laidlaw Lumber Company with his business partner, Thomas Shortreed. The company operated manufacturing and retail lumber divisions in several Ontario and US cities, including London, Sarnia, Guelph, Windsor, Syracuse, and Rochester. The company generated significant wealth that later supported the family's philanthropic efforts.²

However, its growth took place during a period when federal policies actively harmed Indigenous peoples. These included the Indian Act of 1876, the establishment of the residential school system, the pass system restricting Indigenous mobility, and the banning of cultural practices such as the Potlatch and Sun Dance.³ The company's timber was sourced from territories traditionally cared for by the Algonquin, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. Like many industries of the time, the company benefited from policies that removed Indigenous communities from their lands and denied them basic rights and self-determination.



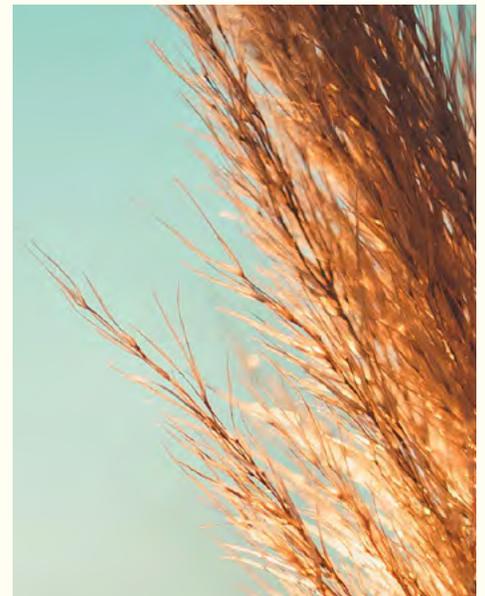
The Family Foundation

In 1949, R.A. and Walter Laidlaw established Laidlaw Foundation with an initial capital of \$50,000.⁴ The Foundation's early philanthropic work focused on arts, health, and education, and it operated within a traditional family-trust model, which is a way for families to manage and pass down assets, protect wealth, and reduce taxes. When a foundation operates like a family trust, family members make decisions together on how to manage and allocate their resources in support of causes that reflect their interests and values. Such a foundation keeps families involved across generations and keeps the family legacy alive.

During the 1960s the Foundation's focus shifted toward broader engagement with systemic issues. A pivotal event, in 1963, was the creation of the Foundation's first Advisory Committee, composed of seven respected professionals in health, education, and social policy. The Advisory Committee helped shift the Foundation's focus from personal interests to public impact, professionalizing its grant-making and launching major fellowships, research grants, and awards.

Led by Advisory Committee member Bessie Touzel, a nationally renowned social worker, the Foundation's work supported early anti-poverty efforts in Canada, including a landmark grant that informed the development of the Canadian welfare state.⁵

The Foundation's assets continued to grow significantly, and while this wealth enabled the Foundation's philanthropic work, it is directly connected to industries built on land dispossession and colonial policies. This legacy has prompted the Foundation to reflect deeply on its history and to take deliberate action toward reconciliation and support for Indigenous self-determination today.





The Foundations' Continuous Evolution

Since the 1960s, Laidlaw has consistently adapted its priorities and processes to the needs of the time, emerging challenges, and evolving understandings. Laidlaw's early environmental focus showed growing awareness of Indigenous peoples' deep connection to the land, as documented in *Making Change: Fifty Years of the Laidlaw Foundation*, a comprehensive history of the Foundation's evolution and impact:

"Nature plays an essential role in native culture, just as native peoples played an essential role in the country's history, which flows from and is a consequence of, our geography and climate: threats to the environment are threats to our values, our prosperity, and even our future."⁶

This perspective influenced R.A. Laidlaw to become a founding director of the Quetico Foundation in 1955, an initiative dedicated to preserving the natural heritage of Quetico Provincial Park in Northwestern Ontario. Laidlaw Foundation supported this work with annual grants for over 15 years, reflecting an early commitment to environmental stewardship aligned with Indigenous values and a recognition of the need to repair damage caused by colonial expansion.

Over time, the Advisory Committee introduced external perspectives, and the Board of Directors eventually expanded beyond the founding family. By the 1990s, Laidlaw was engaging more directly with systemic challenges through programs such as Children at Risk and the Youth Engagement Strategy. Between 1991 and 1997, the Foundation administered the Aboriginal and Black Children at Risk Scholarship Program, which provided scholarships and fellowships to Indigenous and Black students at undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels.

This program awarded 20 students across Canada, three with doctoral fellowships, to encourage education and research aligned with the Foundation's Children at Risk goals.⁷

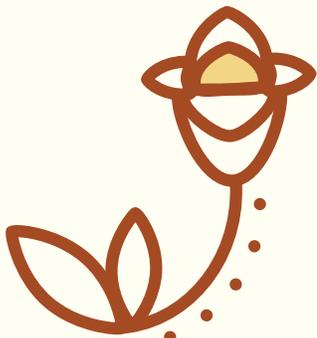
This early investment in education for racialized youth signaled a growing awareness of systemic barriers and helped lay the groundwork for future community-rooted initiatives.

Laidlaw's funding strategies have gradually shifted from being top-down to being more equity-focused and community-responsive. Indigenous communities were largely absent from the Foundation's funding priorities in its early years. Through continued learning and reflection, Laidlaw began to recognize the need to treat the Indigenous youth they funded as key partners in shaping solutions and not merely recipients of support. This recognition became a commitment in 2017 when the Foundation co-created the Indigenous Youth and Community Futures Fund (IYCF) in partnership with Indigenous youth advisors.



The commitment to centering Indigenous knowledge, priorities, and self-determination in philanthropic practice was deepened by the recruitment of a young Indigenous leader, Amanda Bernard (member of the Madawaska Maliseet First Nation), to manage the IYCF portfolio and the appointment of an Indigenous woman, Janine Manning (member of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation), as chair of the Board of Directors and the first Indigenous chair of a private philanthropic foundation in Canada.

The commitment to participatory governance and equity continues, as does the Foundation’s journey from family legacy rooted in industrial wealth to community-led accountability.



Bawaating Child Welfare Warriors

Northern Ontario - Sault Ste Marie

STREAM: IYCF 2023

REGION: Sault Ste Marie (Northern Ontario)

FOCUS: Child Welfare

Bawaating Child Welfare Warriors is founded by youth with lived experience in care to support and advocate for youth aging out of the child welfare system. They help them acquire basic life skills such as financial literacy, self-care, housing, and navigating adult responsibilities so that they may confidently transition into independent living. One of their most notable projects is the production of a short animated documentary titled “I don’t know where I’m gonna live”, which highlights the challenges faced by youth aging out of care. At the heart of their work is advocacy, teaching youth how to advocate for themselves and their communities, recognizing that many reach out to their siblings still in care and who may face many systemic challenges.

