

The Impacts of the Land Between's Knowledge Circles on Personal Inspiration, Personal Behaviour Change, Extension of Relationships, and Community Building

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Introduction

The Talking Circles project was created in order to enact grassroots and Traditional forms of governance and to facilitate the spirit of stewardship for Land Between. In our current governing structures, there is a growing distance between decision makers and the land-base/natural resources. Individuals, due to modern efficiencies, are also further and further removed from the natural sector. Meanwhile, this sector faces increasing challenges of Climate Change, demographic changes and growth, and related pressures on increasingly scarce and fragile resources. Therefore, this project uses tried and traditional governance models to create a substantive and essential foundation for increased and meaningful capacity at the community level for environmental stewardship and awareness.

Talking Circles are a traditional form of governance and true form of democracy that have been practiced in the majority of Original cultures in the world, and which are still in effect and effective in communities and efforts within First Nations communities in Canada. These models facilitate inclusive leadership by allowing equal voice and representation, and inherently prohibiting self-interest and dominance by any individual or group. They therefore serve to honor diversity, to gather knowledge, to achieve consensus and agreement, and often result in the generation and finding of new integrative solutions.

The Land Between used this ancient practice in modern arenas to begin addressing growing divergence and pressures and cultivating tenable practices, actions and solutions in an increasingly fractured and fragmented environmental sector. The Talking Circles intended to share testimonies of the public regarding the Land and its relationship to our cultural expressions, economies, and mental health. Talking Circles are known to result in animate, stronger communities and enhanced capacity due to the connections made, relationships built, and the understandings born. With greater insights, new integration and community cooperation, Talking Circles are also noted to result in newfound solutions to pertinent and challenging issues.

The Land Between hosted four talking circles in the fall of 2017; one in Gravenhurst, Buckhorn, Verona, and Madoc. Communities, groups, experts, but especially laypersons and resource users with intimate knowledge of and "felt experience" of the environment such as farmers, hunters, beekeepers, gardeners, foresters, naturalists etc. and those with Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge, were invited as core participants in the Talking Circle Conferences but also as the network of participants in the project overall.

In each circle, about 40 participants attended, all from diverse backgrounds and interests. No demographics were recorded,

which could potentially be useful for future research to highlight which community members this project intrigued and also to account for the voices that may have been missing and should potentially be targeted in the undefined future.

To measure the impacts of each of the four Land Knowledge Circles 28 interviews were had with willing participants. This report will explain the processes and methods for acquiring impact assessment, deliver findings/results, and provide an analysis of personal inspiration; perspectives, personal behavior change; calls to action, extension of relationships; changes and networking, and community building; changes and impacts.

Talking Circle Proceedings

General Conduct- words are spoken to all, and not directed at one individual nor for self-promotion. Within the circle there is no hierarchy. Everyone within the Circle is equal. The object of reverence is held at all times.

Process-

1. Opening prayers were conducted by either Gary Williams or Gerrard Segassige from Curve Lake First Nation.
2. The Traditional First Nation Territory in which the Circle is held is given recognition
3. Introduction of the object of reverence (a goose feather).
4. The Chair or elder introduces the topic or theme for the round.
5. The feather is then passed clockwise from the Chair.
6. The participant holding the feather introduces themselves along with place of origin.
7. The participant then shares knowledge or sentiments, considerate of time, allowing others to all have the opportunity to share.
8. The participant closes their turn by saying "All my Relations" and then passing the feather to the left.
9. The next participant acknowledges what was said and then adds their own words.
10. The Elder or Chair closes the circle with a prayer in gratitude.

(*Note: Uncommon in Traditional Circles, is the recording of proceedings. These circles were recorded in order to generate minutes, and where permission was granted by all participants.)

Method for Gaining Feedback

The goals for the interviews were to measure changes in behaviour and capacity at each scale of:

Individual; change in attitude, knowledge, wellness, and inspiration

Relationships; new ideas and new connections

Greater community; inspiration for new actions and projects.

The research was also intended to discover the mental, emotional, spiritual, and behavioural lessons and changes experienced by individual participants as well as seeking evidence of enhanced relationships to the land and to other community members. Finally, the impacts on communities in the form of new or increased potential for inclusive leadership, and increased capacity and resilience will be estimated by the feedback from individuals. The research also focused on peoples' connection to the land, including the Traditional Peoples, territories, and history of the land. The understanding generated from this question was qualified and used to assess both the individual's sense of inspiration and knowledge within their connection and rootedness in their respective communities.

The interviews 28 in total, spread across each of the four circles, provided the greatest feedback for gaining insight to the results of this project, but surveys were also collected and analyzed and used in compiling results. Also, I, the researcher, attended three out of the four circles and will provide my own witnessing of how the circles were received by participants.

The questions asked in the phone interviews were the following, in sequence:

1. What was your motivation for participating?
2. Do you feel better connected with your community after participating?
3. Do you feel the Talking Circle was an effective first step in grassroots land stewardship?
4. Did you learn anything new about the land or wildlife in your area?
5. What are your greatest concerns about the land and wildlife in your area?
6. Are you now more familiar with colonial histories and settler-indigenous treaties made in your area?
7. Do you feel like the Talking Circle is an effective step forward in reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships?
8. Do you feel the Talking Circle is an effective tool in democratic community organizing?
9. Did the experience inspire you to take action in anyway?
10. Do you have any ideas in moving the project forward?
11. What do you feel was missing or should have been included?
12. Additional Comments?

