

# First Peoples Child & Family Review

An Interdisciplinary Journal Honouring the Voices, Perspectives, and Knowledges of First Peoples through Research, Critical Analyses, Stories, Standpoints and Media Reviews

## Hopes and Dreams

Volume 12, Number 2, 2017

Indigenous Children, Youth and Families in the Next 150 Years :  
special Edition by Children and Youth

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077966ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077966ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

### ISSN

1708-489X (print)

2293-6610 (digital)

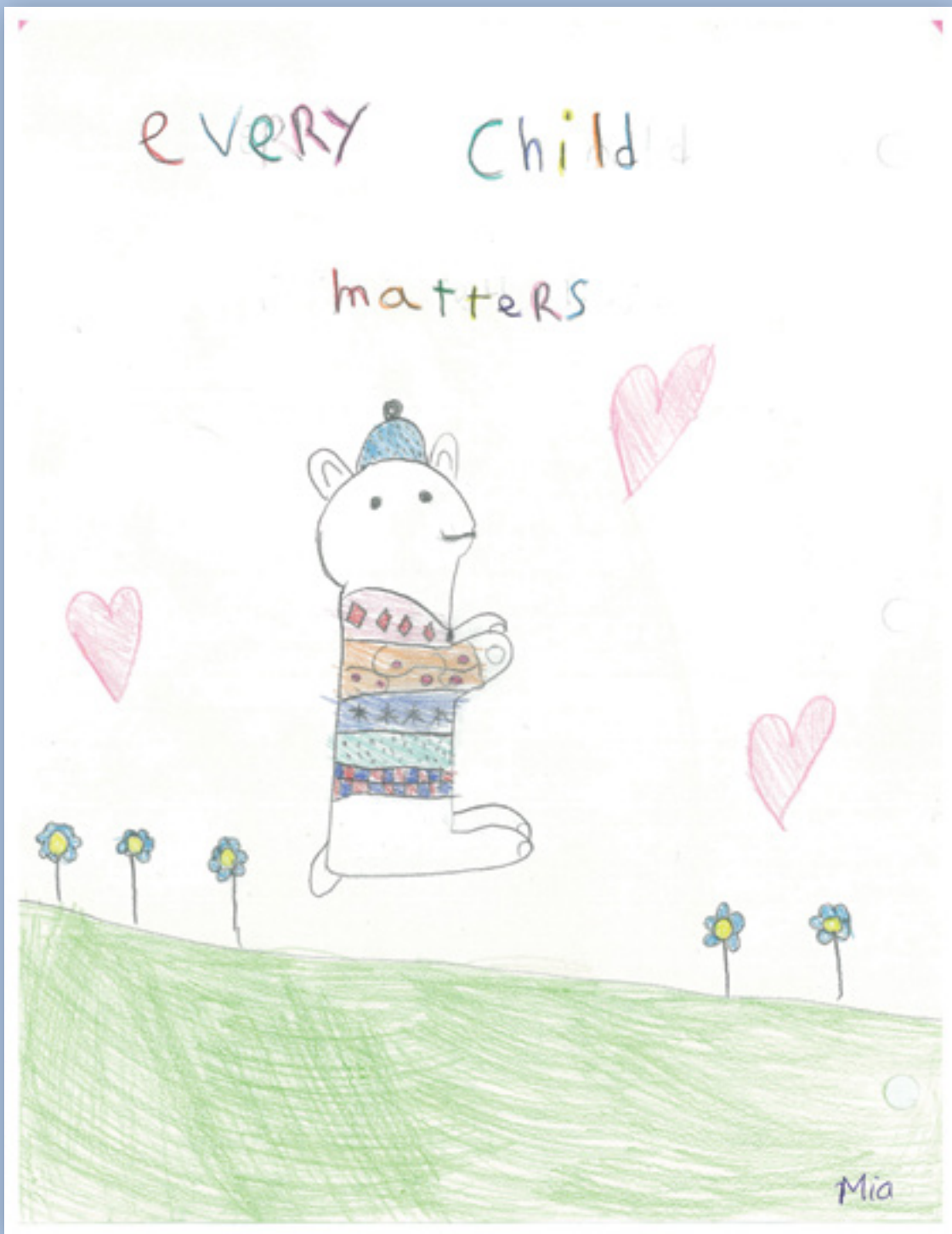
[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this document

(2017). Hopes and Dreams. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 12(2), 6–27.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1077966ar>

# Hopes and Dreams

Children and youth across Canada share their thoughts on the past 150 years, along with their hopes and dreams for the future.