“We have noticed that the youth in our program always seek to reach out to their siblings who are still in care. They know firsthand how challenging the system can be and want to support their siblings in navigating it. That is why advocacy is at the heart of our work. We provide youth with the tools and knowledge they need to advocate for themselves and their loved ones, ensuring no one is left behind. When one youth rises, the lift others with them.”

Jen Guise, Co-Founder of Bawaating Child Welfare Warriors



SECTION THREE

A Turning Point: The Truth And Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Laidlaw's Response

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established in 2008, documented the devastating impacts of the Indian Residential Schools system, which forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families. In church-run institutions, many children endured abuse, neglect, and cultural erasure. The TRC described this policy as a form of "cultural genocide."

THE TRC'S FINAL REPORT, released in 2015, included 94 Calls to Action urging all sectors in Canadian society, including philanthropy, to acknowledge their roles in colonial systems and contribute meaningfully to reconciliation.⁸

Laidlaw heeded the call, becoming one of more than 80 organizations to sign The Philanthropic Community's Declaration of Action, a public pledge to advance reconciliation.

The pledge was presented to the Honourable Murray Sinclair, Chief Commissioner of the TRC, in Ottawa in June 2015 and remains displayed at Foundation House, a shared space for philanthropic collaboration in Toronto.



For Laidlaw Foundation, this was crucial time to reflect on how its historical practices connected to broader systems of harm. While Laidlaw had previously funded Indigenous individuals and organizations both directly and indirectly, the Foundation had not intentionally focused on how it worked with Indigenous peoples, particularly Indigenous youth, as partners. The TRC's Calls to Action, alongside commitments outlined in Laidlaw's 2015 Annual Report and Strategic Plan, underscored the need for deeper collaboration and relationship-building. As stated at the 2015 annual report:

“Moving forward, we will be creating new collaboration and funding opportunities for Aboriginal-focused groups and organizations, increasing our support for and engagement in this area.”⁹

Starting with an Indigenous Engagement Strategy

As part of its response to the TRC and its pledge to The Declaration, Laidlaw launched the Indigenous Engagement Strategy (IES). The IES aimed to support Indigenous youth in connecting with their lands, languages, and cultures while fostering intergenerational knowledge-sharing and community leadership.¹⁰ In its first year, the initiative awarded 11 grants totaling \$370,330.¹¹ It was a tangible shift toward funding community-rooted and self-determined solutions.

Moving from Commitment to Action: The Circle's Influence

In 2017, Laidlaw commissioned The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada to guide its transition from commitment to meaningful action. Their report, *Philanthropy in the Age of Reconciliation*, became a cornerstone for reimagining Laidlaw's role in reconciliation. Dr. Elisa Levi, (Anishinaabe, Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation) the lead researcher, emphasized in the report that reconciliation must be rooted in reciprocity, not charity, and called for internal reflection on the origins of philanthropic wealth. Her guidance prompted shifts in practice, including reviewing past Indigenous-led grant applications (funded or not), providing staff and board training on Indigenous history and rights, and prioritizing Indigenous youth leadership in programming.

Following the Circle's recommendations, the Foundation launched the Indigenous Youth and Community Futures Fund (IYCFF) and established an Indigenous Advisory Committee composed of Indigenous youth under 35. These young leaders bring deep community knowledge and lived experience, shaping funding strategies, advising operations, and contributing to sector-wide learning. The committee is vital in ensuring the Foundation's work remains rooted in Indigenous values, community priorities, and Indigenous worldviews.

In June 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Laidlaw co-funded the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF) and the Foundation for Black Communities (FFBC) alongside Inspirit Foundation and a number of other foundations.¹² The IPRF provides resources to meet both urgent and long-term needs of Indigenous communities nationwide, particularly in remote regions, and the cornerstone investment made by these foundations has helped build a sustainable base for Indigenous-led work that is vital, visionary, and responsive.

This was not a grant but an act of power and capital redistribution, an approach that remains rare in philanthropy and challenging to replicate, yet essential for systemic change. This transfer of control and capital placed funding and decision-making directly in the hands of Indigenous communities, allowing them to define their own priorities and outcomes.

Building on this momentum, in March 2023 the McConnell Foundation committed \$30 million in capital transfers to Indigenous-led foundations, beginning with \$10 million to the IPRF. This move reflects a growing shift in philanthropy toward placing long-term resources and decision-making power directly in Indigenous hands.¹³



Decolonizing Evaluation and Granting Practices: Indigenous-Led Approaches

In 2020, Laidlaw partnered with Andrea Johnston (Anishinaabe, Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation), a leader in Indigenous evaluation, to reimagine how impact is measured. Her report, *Decolonizing the Indigenous Program's Evaluation and Reporting Practices*,¹⁴ emphasized the need for culturally grounded methodologies rooted in Indigenous worldviews

Drawing on frameworks such as the Kaswentha (Two Row Wampum Belt), Johnston's work guided Laidlaw away from imposed Western models and toward evaluation approaches defined by Indigenous communities themselves. This shift does not mean abandoning all metrics but using them thoughtfully. In small communities, for example, a metric such as the number of project participants may be irrelevant or insignificant.

Success should be defined by the community, based on outcomes they value and measures that reflect their lived realities and aspirations.

The reports from The Circle and from Andrea Johnston also prompted meaningful steps to decolonize the Foundation's granting practices by centering community knowledge, trust, and accessibility.

These steps are documented in a 2023 guide produced by Amanda Bernard and the Laidlaw team, *Indigenous Lenses: Decolonizing Grant Practices*.¹⁵ They include the following:

- **Oral storytelling instead of written reports:** Grantees may share progress and impact through culturally grounded oral storytelling—via recorded conversations, video check-ins, or roundtable reflections—instead of formal written reports.
- **Reduced administrative burden:** Because time spent applying is time away from community work, Laidlaw has redesigned application and reporting processes to be shorter, flexible, and responsive to community organizations' capacities. This approach especially benefits youth-led and grassroots groups without dedicated grant writers or staff. Laidlaw also allows verbal expressions of interest and offers guidance during the application process.
- **Trust-based and participatory funding:** Funding decisions involve input from youth leaders with lived experience of systems Laidlaw aims to challenge. Community advisors are empowered by collaborative grant-review. Grantees are trusted to use funds as needed, without prescriptive outcomes.
- **Valuing Indigenous knowledge and leadership:** Rather than privileging academic or professional credentials, the funding process values Indigenous youth's knowledge about their communities, lands, and cultures. IYCF supports projects designed and led by Indigenous youth as experts in cultural resurgence, land stewardship, and language revitalization.
- **Entrenching health and wellness:** The pandemic underscored the importance of strong health and wellness practices. In response, Laidlaw piloted a four-day workweek and a hybrid work model (staff work two days in the office and two days remotely) which have both since been institutionalized. Employees are also provided with health spending accounts, in addition to a comprehensive and competitive benefits package designed to address the diverse and complex health needs of individuals. This approach aligns with the Haudenosaunee principle of cultivating a Good Mind (Kanikonhriyo), which teaches that clarity, balance, and positive intentions are essential for contributing meaningfully to one's community and work.¹⁶

Together, these practices remove barriers and increase access to funding for Indigenous youth-led initiatives while fostering stronger relationships, greater trust, and deeper accountability.