Participants were selected randomly at the circles based on perceived willingness, and a few were acquired via email. My selection process was based on acquiring a diverse sample based on age, background, gender balance, and field of work or expertise.

The questions were then divided into the four following categories:

Personal Inspiration; Perspectives

1. What was your motivation for participating?
4. Did you learn anything new about the land or wildlife in your area?
6. Are you now more familiar with colonial histories and settler-indigenous treaties made in your area?
10. Do you have any ideas in moving the project forward?

Personal Behaviour Change; Calls to Action

9. Did the experience inspire you to take action in anyway?
5. What are your greatest concerns for the land/wildlife in your area?

Extension of Relationships; Changes and Networking

2. Do you feel better connected with your community after participating?
7. Do you feel like the Talking Circle is an effective step forward in reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships?
10. Do you have any ideas in moving the project forward?

Community Building; Changes and Impacts

2. Do you feel better connected with your community after participating?
3. Do you feel the Talking Circle was an effective first step in grassroots land stewardship?
6. Are you now more familiar with colonial histories and settler-indigenous treaties made in your area?
8. Do you feel the Talking Circle is an effective tool in democratic community organizing?

RESULTS:

Personal Inspiration; Perspectives

MOTIVATIONS: Participants had a variety of motivations for attending. From the interview results, one can see that most were curious to learn more about the Land Between, either as a bioregion or as the organization. Many were also intrigued to experience a Land Knowledge Circle. There was also personal inspiration to connect with community members and to also learn how to be a better steward of the land. A handful of people also came out of sheer love for the land, or to deepen an understanding of Indigenous perspectives or history.

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Interview results:

- to learn more about the Land Between x 11
- to learn about/experience a knowledge circle x 9
- to listen to other peoples' stories or to be heard x 9
- to build new relationships/connect with community x 6
- to learn how to be a better steward of the land x 5
- to learn about impacts of environmental changes x 4
- out of love for the land x 3
- deepening an understanding of Indigenous perspectives or history x 3
- others: political reasons, media coverage, thought it would be a valuable experience, to share knowledge

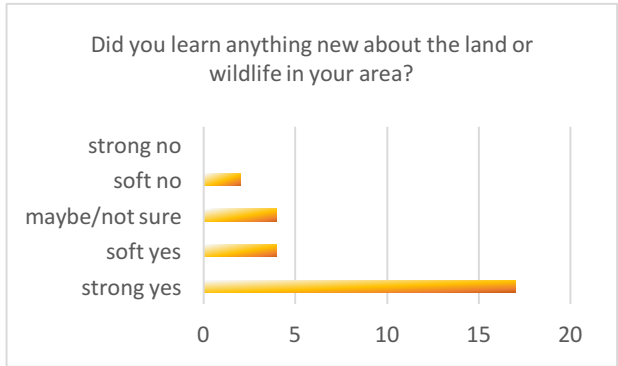
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I wanted to learn more about First Nations' history and in trying to get back to the earth... It was something I truly enjoyed because it sounded like someone was listening. Someone else on same level of rebuilding what was lost... It was nice to talk when someone else was listening.
-Kyle Wannamaker, Madoc

I had heard of these Talking Circles before and I was interested in that way of facilitating the passing of information to turn something that was more ideological and perhaps mythological in my mind into reality and bear witness in something actually occurring... I was hoping to see what it was like... and how it was about the land... and I thought it was cool to include anecdotal... and that you didn't have to qualify yourself as an expert to be there.
-Aaron R, Buckhorn

I wanted to see how they were using the Knowledge Circles format and also what people's- well, to gain a snapshot of peoples' ideas of that was happening in the Land Between in terms of wildlife.
-Suzanne Atkinson, Madoc

NEW KNOWLEDGE- LAND AND WILD LIFE: After attending, perspectives shifted in a number of ways, as one can infer from the graph, most people were enthusiastic and strongly affirming in that they had acquired new knowledge about the land and wildlife in their areas. A number of participants mentioned they had no prior knowledge that the bioregion of the Land Between even existed. A few also made mention that they knew they had learned a lot, but had a hard time pinning examples. For many, it seemed more like a felt experience of enhanced knowledge and a number of participants expressed gratitude for having a space to talk about the land on which they live. The soft 'no's' were related to individuals already having a broad understanding and significant knowledge about the land and wildlife in their areas.



As a fisheries and wildlife technician, I have been keenly aware of the land and the wildlife in my area. I am currently working for a First Nation in Muskoka as a by-law coordinator and will be transitioning to the wildlife manager position after the New Year. As an educated wildlife worker, I have been keenly aware of the changes to my environment for both the land and the animals which use the land. —William Manary, Gravenhurst

Yes. The presentation was very good, very informative about key features of this unique bio-region and the role it is, and will be, playing in preserving the health of the bioregion. I came away with a greater sense of urgency about conservation. Regarding wildlife, many people spoke about the great loss of songbirds and how they felt about this. We plan to try to monitor these changes more closely. Keep a nature journal and speak to others in the village area. —Kate McLaren, Verona

I had no idea about skinks before and about the turtles except for hand-written "turtle-crossing" signs on the side of the road—now I want to do more! —Kimberlee McKinnon, Buckhorn

Yeah! Huge! A fountain of knowledge! — Denise Apple, Madoc

Yeah, well, absolutely. And I grapple with various cultural guilt. I was not there. Neither were my parents. But I feel a responsibility to right those wrongs or at least try to mitigate in whatever way I can. I picked up on Gerrard's style of humour. He would frequently say 'just kidding'. There's a saying; there's truth in jest... There was one line he said; "And you've signed the land back over to us." I thought, "Good for you"! I appreciated that so much; subtly putting in those kinds of comments.