Mia, age 8

## My Reflections, Hopes and Dreams

Macheshuu N.

My name is Macheshuu Neeganagwedgin. I come from Treaty 9 in the community of Constance Lake First Nations in Northern Ontario. I am 11 years old and I am in grade 7, but I will be 12 years old shortly. I live in Southern Ontario with my family. This is my reflection about the past 150 years in Canada and the significance for me as a Cree person and other Indigenous people and families like me and my family. I believe that, over the past 150 years, a lot has happened for families and youth just like me. In the past 150 years, we have had a history of hurt – a history of the government trying to harm us. The government doesn't want us to be here on our lands, but we are still alive. We come from great people and we are still fighting for our land. They tried to steal our language and to stop us from speaking in our language. They could fight us for another 150 years but we will never give up.

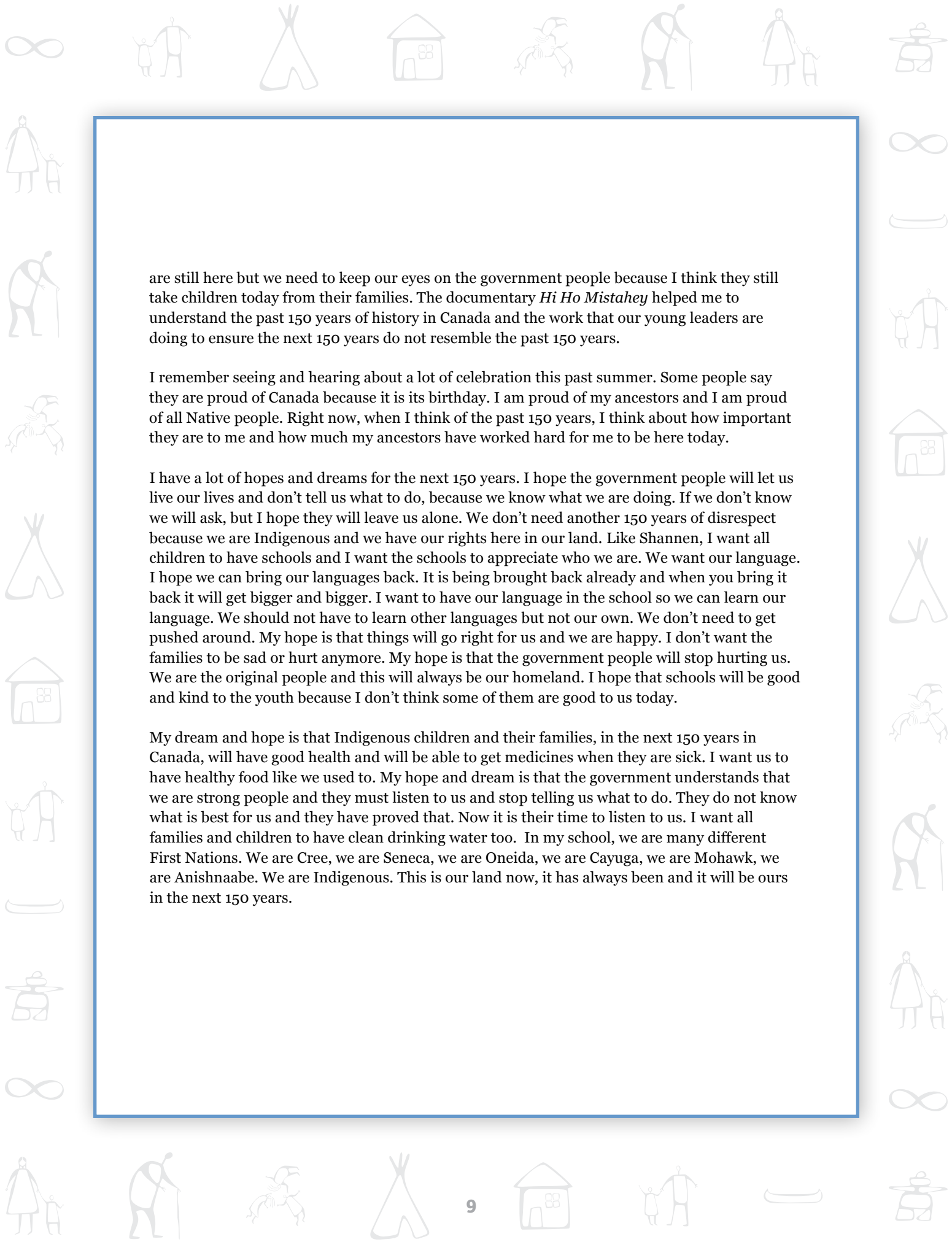
My dad tells me a story I will share about people who came to my kokum's house in our community to do work. She did not trust them and she ran them away in our Cree language – no English, only Cree. Our language is powerful. Over the past 150 years, the land has helped us to live. We help our land by fighting for it. We did not harm the land and our land did not harm us. Our land knows us. It knows who we are. In grade 4, I watched a documentary called *Hi-Ho Mistahey* about Shannen's Dream. Shannen wanted a school for the children in her community. She was fighting for the children.