The result is more-accessible and community-rooted funding.

Growth and Impact of Indigenous Granting

Laidlaw's granting patterns have changed significantly:

Between 2008 and 2016, Laidlaw provided 32 grants to Indigenous causes, about one-third of which went directly to Indigenous-led organizations (rather than mainstream/white-led organizations delivering programs for Indigenous youth). These grants ranged from \$500 to \$225,000 (most were under \$25,000), and focused on cultural reclamation, youth capacity-building, and reconciliation. The Foundation's approach at the time was largely one-time funding, with only one Indigenous youth program, the Ontario Indigenous Youth Partnership Project (OIYPP), receiving support more than once. There were no grants to Indigenous causes in 2010–2011 following a Board decision to focus efforts within the Greater Toronto Area.¹⁷

Between 2019 and 2025, Laidlaw Foundation awarded 150 grants totaling \$4,996,213 through the IYCF. Additionally, the Foundation supported Indigenous and youth-led initiatives through 23 grants amounting to \$5,967,054.56 across other funding streams, including PopUp Grants, Youth Action Fund (YAF), Special Grants, and the Community Equity and Solidarity Fund.

The growth of IYCF and related funding streams reflects a deliberate shift toward longer-term, Indigenous-led funding partnerships centered on self-determination and sustained impact.

Since its launch in 2017, IYCF has steadily expanded in grants awarded and geographic reach.



In its first year, the Fund awarded \$481,650 to 10

Indigenous youth-led initiatives across Ontario, from urban centres like Toronto and Ottawa to northern and rural areas such as Thunder Bay, Kenora, and Sault Ste. Marie.

By 2021, grant numbers had increased to 24

and the initiatives supported extended into remote and northern regions.

Between 2022 and 2024, the Fund awarded \$700,000 in

grants annually to 22–24 initiatives, with typical grants ranging from \$18,000 to \$30,000.

In 2025, the pool of funds was increased to \$1 million.

Reflecting its growing maturity, IYCF now offers multi-year funding opportunities to repeat grantees, enabling Indigenous-led projects to continue or scale their work over time.

This supports sustained community development and long-term success.



GRANTEE PROFILE



The Wolverines

Northern Ontario - Elliot Lake

STREAM: IYCF 2023

REGION: Elliot Lake (Northern Ontario)

FOCUS: Culture Revitalization

The Wolverines is a grassroots group located in Elliot Lake, Ontario that organizes annual hunt camps that teaches youth how to hunt moose but also basic survival skills, such as making fire with a flint, creating water filters and creating maps of traditional territory. Hunt camps serves as a place for community bonding, teaching cultural knowledge, and sustaining food sovereignty through connection with nature.

“Uranium was processed on our traditional lands, which caused us to be displaced from our original territory around Elliot Lake or Mississauga Provincial Park for a long time. For over a century, youth hadn't been involved in starting ceremonial fires, a sacred fire used during rituals, gatherings, and ceremonies to honour ancestors, the natural world, and spiritual teachings, in large part as a result of the impacts of displacement, industrial activities such as uranium mining, and government policies which restricted Indigenous cultural practices. During the Hunt Camp, youth learned how to start a fire without a lighter, which was something they specifically wanted to learn and this was one of our greatest achievements - seeing the youth successfully light the fire at the ceremonial site for the first time in probably hundreds of years, marking a significant milestone”

Paraphrased from Viola-Rose Day, Founder of The Wolverines



Aligning Investments with Values

When Indigenous communities raised concerns about certain Laidlaw investments, the Foundation reflected on the effects of its financial decisions and acted to prioritize environmental and social responsibility: In 2016, Laidlaw implemented environmental, social and governance standards, which led to the withdrawal of investments from the energy sector. By 2022, Laidlaw had completely divested from the oil and gas industries.

This decision resulted in a considerable financial loss, but it was and remains more important for Laidlaw's investment portfolio to align with its values to avoid exploiting land or harming communities.

The Foundation is serious about upholding ethical and community-focused principles, and the commitment to social responsibility directly guides its investment strategy.

Investing in Indigenous-Led Solutions

Significant capital has been reallocated to Indigenous-led funds and organizations that strengthen community resilience and self-determination. These include:

- **Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF):** Between 2020 and 2024, Laidlaw committed a capital transfer of \$2.5 million to establish IPRF. This fund mobilizes resources quickly to address food insecurity, mental health, housing, cultural healing, and economic sustainability.
- **Raven Indigenous Impact Investing:** By investing in Raven Indigenous Capital Partners, Laidlaw provides patient capital and culturally-grounded business support to Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- **ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency:** Laidlaw provided ENAGB with \$174,600 in COVID-response funding from 2021 to 2023, through two granting streams (IYCF and YAF), to support programs that addressed pandemic-related impacts on Indigenous youth across Ontario, ensuring culturally relevant supports and safe spaces during isolation.

Many Indigenous-led organizations are structured as grassroots groups without charitable status, and this has historically limited their access to philanthropic funding. The process of incorporating as a charitable organization is arduous and prohibitive, particularly for those with finite resources and in the face of an unfamiliar system. The high costs and bureaucratic hurdles disincentivizes many from incorporating. Laidlaw funds many impactful community-led groups without charitable status, or Non-Qualified Donees (NQDs), removing structural barriers so grassroots and registered non-profit organizations can access philanthropy without unnecessary administrative burdens.

Of the 290 organizations funded by Laidlaw through multiple granting streams between 2019 and 2025,

- 124 identified as grassroots groups, 88 of which were led by Indigenous youth; and
- 78 identified as non-profits, 30 of which were led by Indigenous youth.

Of the total number of grassroots and non-profit organizations funded since 2019, 49 reported working with organizational mentors.¹⁸

124

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78

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Learning, Building Relationships, and Collaborating with Indigenous-Led Partners

From 2023 onward, Laidlaw deepened internal capacity through training and community engagement. Staff and board participated in the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation course, undertook the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, and visited Six Nations of the Grand River for an immersive retreat. They engaged in cultural workshops, including dream catcher-making and sweetgrass spray-making, and hosted a residential school Survivor presentation. These efforts reflect Laidlaw's commitment to building lasting relationships and fostering deeper understanding of Indigenous histories and lived realities.