My wife and I had a good chat with him over lunch... Yeah! For me I came away with even more desire to make more of an effort to become greater aware. To add MY voice to his voice- their voices... The government at higher levels announces initiatives; apologies regarding treaties. Does the apology include righting the wrongs? Considering the First Nations were here first, they should be treated like kings today, if treated fairly, we wouldn't have these reserve issues. They should have been more fairly compensated and treated better, so all damage that was done... now we have stories about the poor living conditions and water quality and high suicide rates, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. If they had been treated well back then this wouldn't have happened. – Phranq Sanchez

Yes. Interestingly enough it had been an interest of mine for a long time and I did some studies at Queens University a few years ago as part of my Art History degree that delved into it and involved Indigenous arts organizations... I keep learning more.

The more I learn the more I see how- I'm really enjoying seeing the strengthening of Indigenous ways of doing in mainstream culture. I grew up on West Coast. Lived next to a reservation, in BC, the Indigenous people were so done-in by colonialism that as a kid I couldn't understand it... I've always been interested in the treatment and how it plays into the land and sharing the land, taking care of the land, these are big issues. I'm curious to see how this will progress because it's important that it does. I think it's very timely. – Milly Ristvedt

NEW KNOWLEDGE- COLONIAL HISTORIES AND SETTLER-INDIGENOUS TREATIES:

The answers to this topic varied significantly and it became clear that participants had differing levels of prior knowledge regarding treaties made within the Land Between. The question, "Are you now more familiar with colonial histories and settler-Indigenous treaties made in your area?" was asked to develop an understanding of people's prior knowledge of this topic. The findings show that many personal perspectives were shifted; the majority of interviewed participants agreed that they are indeed more familiar with colonial histories and settler-Indigenous treaties made in their areas after attending the Circle. The negative answers were mostly paired with statements about already having a considerable prior understanding of the treaties and histories. Others expressed gratitude for having this knowledge reinforced. One person mentioned this theme didn't particularly stand out to him, there were a couple comments suggesting a deeper expansion on this topic, and another mentioned a solid 'no' with no further information. There were also a few "I'm still learning" comments. However, it's important to emphasize that the majority agreed that it had been an effective learning opportunity and was definitely an important component of the Circle.



Some short quotes highlighting these results are the following:

Already very familiar. Read a lot of books... Didn't learn anything new... – JF, Madoc

I knew some beforehand. Read info in hand out. I'm now more knowledgeable about the Curve Lake community... I now know more specifics.
–Carolyn Laydon, Buckhorn

Every discussion helps me to understand more – Bernard Pope, Gravenhurst

Yes, that was a great deepening... - Jessica Reaske, Gravenhurst

I liked the passing of the feather and educating the room to that. I think it brought people's respect level up. It was a real heart-felt religious feeling in the room. – Louanne Ramage

As someone who works for a First Nation I am well aware of the treaties made in the area and how the Indigenous Peoples of the area have suffered at the hands of the Colonial settlers. I don't feel that there was enough awareness of the history of Indigenous societies in the area by the attendees in the circle. – William Manery, Gravenhurst

Yes! Absolutely!... I certainly did learn more. I had a chance to meet people from Tweed, Metis Nation. I really enjoyed Gerrard's story and his personality. – Sheila Currie, Madoc

MOVING FORWARD:

Personal Inspiration was also portrayed through asking participants if they had any ideas for moving the project forward. There were ample amounts of encouragement to continue the project, and many expressed enthusiasm for another circle to take shape in their areas. There were a number of comments highlighting that greater participation from Indigenous communities would have enhanced the inclusivity of the project and many were interested in hearing what they had to say.

Interview Results

Momentum/encouragement to continue x 7

Another circle or follow-up x 7

More involvement from Indigenous communities or organizations x 5

Involve local colleges/universities x 1

Connect with Friends of the Salmon River x 2

Collaboration with other organizations x 3

...Next step is to collate information and issues that came up — if there is some broad overlap- for those people to connect with one another. Might want to collaborate on something or have each other's contact. Especially those of us that live farther from one another. A lot of people were engaged in activities, and it would be nice to have access to updates about them. People could offer ways to assist if regular updates- could happen with FC. Would be a next level. — Carolyn Laydon, Buckhorn

I think to have another would be amazing. Keep doing it. Make sure the results are publicized. And... Any way we could get more people from the Indigenous communities involved- especially because it's using a traditional format. I think it would [also] be fun for municipal councils to try Talking Circles. — Michelle Tremblay, Madoc

Personal Behaviour Change; Calls to Action

It is useful to examine the results of question 5. (What is your greatest concern for the land/wildlife in your area?) as they provide a basis of understanding for where participants' underlying motivations are and from where action might be inspired to occur. Below are the sorted responses:

Human Impact

Loss/fragmentation of habitat due to human development x 13

Species decline x 5

Economics as priority x 3

Lack of awareness x 3

Climate change x 3

Personal hedonism x 2

Cottage shoreline as priority x 3

Overpopulation x 1

Over-harvesting x 1

Landscaping x 1

Losing Indigenous values x 1

Recreational uses (ATV's) x 1

Governmental / Environmental Regulations

Invasive species or gov. regulated species x5

Conservation x 4

Quarries x 2

MNR x 2

Funding cuts at federal level x 1

No proactive gov. mechanisms for farmers protecting against wildlife x 1

Government in general x 1

Specific Species

Turtles x 2

Bees x 1

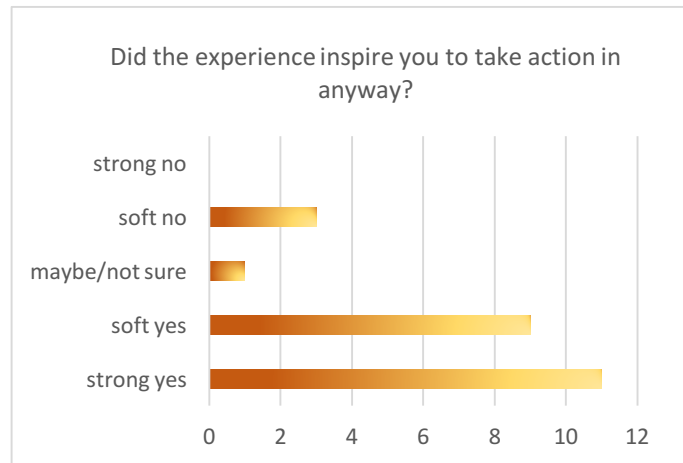
Increase of wild turkeys x 1

Increase of bears x 1

As the results show, loss of, or fragmented habitat due to human development was mentioned by nearly half the participants! Also holding a heavier weight to participants was species decline, invasive species or government-regulated species and conservation.

Inspired to Take Action:

Overall, the majority of participants left the Circle feeling inspired to act and within a month or two after attending engaged in some sort of effort to do so. There were comments ranging from joining Frog Circle (the Land Between's social platform to share about the land and wildlife in peoples' areas) to watching the Land Between DVD to making a point of talking to others about the event or seeding more nature-based/conservation conversations to joining forces on projects. There were several comments mentioning that the Circle was affirming of current endeavours or paths and that it strengthened current commitments. A couple mentioned that others in the circle had greatly inspired them to change certain actions, like turning off all lights on their property at nighttime. Some had a hard time thinking of an example right away, but the majority was able to list at least one follow-up action. Included below are a number of quotes outlining examples of action-oriented inspiration.



Well, like I said, it steered me into grasping my Mohawk heritage. I bought the drum. I've gone to the longhouse for one meeting so far. Different events, time management, can't do everything all the time. — Kyle Wannamaker, Madoc

Yeah. I brought it back to my council, I said "hey, we have got to bring this person in." I would like to see another sharing circle. I would like to see a formal relationship between our council [Highland Waters Métis Council] and the Land Between. . . Everything she described is these three councils. I would like to have someone come to each of our meetings to represent the land and be a part of our indigenous group. Friends of Salmon River, I'd love to attend one of their meetings. Or a seminar where she's teaching about the Land Between. I want to move further on own traditional land-use workshops. Bring her input in it to bring a rounder image to our work. Everyone wanted to go to another seminar. She made a big impact on us! It did motivate me to look into more projects and others things. I applied for a grant; Greatlakes fund. — Candace Lloyd, Madoc

Yes. Well I think a continuation of what I've been doing more recently anyway. I'm at a point in my career and family that I can start to participate in initiatives that involve land and water resources. I'm taking a course to get certified in horticulture. I felt very full when I left that day. The whole experience was very enriching and increased my commitment to do some good while I still can. — Sheila Currie, Madoc

Yes. To deepen my learnings and relationships with First Nation People. . . and my current involvements with The Lake Simcoe Association — June Davis, Gravenhurst

Yes. I have visited with one of the attendees to discuss mutually mapping the canoe, walking paths and archaeological sites in the Land Between. — Hans Honegar, Verona

I guess it planted a big seed. Like the action, I could go around and tell everybody about it, but I guess it's helped my resolve to what I believe to be the truth by illustrating through stories and science the uniqueness and power of this land, the Land Between. So, I know there is more to come, for me, in regards to this land but it really actually grounded me to the land in Ontario, just like a key in the lock, "Oh! Okay, now I understand." Maybe because of the natural history lesson. Like my ancestry. When I learn about it I feel more empowered by it and almost like lands, the ancestral lands I am on, derive reverence. — Aaron R, Buckhorn

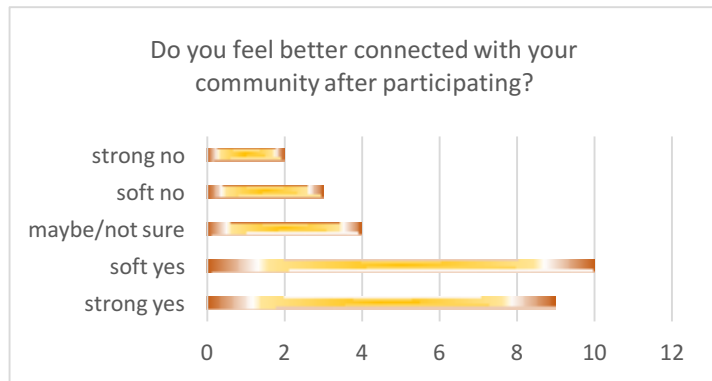
Well, yeah you know in terms of reaching out more to different people. To make connections- I'm still inspired to do that. [The Circle] affirmed something I've been a part of for a number of years, *Nogie's Waterway*, trying to do some stewardship and education stuff- affirmed I'm doing a good thing, a right thing. Encouraged me in terms of personal project on my land to create a uhh. . . well one part natural burying ground where can come appreciate, enjoy land as is, one being a burial ground. Bumped into people who asked how it was going. That was encouraging. Like-minded people reminded me this is important. Working towards that. — Carrie Hoskine, Buckhorn