We were not able to speak our language  
We could not wear our own clothes  
We could not see our families  
We were sad  
But we also resisted then  
We fought back  
We are here today  
Today we are learning our language  
We are making our regalia  
We are Smudging  
And we know who we are  
The Original people of Turtle Island

Some of the children were brave. I know that bravery is one of the Grandfather teachings. They tried to run away because the schools were very strict. The government people there did not love us. They wanted our food. They wanted our land and when they take it they do not learn from it – they just ruin it like they always do, but they think what they are doing is right. They are making the world worse by their actions. Over the past 150 years we fought for our rights, and our rights are in our land in Canada. The past 150 years are significant for all the things that happened to us. We have ancestors who help us every day. For example, when the government took the children from their families and put them in residential schools. Now we Cree children

*Macheshuu, age 11*





are still here but we need to keep our eyes on the government people because I think they still take children today from their families. The documentary *Hi Ho Mistahey* helped me to understand the past 150 years of history in Canada and the work that our young leaders are doing to ensure the next 150 years do not resemble the past 150 years.

I remember seeing and hearing about a lot of celebration this past summer. Some people say they are proud of Canada because it is its birthday. I am proud of my ancestors and I am proud of all Native people. Right now, when I think of the past 150 years, I think about how important they are to me and how much my ancestors have worked hard for me to be here today.

I have a lot of hopes and dreams for the next 150 years. I hope the government people will let us live our lives and don't tell us what to do, because we know what we are doing. If we don't know we will ask, but I hope they will leave us alone. We don't need another 150 years of disrespect because we are Indigenous and we have our rights here in our land. Like Shannen, I want all children to have schools and I want the schools to appreciate who we are. We want our language. I hope we can bring our languages back. It is being brought back already and when you bring it back it will get bigger and bigger. I want to have our language in the school so we can learn our language. We should not have to learn other languages but not our own. We don't need to get pushed around. My hope is that things will go right for us and we are happy. I don't want the families to be sad or hurt anymore. My hope is that the government people will stop hurting us. We are the original people and this will always be our homeland. I hope that schools will be good and kind to the youth because I don't think some of them are good to us today.

My dream and hope is that Indigenous children and their families, in the next 150 years in Canada, will have good health and will be able to get medicines when they are sick. I want us to have healthy food like we used to. My hope and dream is that the government understands that we are strong people and they must listen to us and stop telling us what to do. They do not know what is best for us and they have proved that. Now it is their time to listen to us. I want all families and children to have clean drinking water too. In my school, we are many different First Nations. We are Cree, we are Seneca, we are Oneida, we are Cayuga, we are Mohawk, we are Anishnaabe. We are Indigenous. This is our land now, it has always been and it will be ours in the next 150 years.



# Spirit Bear!



first nations people  
must have equal  
Rights

By: Yuna

Yuna, age 8



Isra, age 13

## Raise me Nēhiyaw

Jamin M.