Laidlaw Foundation has also deepened its commitment to Indigenous self-determination by partnering with organizations that bring lived experience and cultural expertise to the forefront. These collaborations reflect an intentional effort to shift power and resources to Indigenous-led initiatives while strengthening the Foundation's own accountability and learning practices.



By working alongside Indigenous-led partners rather than imposing external frameworks, Laidlaw has been able to align its grant-making, research, and learning practices with community-defined priorities. These partnerships continue to shape how the Foundation approaches accountability, resource allocation, and systems change.

Laidlaw partnered with the Yellowhead Institute, a First Nations-led research and policy centre, to support their landmark Red Papers, *Land Back and Cash Back*, and help advance critical conversations on sovereignty, restitution, and systemic change. *Land Back* explores the reclamation of Indigenous jurisdiction, breathing life into inherent rights and responsibilities, and examines how Canada continues to dispossess Indigenous peoples from their lands alongside what communities are doing to reclaim them. *Cash Back* builds on this work, revealing how land dispossession has eroded Indigenous economic livelihoods and framing restitution in terms of stolen wealth and the redistribution of resources.



GRANTEE PROFILE



TKaronto Plant Life

Southern Ontario - Toronto

STREAM: IYCF 2023, 2025

REGION: Toronto (Southern Ontario)

FOCUS: Land Stewardship

TKaronto Plant Life is an Indigenous youth-led gardening and farming initiative in Toronto that grows traditional foods, vegetables, and medicinal plants while fostering cultural connection, healing, and food sovereignty. Rooted in the Indigenous meaning of "TKaronto" ("where there are trees standing in the water"), it emerged in 2021 as a healing space in Dufferin Grove Park and has since partnered with groups like FoodShare Toronto to supply fresh food to Indigenous, Black, and Black-Indigenous communities. The project has since expanded to include a small-scale farm in Etobicoke, Ontario. This initiative continues to grow and offer year-round land-based programming. Workshops include seed starting, plant maintenance, harvesting, medicine preparation and more....

"Many of the youth who came to the garden had never engaged with the land before—some had never grown tobacco, sage, or traditional corn. However, as they started coming month after month, or even week after week, we noticed a transformation."

Kaitlin Rizarri, TKaronto Plant Life



LIDLAW PARTNERED WITH INDSIGHT, an Indigenous-led evaluation organization, to conduct research and co-publish the Foundation's inaugural report on Black and Indigenous Youth in Ontario: *The State of Black and Indigenous Youth in Ontario: An Examination of the Experiences and Impacts of Policing on Black, Indigenous & Racialized Youth*.¹⁹

The report states that Indigenous and Black youth require more support because they are disproportionately involved in child welfare, justice, and education systems. These systemic inequities stem from the lasting impacts of colonialism and intergenerational trauma and are compounded by a lack of culturally safe, trauma-informed services; fragmented supports across sectors; and disrupted community and cultural connections.

As a result, Indigenous youth often lack the holistic, identity-affirming resources needed to thrive. Working with INDSight ensured that Laidlaw's report was grounded in culturally informed evaluation methods and community-centered storytelling, capturing youth experiences in a way that honoured their voices, knowledge, and lived realities.

Laidlaw sees the need for holistic care echoed in the experiences of its grantees:

- **in the growing number** of applicants annually;
- **in the repeat applicants** seeking to scale successful projects or launch new initiatives in response to gaps in services identified in their communities;
- **in the roundtable reflections** and sharing circles, where grantees often report noticeable changes in youth participants, such as a more hopeful outlook on life, deeper engagement in community, and overall improvements in their well-being and living conditions; and
- **in the stories** that highlight the value of representation—a Two Spirit Powwow in Southern Ontario, where trans youth, many of whom struggle with suicidal ideations, find hope after connecting with Elders who are also trans; to the ostracized autistic child who found belonging and community by participating in a hunt camp in Northern Ontario, experiencing camaraderie and acceptance for the first time; and the many youth founders across the province, who started their organizations to create the opportunities, spaces and the supports they wished they had had themselves.



The Circle on Philanthropy has been a long-standing mentor in Laidlaw's reconciliation journey, providing guidance when Laidlaw has made mistakes, holding the Foundation accountable, and sharing learning opportunities for funders seeking to transform relationships with Indigenous communities.

Through this partnership, Laidlaw has engaged in sector-wide conversations about decolonizing philanthropy and shifting resources to Indigenous-led organizations.

In addition, Laidlaw has partnered with Indigenous Youth Roots (formerly Canadian Roots Exchange) to support grassroots, youth-led initiatives across Ontario. This relationship has been key to building capacity in Indigenous communities and ensuring that funding decisions remain responsive to youth priorities and visions for change. Since 2013, Indigenous Youth Roots has received support through several Laidlaw granting streams, including a \$300,000 Scaling Impact grant in 2017. Founded in 2008, Canadian Roots Exchange has placed youth at the heart of reconciliation by connecting thousands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people through exchanges, national gatherings, and the Youth Reconciliation Initiative.

These youth-led programs create space for relationship-building, shared learning, and grassroots organizing, while equipping participants with the skills, networks, and confidence to advance reconciliation in their own communities and ensure youth voices remain central to shaping change across the country.

Indigenous Leadership Within Laidlaw

The Foundation is proud to be guided by Indigenous leaders whose expertise and lived experience bring critical perspectives to all aspects of its work. Their vision and guidance embed reconciliation into day-to-day operations, turning stated values into active practices grounded in respect, partnership, and accountability. Under their leadership, Laidlaw continues to center Indigenous voices on the path toward meaningful change.



GRANTEE PROFILE



The Kiskinohtahiwewak Partnership

Northern Ontario, Moose Factory

STREAM: IYCF 2024

REGION: Moose Factory (Northern Ontario)

FOCUS: Language Revitalization

The Kiskinohtahiwewak Partnership is a unique initiative that seeks to create medical resources in Cree for health professionals serving Indigenous patients in the James and Hudson Bay region. This tool is designed for doctors and other frontline staff, to support the provision of culturally safe care by incorporating Cree language into clinical interactions. By improving communication, the project aims to reduce barriers to accessing care, strengthen language pride, and foster trust between patients and providers.

“One of the largest barriers to providing culturally safe care is language. Being able to communicate with a healthcare provider in your preferred language is vitally important to a patient, as it allows for greater communication of your experience, allows you to understand your condition, and is shown to improve adherence to medication and treatment. There are very few opportunities to learn the Cree language at the various institutions many of the Leadership Circle are learning at. Thus, a local initiative is needed for learners to learn the basics of the Cree language, as well as specific phrases and sentences needed for us to converse with a patient in Cree.”