Extension of Relationships; Changes and Networking

Community Connections:

It was obvious that the Talking Circles provided an opportunity for community members to engage with one another from personally witnessing how the room filled with enthusiastic chatter between the sessions and during lunchtime. Food is always a great way to bring people together and the hour or so for lunch was spent nibbling at hot chili while following up with intriguing speakers during the first half of the circle or connecting with already established relationships. The interviews mirrored this observation. There were just a few people who answered that they didn't necessarily feel better connected to their community. Some participants expanded on the idea of community in their interviews, and others mentioned that they would have liked to connect further, but there wasn't enough opportunity to do so, or they had commitments they had to leave early for. Some of the *no*'s were paired with wording such as "I'm already quite connected with my community" or "there was not a lot of people from my immediate community." Another *no* was from someone who didn't feel like they could connect because they were looking for solutions, such as "I feel that the knowledge circle showed me that the people in attendance were very passionate about their own piece of the environment but had little to provide in solutions to the problems that lay ahead." Also, some mentioned that they maybe didn't connect in the most concrete of terms, but overall had a sense of feeling better-connected. However, the majority of those interviewed were able to affirm that the experience enabled greater connection to however they defined community. There were a few comments expressing gratitude knowing there are other people who care about the land and wildlife in their area, like, "I feel more hope that there is a community that operates with respect for the sacred," and "yeah, I think there's definite potential there..." Also, one participant mentioned they had a potential job opportunity thanks to attending, and I, myself, also landed a short contract job after running into a former co-worker at one of the circles!

I do not feel better connected with my community after participating. I feel that the knowledge circle showed me that the people in attendance were very passionate about their own piece of the environment but had little to provide in solutions to the problems that lay ahead. — William Manary, Gravenhurst



Definitely! ... Within the geographic community- being near Bancroft; town, neighbours. But in the broader community sense; like-minded people. Those who were there and what they represent. I have a better connection to them, and First Nations people themselves, vis a vis the ceremonial aspect of that meeting... -Phranq Sanchez, Madoc

Good. Yeah. That I agree with - it was good to get people out and talking about this issue. Weren't many from immediate community, though. -JF, Madoc

Definitely! Very much so! So informative! It was awesome. Couldn't stop talking about it. - Denise Apple, Madoc

Well interestingly enough, today, one of the people who was at the Talking Circle, Keith, he came by today and dropped off some hides! We had talked and connected and lived on the same road in Haliburton and he stopped by twice this week! And that's a beautiful thing when that can occur. So, I do for sure feel better connected. In a non-anthropocentric sense, I feel better connected to the community of the land in a deeper respect that was from hearing the ABCs (abiotic, biotic, and cultural features) of the land and just seeing the uniqueness of that place I was in and appreciating what it is. Knowledge of place created a power of place. So, it's uh, yeah. I don't think I would respect it as much if I didn't understand. Led me to other journeys like watching the documentary of the Land Between. The landscape played the human like an instrument. Seems magical to me, it's a special place, the Land Between... -Aaron R, Buckhorn

Yes, I do! Yeah it was an incredible event actually. My expectations about numbers attending were quite modest. For one thing, it can be so hard to get people in communities to come out for anything and especially for that kind of structure- circle, feather- because not a known practice for many the fear of the unknown might keep people away. But I thought it was a fantastic format. Great to see the distance from which people came. It was a good opportunity to hear from people living in the area and experience in same and different ways that I do. I haven't had the benefit of experiencing from other perspectives; farmers, beekeepers. Had a chance to meet a couple of people I could have known as a kid. I knew their family... I feel much more connected. Appreciation for concerns of the farmers. -Sheila Currie, Madoc

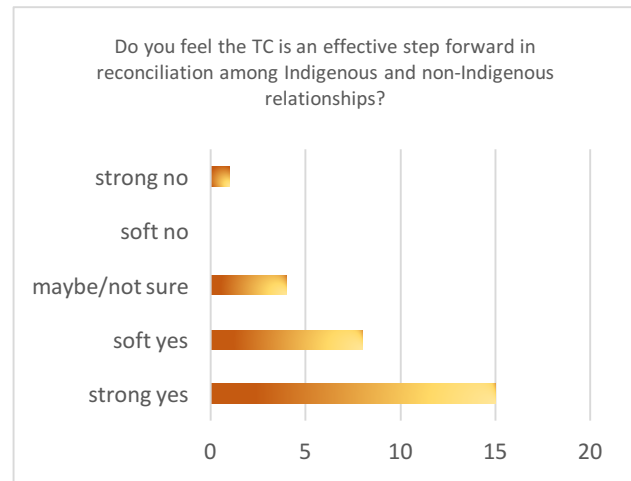
Reconciliation:

The word 'reconciliation' is a loaded one. It has become a popular political topic within the federal sphere due to the remarkable resilience and resurgence of Indigenous Peoples across the country. Indeed, it is assumptive on Canada's end to think Indigenous Peoples are interested in reconciling. It also implies that relations were once friendly, and this is highly debatable. The question, "Do you feel the Talking Circle is an effective step forward in reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships?" resulted in many interesting and dynamic answers. Many participants responded that reconciliation, or at least healthy ways in moving forward, was an issue they have been exploring for themselves.