Since before Canadian Confederation and the colonization of Indigenous communities, my band thrived on the parklands and descended from the willows between two rivers. We've participated in revolutionary battles and signed nation-mending treaties, but everything hit home when an Indian Residential School was constructed on the reserve and had devastated our language, culture, ideologies, and families. This article is of the experience and speculation of a young Neechie man co-existing with, and inheriting 150 years of systemic oppression.

Colonization had swept across the land impaling Indigenous peoples with obscure ideologies unfamiliar to their cultural environments. Canada's national objective was to assimilate any/all Indigenous children in the most convenient methods to create an unnatural identity and illegitimize Indigenous knowledge, technologies, and existence. These methods of colonization were torturous and were designed to destroy Indigenous peoples' governance systems based on kinship and their economies. However, there are many Indigenous people who were successfully assimilated into this system who do not realize it, or do accept it. It has become apparent that there is a divide in many Indigenous communities for that reason and it continues to feed on-going cycles of inter-communal crisis.


Indigenous children witness that. And with a new millennium underway, the influence of an outdated generation seems to confuse many seeking to identify their position within contemporary Indigenous societies. On one hand, there is the belief that one should subscribe to a self-loathing environment that openly accepts enabling behaviours in result from mass post-traumatic stress disorders. Or, to participate in ever deepening movements of people who embrace sovereign ideologies and aspire to rise above our dark histories. Although this seems like such a direct claim, this is what I've personally experienced as an Indigenous youth.

As far as colonization goes, there is another issue that suppresses Indigenous peoples and their progression towards a true nation-to-nation relationship, and that is Canada itself. Despite how we want to think of our relationship, we need to understand that Canada literally disobeyed and broke treaty agreements. So with this new generation coming forward to the front lines, we need to ensure that we understand our inherent rights as Indigenous peoples; not only on a federal and global level, but as sovereign peoples as well. Moreover, Colonization is deeply rooted in our genetics just as much as our original way of life is. And if there is no intention to honestly make the new generations aware of this, are we failing to recognize and practice our rights as Indigenous peoples? I was told by an elderly woman through oral history, "As long as Indigenous peoples continue to hunt, trap, fish and gather, then we are fulfilling our commitments to treaty through simply existing." Her message was infused with the idea that we are the owners of the treaty, not the white man. And whatever our word may be, is what the treaty will be. I've always felt that we are the natural entities of this relationship and we will no longer condone living with shame, fear, and sickness any longer because the treaty is to accommodate us, not white supremacy and its privileged. We are not the settlers.

Indigenous children, on the other hand, have many more barriers to social development on a modern scale than most non-Indigenous groups do; especially through academics. These children are still being oppressed in how their intellectualism is presented and harnessed. We see examples in every place and how the media projects what being "smart" is. Brown children feel as if they are not entitled to endeavor a higher education because they are busy worrying

*Jamin, age 20*





about their traumas. Growing up on the reserve, I knew I was able to get the best grades, but I was never able to rid my clouded mind when it was time to open our whitewashed books and start reading.

Although I believe it is time to move forward, we must address how our children have been treated by not only the system but by our own Indigenous peoples as well. Even though generations before me were immersed in an impoverished culture, doesn't mean I have to be- or my niece- or my little cousins. So when we discuss Indigenous child-rearing, I believe a lot of the misbehaving children are a result of both trauma inheritance, poverty, and a self-loathing community influence. A lot of the "behaving" children are the results of exposure to community, diversity, experience, language, culture, and structure. These fundamentals are nothing more than fundamentals and aren't hard to provide.