Justice Seidel, Founder of The Kiskinohtahiwewak Partnership



SECTION FOUR

Voices from Within: Shaping Laidlaw's Indigenous Leadership and Reconciliation Journey

These interviews provide a multi-layered perspective on solidarity and organizational stewardship; governance and accountability; and the importance of Indigenous leadership, youth empowerment, and community-driven approaches. Our colleagues' reflections capture what has changed, what has been learned, and what still needs to be done. Their insights are synthesized below.

Since committing to the TRC's Calls to Action and the Declaration of Action, Laidlaw Foundation has undertaken a decade-long journey to embed Indigenous leadership and reconciliation at the heart of its work. This journey has been informed and enriched by the people within and alongside the Foundation who pushed for systemic change and refused to settle for symbolic gestures.

To understand this evolution, we spoke with six colleagues who have played pivotal roles in Laidlaw's Indigenous-focused work:

- Janine Manning, past Chair
- Amanda Bernard, Director of Indigenous Programs
- Jessica Bolduc, Indigenous Youth Advisory Council member, original cohort
- Joel Jocko, Indigenous Youth Advisory Council member, current cohort
- Jehad Aliweiwi, Executive Director
- Ana Skinner, former Senior Program Manager

The Importance of Authentic Indigenous Leadership

Authentic Indigenous leadership is not token representation; it is Indigenous people leading the work, shaping priorities, and being entrusted with decision-making power. Several interviewees reflected on the fact that, until recently, much so-called “Native work” in philanthropy was led by non-Indigenous staff or advisors. This approach often sidelined cultural knowledge and community priorities, reinforcing colonial power dynamics that limited the effectiveness and accountability of Indigenous programs.

The significance of Indigenous leadership was underscored by Janine Manning’s historic role as the first Indigenous Chair of a private philanthropic foundation in Canada. Her leadership signaled readiness and capacity for Indigenous people to lead at the highest levels of governance. Janine highlighted how the Foundation embraced evolving language, training, and board culture to move away from “this is how governance has always been done” and enact new ways that better honour Indigenous perspectives and priorities. This cultural shift fostered a growing sense of pride and shared purpose among staff and board members alike.

The establishment of the Indigenous Youth Community and Futures Fund (IYCFF) was a direct outcome of Indigenous Youth Advisory Council members insisting on Indigenous leadership.

This fund exemplifies how youth voices can fundamentally shape program design, governance, and decision-making processes. Interviewees stressed that Indigenous representation on staff, boards, and advisory bodies actively influences resource allocation, relationship-building, and the embedding of cultural values throughout the Foundation’s work.

Embedding Indigenous leadership at every level has allowed Laidlaw to incorporate lived experience and cultural knowledge into its decisions, with critical support from non-Indigenous co-conspirators within Laidlaw. Executive Director Jehad Aliweiwi described allyship as a practice of facilitation and strategic stewardship—holding the Foundation accountable while intentionally creating space for Indigenous leaders to drive the work. This requires humility, ongoing listening, and a willingness to cede power rather than maintain control.

Former Senior Program Manager Ana Skinner reflected on the necessity of organizational readiness and cultural humility in translating strategic commitments into meaningful action. She emphasized that having staff and managers who deeply understand historical and cultural contexts is essential; without this, even the best-intentioned strategies risk falling short of supporting authentic Indigenous leadership.



“To me, Indigenous leadership means having Indigenous people actually leading the work, making the decisions, shaping the direction, and being trusted with that responsibility... You don’t often see Indigenous staff or board members at organizations running Indigenous programs, and I think that says a lot.”

— Amanda Bernard



The Challenges of Tension and Burnout

One significant challenge in Laidlaw's journey to better support Indigenous youth was navigating the tension between creating a new Indigenous youth fund and supporting existing community-led initiatives. There was careful consideration to ensure that new programs complemented rather than displaced ongoing efforts within Indigenous communities. Concerns were raised about potentially fragmenting limited resources or disrupting effective grassroots work already underway.

Another key issue was the risk of burnout among youth advisors who were often deeply involved as leaders in their own communities. Recognizing the heavy demands placed on these young leaders, the Foundation prioritized building partnerships rooted in respect and care to ensure sustainable engagement.

Within the Foundation, early conversations reflected some hesitation about launching an Indigenous youth-led fund from within a primarily non-Indigenous institution. Questions around organizational readiness, community trust, and potential pushback highlighted the importance of approaching this work with humility and patience.

The Foundation addressed these challenges through ongoing relationship-building, internal advocacy, and intentional efforts to center Indigenous voices and leadership in decision-making. As it moved from well-meaning but fragmented efforts to intentional, community-driven funding, Laidlaw demonstrated a deepening commitment to cultural humility, responsiveness, and sustaining Indigenous youth leadership over time.

**“There were internal concerns about getting these youth who are already doing so much in their communities to be a part of this without burning them out. That is a universal concern.”
— Jehad Aliweiwi**

Witnessing a Cultural Shift: Growing Pride, Connection, and Cultural Continuity Among Indigenous Youth

Cultural revitalization is deeply connected to community wellness and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Programs such as wild rice restoration, language revitalization classes, and culture workshops do more than educate; they reconnect youth to the land, their identity, and community responsibilities that many of their parents and grandparents were denied. This reconnection has been linked to improved mental health, as cultural disconnection has long contributed to isolation, loss of identity, and related struggles. Reviving cultural practices allows young people to reclaim pride in who they are, learn from elders, and pass teachings on to future generations, ensuring cultural continuity and resilience.

Interviewees noted a profound cultural shift over the last decade: where once many Indigenous youth hid their identity, today they openly and proudly embrace it. Land-based and cultural revitalization initiatives have played a vital role in this transformation, as have the TRC's Calls to Action, increased public awareness following the discoveries of children's remains at former residential school sites, and the growth of Indigenous-led programs and activities. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized the importance of such initiatives and their role as essential pathways for healing and sustaining culture.



“IYCFE gives youth the opportunity to share their language and culture and keep the process going, there has been significant culture and language loss for a long time and these programs allow Indigenous communities to keep it alive.”

— Joel Jocko



Culture Care: Qilaujarniq

Southern Ontario - Ottawa

STREAM: IYCFE 2024

REGION: Ottawa (Southern Ontario)

FOCUS: Culture Preservation

Qilaujarniq is an initiative that teaches Inuit youth in the Ottawa region how to make drums, speak Inuktitut, master traditional drum songs and dances. Inuit homeland is traditionally located in the Northwest Territories (Nunavut), Northern Quebec (Nunavik), and Northern Labrador (Nunatsiavut). Over the years, the Inuit population has been gradually increasing for access to education, healthcare, employment and social services which are limited in remote arctic regions. Initiatives such as those provided by Qilaujarniq provide Inuit youth a vital connection to Inuit culture, traditions, and identity, while living far away from their homelands and community.

