

Kluane Adamek

Our Voices: Northern Indigenous Emerging Leaders

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The Gordon Foundation undertakes research, leadership development and public dialogue so that public policies in Canada reflect a commitment to collaborative stewardship of our freshwater resources and to a people-driven, equitable and evolving North. Our mission is to promote innovative public policies for the North and in fresh water management based on our values of independent thought, protecting the environment, and full participation of indigenous people in the decisions that affect their well-being. Over the past quarter century The Gordon Foundation has invested over \$37 million in a wide variety of northern community initiatives and freshwater protection initiatives.



The Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship is a policy and leadership development program that recognizes leadership potential among young northern Canadians who want to address the emerging policy challenges facing the North. The two year long program is built around four regional gatherings and offers skills training, mentorship and networking opportunities. Through self-directed learning, group work and the collective sharing of knowledge, Fellows will foster a deeper understanding of important contemporary northern issues, and develop the skills and confidence to better articulate and share their ideas and policy research publicly. The Fellowship is intended for young northerners between 25 and 35 years of age, who want to build a strong North that benefits all northerners. Through the Fellowship, we hope to foster a bond among the Fellows that will endure throughout their professional lives and support a pan-northern network.



Kluane Adamek

Kluane Adamek has experience living in rural, urban, northern and southern communities. She is a graduate of Carleton University, fluent in English and French and continues to learn her traditional languages, Southern Tutchone and Tlingit. Currently, Kluane is working with the Assembly of First Nations in the role of First Nation liaison officer and advisor for the Office of National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo. Kluane comes from a diverse background – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – which she believes has given her the ability to view and analyze our world from different perspectives. On her father's side, she is of Tlingit and Southern Tutchone First Nation ancestry, and on her mother's side, German and Irish descent. A citizen of the Kluane First Nation, Yukon Territory – her traditional name is Aagé, and she comes from the Dakh'l'aweidí – Killerwhale Clan, which falls under the Eagle moiety.

Kluane feels most at home in Yukon. She believes her values and abilities have been tremendously shaped by her experience working with community organizations such as the Skookum Jim Friendship

Centre, Council of Yukon First Nations, and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Kluane pursues cultural activities as often as she can while in Ottawa, traveling and at home in Yukon. She dances traditionally and is a member of the Dakhká Khwáan Dancers, Inland Tlingit Dance Group. Kluane continues to serve as a board member for the Kluane Corporations, which focus on economic and business opportunities for the citizens of Kluane First Nation.

For the duration of the fellowship, Kluane will be focusing on education in the North, and in particular in Yukon. Education is the foundation for success and for students to be truly successful they must see themselves positively reflected in their environments. Language, culture and identity are an important part of learning, and students need to be supported in this learning process. Kluane will work to identify successful curriculum delivery, programming and student success models while working with First Nations, Elders, schools, communities, governments and education stakeholders.

When Kluane Adamek's cousin committed suicide, she struggled with trying to understand how a young person could get to such a place. As she searched out support and coping strategies from a community that has been consumed by this all too familiar circumstance, she realized that there wasn't as much in place as might be expected.

Our Voices (OV) was founded in December 2013 in response to the tragic loss of young lives in Yukon. The organization first began as a conversation. Kluane Adamek, a Jane Glasco Northern Fellow, brought together a small group of passionate and energetic First Nation emerging leaders to participate in a dialogue on creating a positive change. The group identified that young people in the Yukon wanted to be heard, needed to be supported, and that they felt a strong need to develop positive relationships between individuals, as well as other communities. This conversation highlighted the need to bring together Yukon First Nation youth and young leaders to learn, share, and communicate, so they could build positive solutions and opportunities for youth in their communities. The energy and momentum derived from this discussion led to the first ever Yukon First Nation Emerging Leaders Gathering.

The on-the-land gathering would be a first action by this group, which banded together as “Our Voices” to develop mechanisms for youth to support and work together. Initial goals included increasing wellness in the region, ending the tragic rise in youth suicide, and revitalizing cultural identity.

Gathering Objectives

- ▶ Provide a healthy and safe environment for youth to discuss their priorities, issues, and solutions
- ▶ Foster intergenerational relationships between youth and elders
- ▶ Facilitate youth and emerging leaders’ development through decision-making, leadership, and communication skills
- ▶ Provide experiential education programming
- ▶ Enhance identity through fostering self-esteem and culturally based programming

“Young people need more options to reach out and talk to someone; suicide prevention.”

2014 Our Voices Gathering Youth Participant

Summer Gatherings

Every OV gathering has brought together more than one hundred youth and emerging leaders from the Yukon, Northern British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories. In August 2014, the first OV Gathering was held in partnership with the Teslin Tlingit Council. The Strength within Circle Gathering followed in 2015. It was co-hosted with Kwanlin Dün First Nation and held at the Jackson Lake Healing Camp outside of Whitehorse. Most recently, the 2016 Shāna Dákeyi Käy/Youth on Our Country Gathering was co-hosted with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations at Kathleen Lake in Kluane National Park. Following a decision to host these youth gatherings on a biennial basis, OV hosted its fourth gathering in March 2018.

Gathering Highlights

- ▶ Creation of a positive and supportive environment for youth to learn, listen, and share
- ▶ Reconnection to ceremony, cultural and traditional knowledge, especially through hosting youth on the land
- ▶ Elders, youth, and emerging leaders collaborating together
- ▶ Building partnerships with communities and youth stakeholders
- ▶ Connecting youth from across the Yukon and beyond
- ▶ “Youth for Action” youth leading solutions
- ▶ Life Promotion

“We want to be supported in bettering ourselves; our health and wellness are so important.”