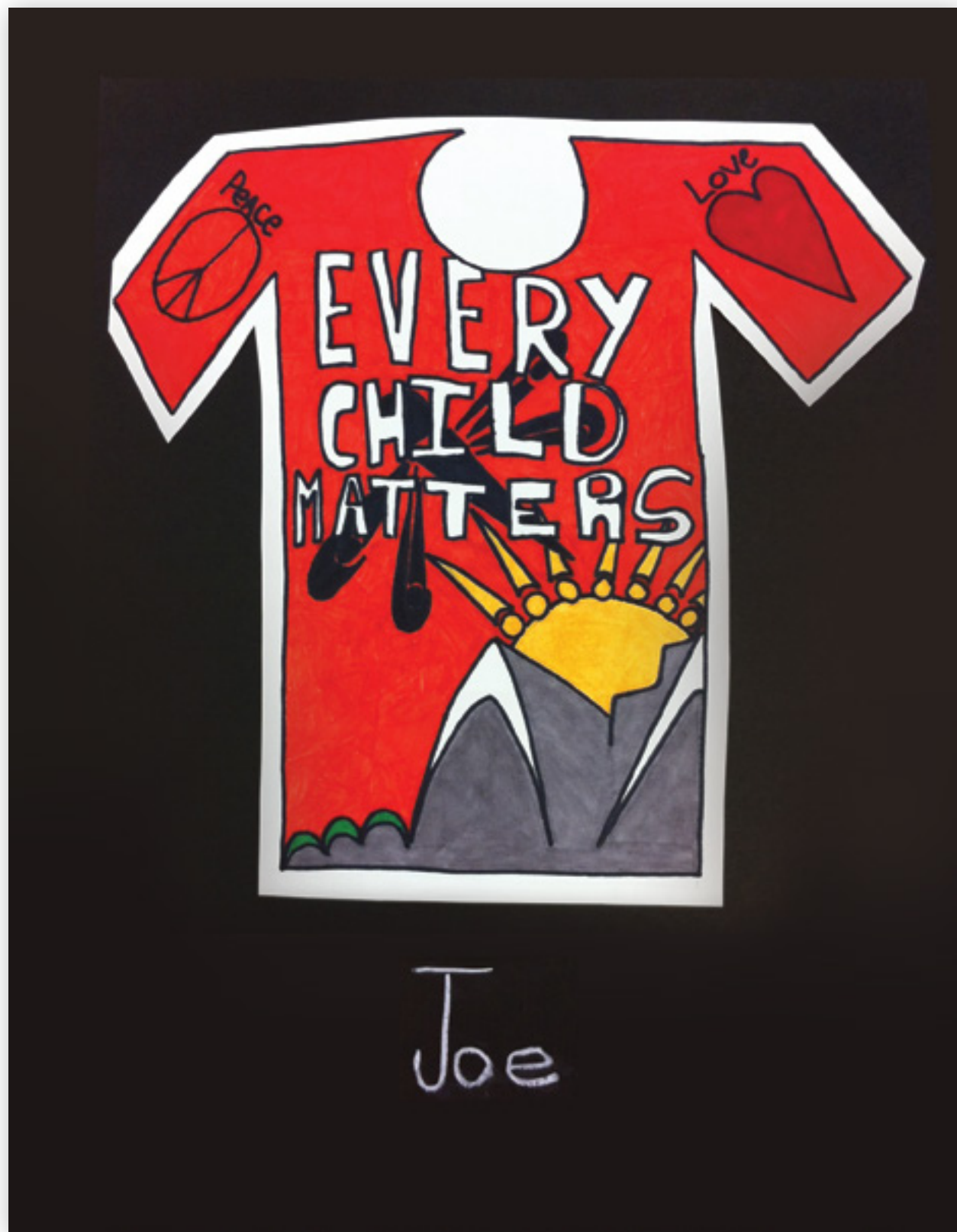
With that being said, we can see how colonization turned into a cultural genocide when entire bands were being manipulated out of their own worldviews. We also see how this affected the mental health of Indigenous children, especially those in isolated northern communities. They say it takes a community to raise a child, and so it has been. What are we doing to motivate our children and their aspirations indigenously? Moreover, what are we doing to raise our children with not only Indigenous values but their own human, family and community values as well? I am a strong believer that our cultural platform is made of geographical location and the language accompanying it. For any group of people in the world, give them a piece of land and they will develop their own understandings and language given time. Give Indigenous children a future through a promising home and an appropriate education, they will prove their capability to thrive and be respected for it. "Indians are never stuck," as they would say. The ideologies for Indigenous children are common because of similar issues striking their homes. Sometimes it doesn't even matter whether or not there is a status or non-status Indian, the system treats us all the same anyway.

150 years of a government that views Indigenous peoples as an obstacle is ridiculous. To me, reconciliation is the realization that white people have benefitted from a system meant to destroy Indigenous children and their homes. Our children are exhausted from the ulterior motives in Canadian development and its discriminating capitalism. Events in time obviously show how much effort the government had put into ridding the Indian problem, so why can't they put that much effort into reconciliation? They enforced residential schools, so now they need to enforce Indigenous language immersion schools. They took our children away in the 60's scoop, now they need to give back our children in the current child welfare system.