“We provide up to 80 drums and offer storytelling workshops where Inuit youth can share common challenges, especially about being away from home during the difficult winter months. In Inuit tradition, winter was a hard time spent following nomadic hunting routes, and during these periods, families would come together in igloos to share food, tell stories, and celebrate the end of the harsh season with drum dancing. This program creates a safe space that brings youth back to these important cultural practices by teaching the spiritual significance of drumming and drum making. It aims to reconnect youth with their heritage and prepare them to pass these teachings on to others, even while living away from their traditional home.”

Paraphrased from Donovan Gordon,
Founder of Culture Care: Qilaujarniq

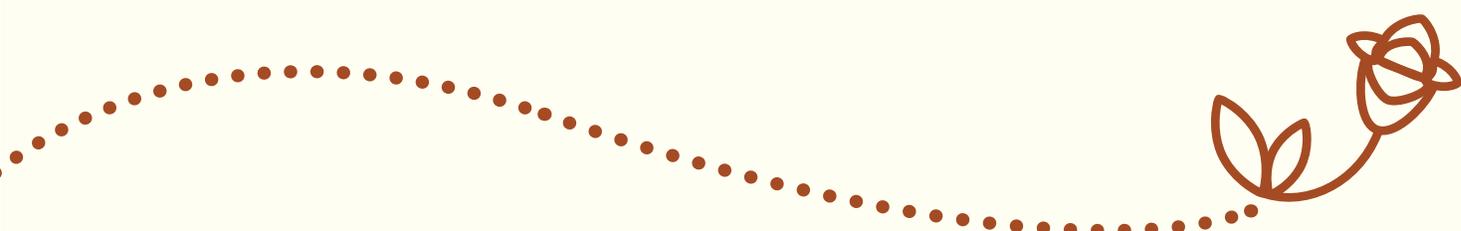
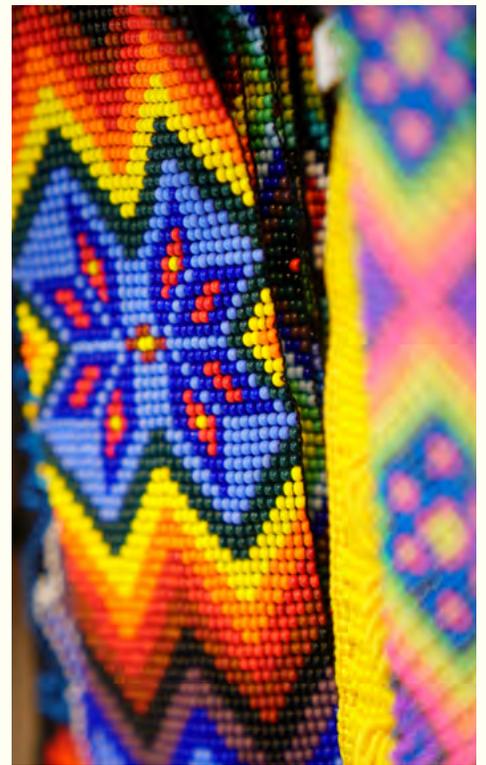
“When displeasure with some of our work by an Indigenous community in Winnipeg was conveyed to us, we weren’t reactive. Instead, we paused and asked ourselves: What did we do wrong, and how can we course-correct now? We sat in ceremony, shared a feast, and listened deeply to Indigenous elders... By truly listening to impacted communities, we can achieve meaningful progress.”
— Janine Manning

Embedding Accountability Through Relationship and Reflection

Interviewees described accountability as a living practice that extends beyond compliance or metrics. They emphasized Laidlaw’s responsibility to share learnings with other funders and influence sector-wide change, showing through action why Indigenous leadership and culturally grounded processes matter. The Foundation’s decision to replace formal reporting with roundtable reflections, for example, is part of a broader commitment to building trust and reciprocity rather than extracting information. These reflections create space for meaningful dialogue, centering community voices and allowing staff to adapt programs based on what they hear.

Interviewees pointed to times when Laidlaw, after receiving critical feedback from communities—and guided by Indigenous leaders on staff and boards—chose to pause, sit in ceremony, and listen deeply instead of reacting defensively, actions that model humility and course correction. Sharing such experiences with other foundations helps demonstrate how accountability can be relational, culturally respectful, and transformative.

Reflections on allyship and stewardship emphasized that accountability to Indigenous communities must go beyond written policies to embody respect and responsiveness in day-to-day operations. Building internal capacity—through cultural workshops, staff retreats on Indigenous territories, and presentations from residential school Survivors—fostered a shared commitment among Foundation staff to uphold Indigenous values and practices and created a culture where authentic Indigenous leadership could thrive.





Waterways Collective

Northern Ontario, Serpent River

STREAM: IYCF 2024, 2025

REGION: Serpent River (Northern Ontario)

FOCUS: Water Stewardship

The Waterways Collective, a paddling collective in Serpent River First Nation was founded to increase Indigenous youths' access to paddling, a traditional practice in many Indigenous communities halted due to environmental contamination and industrial development. Activities such as uranium mining in Serpent River polluted the waterways, making it unsafe and disrupted traditional ways of travel. It also made it challenging to continue cultural practices, such as accessing pictographs, which are sacred visual stories that connect Indigenous peoples to their ancestors, land and spiritual beliefs, many existing for thousands of years and only accessible by water. The collective sought to reinstating ancestral connections to waterways through teaching paddling and organizing excursions. It has since grown significantly to include the revitalization of other lost practices such as reseeded of manoomin (wild rice) in local waterways, to promote cultural reconnection and food sovereignty, among many other initiatives in the region.

“Reconnecting with the land through wild rice restoration is about more than food, it’s about reviving lost traditions. Participants of this project are proud to reseed these beds, planting the seeds for future abundance so their children and grandchildren can benefit. It’s about teaching the next generation to care for the land and restoring not just food, but the songs, stories, and ecosystems that sustain us.”

Quinn Meawasige, Co-Founding Member of The Waterways Collective

Ceding Power and Control

To decolonize its philanthropy, Laidlaw had to rethink how money and decision-making power flow. In the Foundation's early years, larger grants went to a small number of white-led organizations, mirroring conventional philanthropic models.

Over time, Laidlaw shifted to providing smaller grants to a broader range of grassroots groups—an intentional move to redistribute resources to those closest to the community, who often lacked the capacity to navigate traditional funding systems.