There were 15 strong *yes*'s and 8 soft *yes*'s in agreement that the Talking Circle was an effective step forward in reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, and only one person answered *no*.

Honouring the treaties is directly within the Land Between's operating principles. The Land Between operates with at least half of its council identifying as First Nations and with a delegate to represent the territory's First Nations.

As one can gather from reading the following quotes, there was a lot of appreciation that there was an Indigenous partnership in the project and that it was an Indigenous practice or format used in talking about the land. There were comments recognizing that Reconciliation is a really complicated and challenging issue and that it's difficult to know how to go about it effectively and respectfully.



I am of two minds with this question as there needs to be more reconciliation done but there is still so much to be done to change public opinion of First Nations issues that the knowledge circle may not be able to provide. On the other side of that is the benefit of having non-Indigenous people having a chance to participate in a more traditional form of discussion which may allow individuals to open their minds to the long-standing history and traditions which First Nations have in this area. — William Manary, Gravenhurst

I think I can only answer half of that question. All I can say is I was grateful to see there were representatives of First Nations in the area; that Curve Lake was there. I was glad to see that representation; accurate representation. I think that it's important, and I also think First Peoples are part of the process but it's not one person's problem it is a one *peoples'* problem. People don't appreciate the wisdom that is there in the knowledge of the land. The culture is from the land, and it functions for a reason. Maybe not 100 percent, I'm sure they have problems like everyone else, you can't romanticise it, but there are pieces of wisdom that need to be listened to. Their voices are minority and need to be heard. All the minorities. It all relates. If you're in poverty, who cares about nature- you're thinking, "I need to get food." There are pieces in indigenous perspective that are essential to understanding what is needed. — Aaron R. Buckhorn

Yes, I think sharing circles are a good way to bring both cultures together. They provide an opportunity for indigenous culture to present their views on how to protect land. Also for non-indigenous cottagers and whatnot- how they protect it, what they are doing, what they think is a good way to move forward. -Candace Lloyd, Madoc

Even though I didn't perceive it as the focus, I could see it was an element, and I encourage that. And it absolutely would be [an effective first step]. As I pointed out with the government, I don't think it's as genuine as it should be, it should be left to little people to make amends. I hate to use us and them, but that it's us... to build those bridges, form those bonds. - Phranq Sanchez, Madoc

I think these sorts of forums in which you have Indigenous and non-Indigenous together talking about common interests and concerns is an effective way to build bridges. Not an us vs. them environment. Differing opinions but that's normal. It's a really good way to increase awareness. — Sheila Currie, Madoc

I hope so. I find there are not enough people interested in it or are too busy with their colonial lives that it's not on their minds. — Thomas Ordorizzi, Gravenhurst

A bit. I'm glad that we showed up. — Robert Lloyd, Madoc

Yeah, it's... again... some people get it, and others don't really understand how it's supposed to work. When I've gone to an event, there will be a video or something and THEN a talking circle. Encourages people to talk about what they're thinking about. I liked it because it seems to explain so much about what Indigenous People are about and how they function. And I think that's really good. Gary came to my place once for a political event and he stayed a bit later. I asked what he thought of the event and he said after some silence... "White people talk a lot." Talking Circles enable a totally different point of view and creates a balanced space. — Carla Salvador, Buckhorn

I like to think so. What do our Indigenous friends think? I would like them to be happy with us at least trying? It is them we (our past) have injured and hurt- what can we do to make it better? It is so hard to know how to contribute to reconciliation. My family came to Canada in 1700's [due to] forced eviction from Highland clearances in Scotland (lost war for land to England). The farmers on the wrong side lost their land – they were evicted as land taken from them and given to the victors, with nowhere to go, they came to North America. Little steps I guess. This was my little step. — Kimberlee McKinnon, Buckhorn

Extension of Relationships:

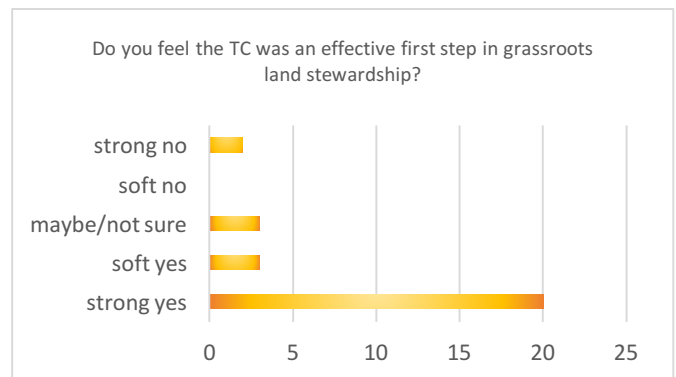
Although already mentioned in question Personal Inspirations, question 10 provides insight to extension of relationships as well. People's inspirations were majorly related to pushing personal connections further. There was encouragement for more Indigenous involvement, involvement from local colleges or universities, and encouragement of collaboration, two people suggesting Friends of the Salmon River, in particular.