However, Canada can only do so much. It's now our responsibility as Indigenous people to reclaim our honor in our families, relationships, marriages, communities, and ceremonies. It is our duty to be honest in all aspects of our lives and to continue to strive for the healing of the mind, heart, body, and soul. Our children born today will see a better and brighter Canada if we do so. Our men have to stop leaving their children broken hearted. We need our fathers to be there to fight for their sons and to protect their daughters in the name of the nationhood. To the next 150.



I am dancing at a song sung  
in Nigga'a



Joe, age 10



## Hopes and dreams for the next 150 years in Canada for Indigenous children, youth and families.

Indigenous children should have great education like me and my friends.

No child should be harmed to express their ideas, thoughts and opinions.

Diets of nutritious and fresh foods for all children.

I dream that Indigenous children would have lots of green space to play.

Getting great health care where you live.

Every child needs to have a nice and quiet space to work and books to read.

No child should have dirty bathrooms.

Only if the government treated people fairly it would be a better world.

Use your time to volunteer and help people in need.

Safe housing and shelter for everyone.

Canada would be better if Indigenous children could have a great childhood.

Hope to have a better society for Indigenous children.

Indigenous children should have clean water.

Let's keep the promises we make.

Do you know the government gives money to some schools and not others?

Right to life and freedom for everyone.

Each child should have the life they want.

Not fair for Indigenous children because they are children like us.

By Jamila S., Montreal  
Grade 5

*Jamila, age 10*





EVERY  
Child  
matters!

Give every child equal  
rights.

Ethan

*Ethan, age 9*

## Reconciliation from the bubble

Sarah M.

I don't know how to write about this because I am white and I live in a majority white suburban town. It is very sheltered and is said to have a protective bubble that surrounds it where you don't tend to experience many injustices from people in power first hand. I've always known about injustices in the world despite the bubble around my town but I never know how to help. I will point out if someone is being ignorant in my close circle or in my family, but never in a classroom setting. I guess I'm too scared that no one will back me up, which isn't the right mindset to have when you're an ally. To me, an ally is someone who recognizes that they are in the dominant culture and who wants equality even if it isn't beneficial to them. I was even hesitant about writing on here because I am white, I've never experienced being marginalized by the government. How do I talk about the injustices of Indigenous communities when I've had very little first-hand views of the reality of these communities and the effects of colonization on my day to day life? How can I write about it? Well the answer is I can't write about these injustices and these realities first hand because it isn't my place. I've never experienced the effects of colonization in my daily life. I can't pretend to know what it's like when I've never experienced it. In order for reconciliation to truly happen we, as white allies, have to move over and let the Indigenous communities and individuals voices be heard even if it's silent. Without us shouting over them about how we are good people because we believe that everybody should have equal rights and have decent living conditions. Yes, we should still correct people when they make an ignorant claim and support Indigenous individuals, but at the end of the day if we are allies we should not conquer or overpower like we have done for hundreds of years. We have to help with the change, not silence it.

Living in a sheltered community my entire life has shown me many injustices over the years. I've seen people complain that we have to learn about residential schools, which was just integrated into the curriculum and many people that are not of my generation still don't know they ever existed. It is everyone's history. We have to learn about it whether we like it or not. Because if we don't talk about it, we are doomed to repeat it. This became clear to me in one of my classes where we did the blanket exercise and lots of kids skipped that day. I heard them say it was useless. It's this mindset that we have in the bubble of "yes we've learnt about this history every year in social so it's dumb and I'm not going to go." They don't want to get involved because we've learnt about it every year since Grade 6. We need to learn about it because we cannot pretend that it has never happened or is just a small part of our history. We have to discuss how dark our history is just as much as the good stuff because we need to recognize what we did in order not to repeat it.