Several interviewees highlighted the 2022 capital transfer to the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF) as a landmark signal of trust and of willingness to cede power. They also described how program processes have been repeatedly updated based on grantee feedback: applications have been simplified, the reporting burden has been reduced, and space has been created for more-relational and culturally grounded exchanges. Such ongoing changes are crucial in making funding accessible and relevant to Indigenous communities, and in modeling practices that other funders could follow.

What's Next?

Looking forward, interviewees expressed hope for Laidlaw to continue deepening its support for Indigenous youth-led and community-rooted initiatives. They emphasized the importance of setting aside flexible funding to respond to urgent needs, whether during crises like the pandemic or in moments when land rights are under threat.

The role of advisory groups will remain central to ensuring programs evolve with community priorities. Strengthening partnerships with Indigenous foundations, advancing succession planning, and fostering genuine power-sharing were also identified as key next steps. Interviewees pointed to the growth in IYCF applications, which have doubled since inception, as evidence of increasing demand and visibility, much of it fueled by social media and storytelling.

“Youth leaders have emphasized that their participation is not just about representation; it is about reshaping how decisions are made, programs are designed, and success is measured.”

— Synthesis from Jessica & Joel interviews

The Work Is Ongoing

Laidlaw's progress in reconciliation has been shaped by a willingness to share power, invest in internal learning, and follow the lead of Indigenous staff, youth, and advisors.

Meaningful change has taken root, but interviewees were clear: **reconciliation is not a task to be completed but an ongoing process.**

Laidlaw is committed to this process and to the continued guidance of Indigenous voices and values.



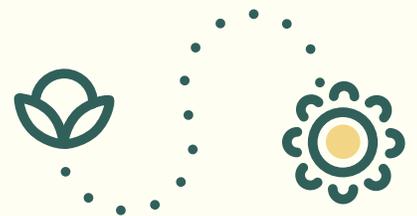
MY JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION

A personal reflection from Amanda Bernard, the first Indigenous employee at Laidlaw in recent history

“Growing up, I always knew I was Indigenous, but I didn’t know what that truly meant. My journey of reconnection has been shaped by moments of pain, discovery, pride, and community. In this reflection, I want to share how I found my way back to culture, and how the work I do today helps others do the same.”

My name is Amanda Bernard, and I’m a proud member of the Madawaska Maliseet First Nation and I currently serve as the Director of Indigenous Programs at the Laidlaw Foundation. My father grew up on our reserve in Edmundston, New Brunswick, alongside his six siblings. The Maliseet people (Wəlastəkwewiyik) have lived along the St. John River since time immemorial.

His childhood home sat right beside the river, a constant presence in their daily life. In 1725, the Maliseet Nation and the British Crown signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship which was an agreement that continues to affirm our rights and relationship to the land. The Bernard family is rooted in leadership, culture, and resilience. My grandmother, Margaret and my aunts, Joanna and Trish, have all served as chiefs of our community. My grandmother also ran a craft shop, traveling across the country to sell her handmade items—a legacy later carried on by my Uncle Bob.



I feel incredibly fortunate to come from a family that preserved records of our history. My Great Uncle, Noel Bernard, was documented by a settler Christian who spent time with him. Through these records, we were even able to trace our original family name, Shawish. When settlers arrived, my ancestors were forced to change it. They chose Bernard, the name of their favourite priest.

My dad eventually moved from the reserve to Ottawa to get better employment opportunities. In Ottawa, he had myself and my three siblings. Growing up, I always knew I was Indigenous, but I didn't fully understand what that meant until much later in life. My father, like many Indigenous people of his generation, experienced bullying and racism, so he often kept his identity private. As a result, our culture was rarely talked about at home.

We lived in Ottawa and only visited the reserve about once a year to see my grandparents and cousins. I remember receiving an eagle feather from my grandmother after reading a novel about an Indigenous medicine man and taking a quiz. She tried her best to pass on teachings—about plant medicine, sweetgrass, and our traditions.

Despite these efforts, I often felt disconnected. I remember being in elementary school when teachers found out I was Indigenous. They asked me to do a presentation and bring in my moccasins, eagle feather, and medicine. At that young age, I didn't even understand the significance of what I was sharing.

Fifteen or twenty years ago, it wasn't seen as "cool" to be Indigenous. I rarely talked about it. I even recall someone asking, "Why would you tell people you're Native?" That lack of pride led

to a lack of understanding, and a lot of intergenerational pain.

My grandfather and great-grandfather both attended day schools, where they were segregated from white children. My grandfather never spoke about his experience—not even up until his death. That silence carried deep pain, and while I'll never fully know what he endured, I can see how that trauma was passed down to my aunts, my father, and eventually, to me.

Those who attended day or residential schools often emerged as shells of who they once were. Many struggled to love themselves and others, unsure how to express the kind of love they never received. This was not by accident, but a direct result of systemic oppression designed to sever Indigenous people from their cultures, families, and sense of self. That pain rippled through families. As the saying goes, hurt people hurt people.

After university, I worked for a company building a healthcare adjudication system for Indigenous communities. But I still felt disconnected—I was often the only Indigenous person in the room. When my aunt passed away on the reserve from something that could have been prevented, it was a wake-up call. I knew I needed to be closer to community. That's when I joined Laidlaw Foundation.

It was through my work at Laidlaw, and especially with Indigenous youth, that I began to reconnect. The Indigenous Youth and Community Futures Fund (IYCF) invests in youth-led projects that celebrate and reclaim culture, language, land, and community. I've supported projects that include community gardens, dog sledding, medicine walks, e-books, regalia-making, language revitalization, and land-based healing.

These projects aren't just programming, they're lifelines. They're restoring pride, fostering healing, and creating generational change. I've learned so much, from the teachings of plants and the sacredness of regalia to the distinct beauty of each nation's art and worldview.

This work has helped me understand my family's pain and begin my own journey of healing. I've seen that same transformation in the youth we support.

They are proud of who they are and where they come from, and that pride shapes a powerful vision for where they're going.

In 2025, I danced in a powwow wearing a jingle dress, a dream I had carried for years but never felt brave enough to pursue until now.

Indigenous communities are healing, but this work is far from over. We must continue to uplift Indigenous voices, protect cultural knowledge, and honour Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Indigenous traditions are rooted in respect—respect for one another, for the land, and for future generations. It's a beautiful and powerful culture. One that everyone deserves the opportunity to know, learn from, and walk alongside.