Community Building: Changes and Impacts

Grassroots Land-Stewardship: For many, it was obvious that the Talking Circles were an effective first step in regards to land-stewardship at the grassroots level. As one can see in the associated graph, 20/28 people answered with a strong yes. This question was asked as part of determining changes and impacts within the community. Did people see this event as just a casual activity for a Saturday, or did they see it as contributing to their communities by participating in a space to talk about the land and the much-needed efforts to conserve and steward it. Responses to this question included the importance of bringing people together to talk about the land, the allowance of knowledge transference among community members, and the importance of being heard in regards to one's relationship with the land.

One of the people answering *no* stated that the Talking Circles were "just a forum, really, for people to give a few ideas and share what they were doing," but ended their statement with "I don't know," so it seemed like it was a thought not quite completed.

One interesting comment, by Milly Ristvedt in the Gravenhurst Circle, noted that the Talking Circle was "almost completely effecting in deflecting opinions and ideologies that don't belong when you're actually trying to catalogue information. It was a very effective process."



I think it is a good step because it takes people out of isolation. Could be multiple first steps and as far as a step it's a good step. Brings like-minded people together in a way they get to share and are on equal playing field. It's a good thing, and I learned lots from it and got to see who speaks for the land. All those people did, they cared. -Aaron R, Buckhorn

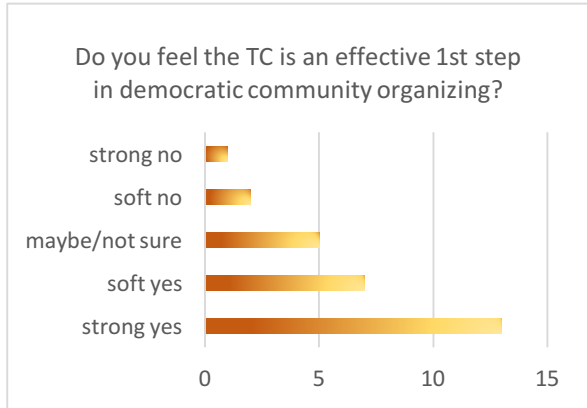
I think it's the first step to awareness. — Amber Simpson, Madoc

I do think it's effective especially if there's some kind of ... I think it's effective the smaller the community is. Wait. Let's start with: Yes, I think it's effective. It would have been more effective if I could've connected with people in my immediate area. — Brad Boyles, Madoc

Yes, it was excellent, really nourishing and supportive. - Jessica Reaske, Gravenhurst

Absolutely! Dialoguing about how to live in harmony with the Earth beginning at the local level is imperative. -June Davis, Gravenhurst

I would say yes. Fundamentally, the first thing you have to do is bring people together. — Carrie Hoskine, Buckhorn



Democratic Community Organizing:

This theme produced more varied responses, but still most were in agreement that Talking Circles were indeed an effective first step in democratic community organizing. Vicki Schmolka from the Verona circle had an interesting response to this question. Granted, she is a municipal council member, and executive director of the Kingston-Lennox Land Trust, but her points still merit validity. Perhaps Vicki was expecting a more results-oriented agenda and wasn't quite familiar with the Circle structure and its capacity for personal sharing and loose direction. However, she broke apart the question for critical thought:

Vicki's comments were mimicked by one other participant who felt the circle did not generate 'outcomes' or 'solutions', and by those few who felt frustrated by not having answers to "what to do next?" or "where is the action plan/take home?". This is partly a misunderstanding of the Circle, which is a forum most often without a preconceived agenda. It is intended for sharing and cultivating relationships (and which themselves lead to greater understanding, capacity and therefore solutions); but it may also be part of a personal need to do more and help more; action oriented people (perhaps like Vicki) who want more concrete ways to contribute. Louanne Rammage from the Gravenhurst circle said, "It would be nice if it was for a purpose of solving something. It is nice to hear how the people around you think, but it's a matter of... if we all think the same thing but nobody's doing anything about it, it's kind of useless time in some ways because you can get quite frustrated. It would be nice to motivate people to fix concerns in nature. But I guess just talking about it, it does give people opportunity."

"so many words with such loaded meanings --
 "effective" -- maybe "potentially meaningful", maybe "one possible tool"
 "democratic" -- if democracy means "representative" -- the Talking Circle attendance, as I experienced it, was somewhat random not representative -- and the structure of the day was pre-determined with no opportunity for attendees to have input -- so not democratic in that sense either
 "community" -- how is this defined in this context? everyone in the region -- or the community of people who chose to attend?
 "organizing" -- the day did not provide direction or a conclusion -- I am not sure people attending thought that their attendance would be leading to something
 Maybe I would answer this differently had the day covered more of the "agenda".
 -Vicki Schmolka, Verona

June Davis, Gravenhurst, however, critiqued our current political structures by saying "Our current local, provincial, federal, and international community organizing does not work... it is a function of the Empire System and the Global Economy. Talking Circles and other problem-solving processes ... and Non-Violent Communication are the future of democracy."