Another thing that happens in my town are the stereotypes of Indigenous people. Most people hear from their parents or grandparents that most First Nations are drunks and are

*Sarah, age 16*



perceived in a very negative light and are blamed for it. In actuality the addiction problems in these communities are caused by generational traumas from residential schools, the 60s scoop and the marginalization and lack of resources for help on reserves and in communities. Another thing I've seen is the assumption that many Indigenous people get a free ride, for example not paying taxes. Which is not true because of the quality of life in many of these communities is terrible, including underfunded schools, social services and infrastructure and these people still have to pay taxes. Living in my sheltered community or the "bubble" has shown me these double standards in our country and around the world.

Advocating for equal rights of people is something we should all do. And advocating for equal rights does not mean you can wear a headdress because it's fashionable or as a Halloween costume. It means when you hear an unjust thing you politely correct them in that polite Canadian way as we Canadians are known to do. Yes you may get told off and told it was just a joke and you need to calm down, but if you believe in something stand up for it.

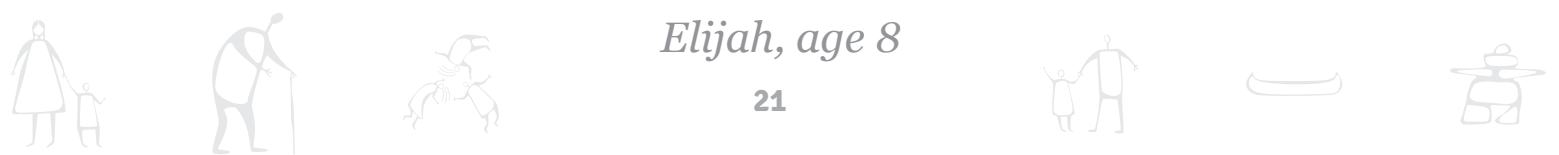
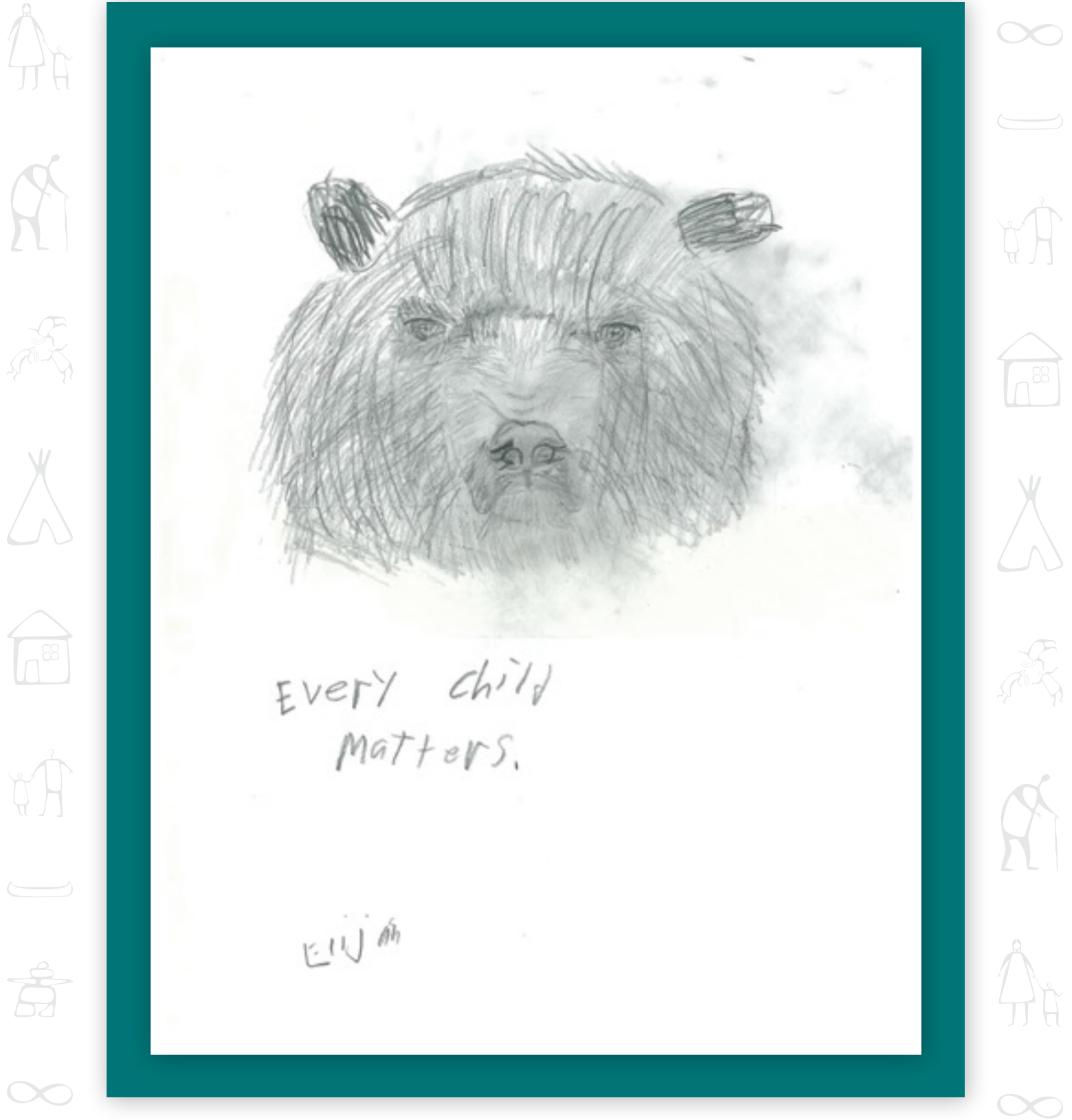
If you want to help, the best thing you can do is learn! It's okay if you don't know much about these issues, everyone has to start somewhere. Learn about the culture and history and the things the Canadian government and other governments around the world have done. Hold meaningful conversations with people around you because we grow when we learn. Talk to your teachers, read books, go to local events. Even just discussing these issues with your family or peer group can help you learn about stuff you may have not known about it or it can give you the chance to help another person learn. Talk about our dark past, the residential schools that killed so many innocent children and still causes trauma today. Or the 60s scoop where social services took children away again and put them white Christian households to try to assimilate them again. Now the condition of reserves and the marginalization from the Canadian Government by giving them almost no political power and how badly funded these communities are.