**Miigwetch - Woliwon,
Amanda Bernard**



The Crooked Good

Indigenous culture is rooted in oral storytelling and artistic expression, passing down knowledge, history and teachings across generations. In honour of these traditions, we present the following poem “The Crooked Good” written by Louise Bernice Halfe. It speaks to the spirit of this report: embracing complexity, honouring lived experience, and committing to healing justice. The poem reflects a worldview where progress isn’t linear, but shaped by community, memory, and resilience. As Laidlaw continues its journey alongside Indigenous youth and partners, the “crooked good” path reminds us that strength lies in listening, learning, and moving forward together, even when the way is not straight.

About the Poet

Louise Bernice Halfe–Skydancer is a Cree poet, former Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate, and a survivor of residential school. Her work powerfully weaves together memory, language, and cultural reclamation to uplift Indigenous truths and traditions.

The Crooked Good

by Louise Bernice Halfe (Skydancer)

I could have been wrong

but I was right

in the crooked good way

of my people.

I could have been wrong

but I was right

in the crooked good way

of my people.

Life is crooked, and so is the path

and it all leads home

where the crooked good circle is made.

I am crooked good, and I am free,

and I stand on the backs of those

who came before me.

The crooked good stories are the ones

that keep us strong, keep us learning,

keep us going.

In the crooked good way, we are whole,

not perfect, but healing.

Not broken, but growing.

Not lost, but finding our way.



Looking Back to Move Forward

REFLECTING ON THE DECADE

since the TRC's Calls to Action and The Declaration has been a humbling experience. We are grateful for the Indigenous leaders, youth, and communities who have guided and challenged our work. In our evolving programs, strengthened relationships, and enhanced accountability practices, we see both the progress made and the need for ongoing work.

THIS REPORT HAS

HIGHLIGHTED key milestones, partnership, initiatives, and insights to illustrate how the Foundation has sought to meaningfully honour its commitments to reconciliation. The journey is ongoing and Laidlaw remains committed to it. We welcome anyone interested in learning more to reach out and engage with us directly.

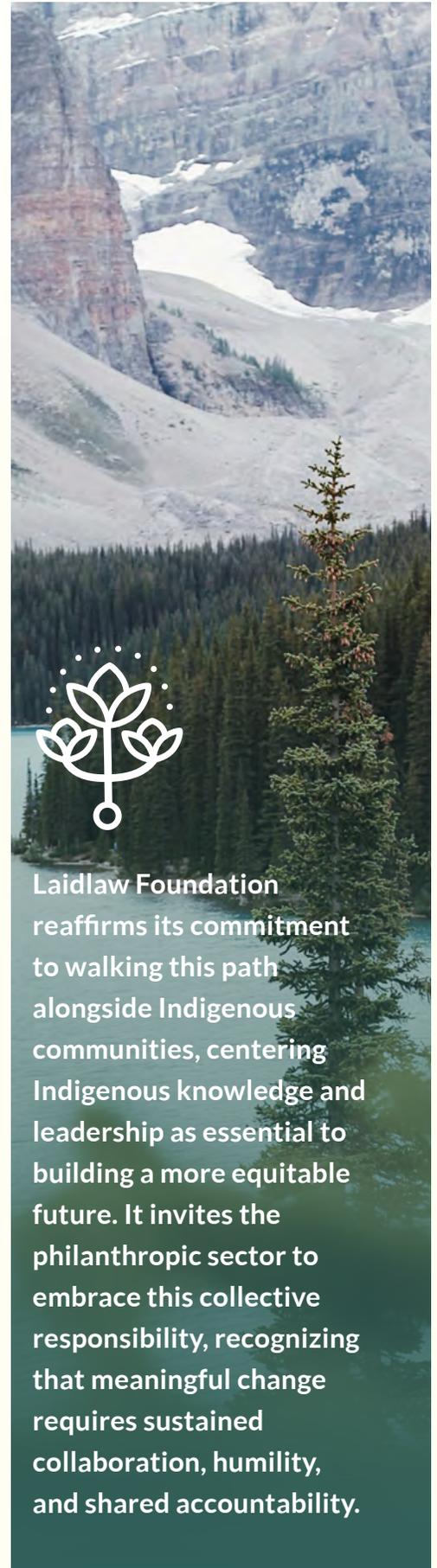
WE ALSO WANT TO EMPHASIZE

that this report is not only a reflection but a call to action. We urge our peers and partners in philanthropy to actively pick up this work and carry it forward—to commit to supporting Indigenous communities with sustained energy, respect, and partnership. Reconciliation is not a destination or a checklist; it is a pathway toward justice, healing, and transformation grounded in truth, respect, and reciprocity.

Laidlaw Foundation reaffirms its commitment to walking this path alongside Indigenous communities, centering Indigenous knowledge and leadership as essential to building a more equitable future. It invites the philanthropic sector to embrace this collective responsibility, recognizing that meaningful change requires sustained collaboration, humility, and shared accountability.

INDIGENOUS CULTURE IS ROOTED IN ORAL STORYTELLING AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

which are used to pass down knowledge, history, and teachings across generations. So it seems fitting for us to give the last word to an Indigenous artist, Cree poet Louise Bernice Halfe (Sky Dancer), former Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2021–2022) and a survivor of residential school. Her work powerfully weaves together memory, language, and cultural reclamation to uplift Indigenous truths and traditions, and her poem, “The Crooked Good,” speaks to important needs highlighted by Laidlaw’s experience: embracing complexity, honouring lived experience, committing to healing justice. As we continue our journey alongside Indigenous youth and partners on the “crooked good” path, it reminds us that progress isn’t linear and strength lies in listening, learning, and moving forward together.



Laidlaw Foundation reaffirms its commitment to walking this path alongside Indigenous communities, centering Indigenous knowledge and leadership as essential to building a more equitable future. It invites the philanthropic sector to embrace this collective responsibility, recognizing that meaningful change requires sustained collaboration, humility, and shared accountability.



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We also extend our appreciation to everyone who shared their stories, reflected on the past, and offered visions for the future.

Above all, we express our heartfelt gratitude to all our partners and all those who are dedicated to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

About Grantee Profiles

The Indigenous Youth Community Futures Fund (IYCFF) provides grants to youth-led, Indigenous-led and Indigenous-focused projects that promote leadership, language and culture revitalization, land and water stewardship, skills building and community development.

These are especially important because of the historical experience of colonization, and policies that caused displacement, such as the 60's scoop and residential schools, disrupted the transmission culture, leadership structures, and connections to the land.

For Indigenous youth, these being able to implement these projects are essential acts of resilience and healing. It is an opportunity to reclaim their identity and sovereignty, help their communities restore their traditions, protect their territories and build a stronger future for themselves, despite ongoing systemic challenges.



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LIDLAW
FOUNDATION

Laidlaw Foundation

2 St. Clair Avenue East Suite 300
Toronto, ON M4T 2T5

Phone: 416-964-3614

Email: info@laidlawfdn.org