Similarly, many others had positive yet critical responses towards the Talking Circles being effective tool in democratic community organizing:

I feel that there may not be as much buy in on the knowledge circles from the community, based on the lack of knowledge and respect the indigenous community has received from the general population. — William Manary, Gravenhurst

It's *one* tool. Democracy is long and messy and it demands a lot from the people participating in it. A Talking Circle is a first start. The TC is a good tool for sharing knowledge. In terms of action and going forward on projects it's limited, but very good at sharing knowledge and valuing all types of knowledge. Good way to begin to engage communities. I think it might've been difficult for some to figure out what the day was about because the tool was highlighted, but not the theme. It's okay, just took some reading and digging and then still was a little bit vague about what was to be expected. — Carolyn Laydon, Buckhorn

Yes. I think it promotes democratic community organizing – everyone has a chance, and expectation to talk. And that's a very good thing because if you go into most town-hall meetings to talk about a concern, you often get a few people who think it over and it can be very difficult for shy people to talk. Without the first person coming right back at them it becomes escalated into 3 people having one discussion. Focus groups- one person who's fiery, they can really take it over. I think the talking circle provides a different space. – Sheila Currie, Madoc

Um. No. There were 40 people sitting there, around the circle, everyone got a chance to say something, but I thought there was way too much time spent on... If the TC was explained more succinctly... it felt too 'folksy'... it didn't feel that authentic to me. But better than ministry people standing there talking to people. And you only got 2 chances. The rest was taken up with that man talking way too much about himself. –Suzanne Atkinson, Madoc

I think it's good in community organizing. And... I would have to look up the definition of what the word democracy actually is, because my perception of democracy is; majority rules. If it can get consensus through group conscious, that is better. All voices can be heard. Or at least, people in their own minds can make own consensus but group mind puts best foot forward. – Aaron R, Buckhorn

I think it's ... can be... yeah, really can work- a way for people to ... very respectfully address common issues, and then what happens after Talking Circle. What's the next step? Is there another stage for actually making things happen? I think first have to change how people think about things, perceptions, about all kinds of issues and that has to be done very gently. A Talking Circle is a great place for that to happen. I'm curious about how a next step can be developed out of it so it goes beyond simply interpreting information... interested in what the next stage will be. How do we get that information working in a direction that's positive for all of us? – Milly Ristvedt, Madoc

Absolutely. I think, quite honestly, if we did them more in political forums it could resolve a lot. Everybody has a chance to contribute, walk away with 40 observations rather than just Kyle's. – Wyle Wannamaker, Madoc

Yeah. I think it can be for sure. It's definitely democratic and respectful. Um, organizing? I think more informing, inspiring, educating, building awareness, effective tool. O don't know about organizing or what you mean by it but great in determining who concerns and if there's an interest in organizing around a specific topic. A little less free-flowing and roles need to be identified. TC is even playing field but need roles assigned to get things done. But it's a really good way to begin and even check in on progress. To return to TC to do a 'how are things going' and on even playing field again. I don't think you get a whole lot done. In terms of accomplishing something. – Carrie Hoskine, Buckhorn

Conclusion

The results of this report can be viewed through many lenses. One might observe the Western perspective of results-based gatherings, or one might observe the effectiveness of a Talking Circle based on Indigenous principles, or, one might notice the positive social effects of having people gather for a purpose. Overall, however, the majority of the interviewed participants responded positively to the Talking Circle events in each of the four regions. The additional comments at the end of the interview were saturated with encouragement to continue this project forward and with much gratitude for initiating the events. Participants were pleased with the format, had great things to say about the leaders, loved the lunchtime meal and snacks throughout, and were hopeful to take part in a follow-up circle down the road. Some saw the circle as limited. But it is important to note that they are only limited when paired with the Western culture of time and pace and productivity. Western culture values measured results and agendas, thus it is hard to sometimes recognize the more latent, but not at all less important, functions of Talking Circles that can only become clear when graced with patience, focus, and compassion.

Ultimately, the results in this report convey that the Circles were effective within each of the measured levels; personal inspiration, personal behaviour change, extension of relationships, and community building. At the level of personal inspiration, interview results dictate that participants had come for a number of motivations, ranging from curiosity of a Talking Circle, to learn about the Land Between, and to connect with community members. Also, the vast majority of the circle participants were enthusiastic about the knowledge they walked away with- whether about the land and wildlife or settler-indigenous treaties in their areas. Within personal behaviour change and inspiration to take action, fewer were as assertive in their answers. Comments suggested that people were very moved by the event, but didn't know how to necessarily move forward in keeping the momentum of the project alive.

Within extension of relationships, a lot of new connections were made. Some participants made plans with one another for projects, some job opportunities were made, and there were lots of engaging conversations had over lunch. There were a few comments alluding to regretting not getting people's contact information. It seems that if another circle were to happen, a lot more numbers or email addresses might be exchanged. The question about reconciliation sparked a lot of thought and some interesting responses. Most agreed that the circle could be an effective step, but there could have been a greater attendance of First Nations representatives.

And within the broader community sense, there were a lot of strong 'yes's' in response to Talking Circles being an effective first step in grassroots land stewardship because it allowed for knowledge transference and connections to be made between people which ultimately builds greater capacity. The question concerning democratic community organizing was met with some more critical thinking; participants first asking themselves about their understanding of democratic. However, still the majority agreed that it was effective and the question brought forth some dynamic responses that considered other structures of political organizing and others that recognized how the Circle format respected the importance of equal voice.

All in all, the Talking Circles project was incredibly effective in a number of categories and engraved a positive mark on the majority of participants. It is important to note that these findings do not mean the wake of event has ceased- those connections continue to pave ways and inspire others.