The first 150 years my people have messed everything up and for next 150 years we will help change and clean it up. It's our responsibility and our duty.



Eldiyar, age 8





Elijah, age 8

## My Aboriginal Studies Class Experience

Maia J.

I ended up taking Aboriginal studies class sort of by accident. It was not my first choice of option, but I was assigned to it anyways. It seemed like it would be a lot like social studies. I wanted to swap out of Aboriginal Studies but my step mom convinced me to stay to see if I liked it. It turns out it was nothing like social studies, with no written tests, just our talking stick. I learned many things in Aboriginal Studies that you don't find in many other places like Aboriginal history, cultural practices, and reconciliation. I love this option and I feel it would change a student's perspective on First Nations if they took it.

I learned about Turtle Island's original peoples teachings that are almost gone because of what the Canadian government did. Residential schools are a main reason why all that knowledge is gone. Children, as young as 3, taken from their parents and put in a place where they can't practice their religion and can only speak English, despite the fact that many of them couldn't. Once a lake on a reserve was used as a practice bombing ground, the lead from the bomb polluted the water, so they could no longer drink from it. They saw first nations as a pest to get rid of, instead of a colony of butterflies to embrace and learn from.

I learned about smudging, tipi building and the rules that come with them. These are rich, vibrant cultures I want people to know about. We did a drumming circle and learned about all the things that came with it. I sewed a pair of Inuit style mittens, watched a First Nations dance, and even learned about the way they see life. Turtle Island's Indigenous peoples culture is like a painting, the colours perfectly divided between everything on the canvas. The painting, of everything on Turtle Island, in harmony.

*Maia, age 13*



I feel that apologies aren't enough, we need reconciliation. We need to learn about these people and what happened. I want First Nation/Métis kids to be accepted, I want people to know what their parents and grandparents went through not that long ago. I think kids should have the chance to learn and help with the reconciliation process. We also did the blanket exercise and our reconciliation project was doing that for everyone in grade 7. They all have a new perspective on First Nations.

I learned things kids don't get a chance to any day of the week. But with Aboriginal Studies they will! Where the opportunity is provided, kids from any background may take it and I feel that kids should have the chance to. I hope schools consider giving this chance to students everywhere.



Gwenith, age 8





Vivi, age 8



Sophia, age 9

Every Child  
matters!  
← Spirit bear!



Lara, age 8