2014 Our Voices Gathering Youth Participant

Partnerships & Support

With support from the Yukon Training and Policy Committee; the Banff Centre, Yukon First Nations governments, Yukon College, Yukon Government, Tides Canada Foundation, and many other supporters, OV has become a well-known collective of Indigenous emerging leaders in the Yukon and beyond. OV is in the process of reviewing and realigning strategic, tactical, and operational plans to meet the needs of Yukon and Northern Indigenous youth and emerging leaders. This has included bringing together the group’s advisory and steering committee members, as well as inviting key community leaders, mentors, and Elders to join in support of OV initiatives.

Our Voices, Moving Forward

OV and its momentum continues to build each year. The youth collective is proud to have become a project of the Tides Canada Initiatives(TCI), a branch of the Tides Canada Foundation. This had led to the hiring of two employees who are in the process of building governance structures, and implementing the group's strategic plan, initiatives, and activities. Partnerships, youth-by-youth approaches, implementation of community-led and driven solutions, as well as support by all communities and leaders, has helped Our Voices, and its membership, in leading exciting programming and initiatives for Yukon youth.

“Culture, language, ceremony and spirituality are important elements of strong leadership.”

2014 Our Voices Gathering Youth Participant

As part of the Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship activities, and the first Our Voices gathering, Kluane Adamek led the process of gathering recommendations, ideas, and information through a facilitated session to help inform and identify youth needs and youth solutions. This session was facilitated with a youth-led approach as other emerging leaders helped lead the discussion. All youth gathering participants were invited to share their community perspectives on the following gathering themes:

- ▶ Leadership
- ▶ Health and Wellness
- ▶ Self-Government and Land Claims
- ▶ Economic Development
- ▶ Justice
- ▶ Lands, Resources, and Water
- ▶ Heritage, Language, and Culture
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity

“We need to connect and learn from our Elders.”

2014 Our Voices Gathering Youth Participant

The session was held on the last day of the four-day gathering, and the youth-led approach proved to have positive outcomes. With emerging leaders facilitating each themed group dialogue, participants felt they were able to share their ideas and further their relationships with the facilitators.

“Culture and language mean everything; it’s who you are and where you come from.”

2014 Our Voices Gathering Youth Participant

The information provided by the youth gathering participants was used to capture a broad Yukon First Nation Youth perspective. This eventually led to the formal development of OV as a youth collective. OV has taken the ideas and vision of youth and incorporated this into their current membership structure, priorities, vision, and mission. Youth have solutions to the challenges and barriers they experience. This feedback session provided an opportunity for them to share their solutions, and OV is proud to continue supporting youth voices in the Yukon and the North.

“Sport and physical activity—mind, body, spirit—our connection—our way of life.”

2014 Our Voices Gathering Youth Participant

What We Heard

LEADERSHIP

“Live life with respect.”

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

“Healthy people are a healthy community.”

SELF-GOVERNMENT AND LAND CLAIMS

“We need people to help us understand our agreements.”

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

“Business is important to our sustainability.”

JUSTICE

“Youth-focused crime prevention and justice education. Our people in the system need programming and support.”

LANDS, RESOURCES AND WATER

“It is our responsibility to know and protect our land.”

YUKON FIRST NATIONS EMERGING LEADERS HERITAGE, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

“It means everything — who you are and where you come from. “

EDUCATION

“We want to learn about our people and ways at school.”

SPORT, RECREATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

“Our kids need the same opportunities as those in other communities.”

Decision-Making

- ▶ Youth in communities are engaged and want to be part of the decision-making process. This can be accomplished in various ways, including supporting First Nation youth councils in communities and ensuring youth representatives are provided with the proper training and supports in their roles.
- ▶ Mechanisms for First Nation youth to be involved in territorial, federal, municipal, and community decision-making need to be created.
- ▶ Indigenous youth voices are an important part of all our communities. As the fastest-growing demographic, their voices matter and need to be included early and often.

Youth-By-Youth, For Us By Us

- ▶ All government and community programs and services aimed at supporting youth must consult and work collaboratively with the youth they serve.

Capacity Building

- ▶ Mentorship is critical in ensuring that future generations are supported and prepared to take on their next responsibility.
- ▶ Yukon First Nation Leaders need to ensure they are actively supporting their youth through education, cultural, political, and economic opportunities.
- ▶ Traditional knowledge exchanges and bi-directional learning models between youth, elders, and community.

Funding

- ▶ Youth have plans and strategies that they are fully able and competent to carry out. Programming and initiatives must meet the needs of youth, their peers, and communities. The current funding streams that are available require heavy pre- and post-proposal administrative and reporting requirements, often for a minimal amount of financial resources.
- ▶ Northwest Territories' On-the-Land Funding Collaborative model has created new efficiencies and opportunities for cultural program funding available to communities. This model should be explored by all levels of government to create efficient funding processes.

Vision

Inspired, engaged and thriving Northern Indigenous youth upholding culture.

Mission

To provide experiential learning, training and development opportunities for Young Emerging Leaders.

Principles

- ▶ To uphold our cultural identity by embodying our ancestors' values and spirituality.
- ▶ To practise, promote, and enhance our languages, cultures, and traditions in all the work that we do.
- ▶ To protect and strengthen our identity with the land and water as it nourishes our mind, body, and spirit.
- ▶ To build healthier inter-community and inter-generational relationships.
- ▶ To provide a safe and supportive environment for all programming and opportunities: traditional and contemporary.
- ▶ To ensure Our Voices is known throughout the North as the "hub" that connects young emerging leaders.
- ▶ To build and strengthen partnerships with organizations that support Our Voices' vision.
- ▶ To break trail in order to ignite and empower generations to come.
- ▶ To live life like a story: to influence and role-model living life in a good way.

OV aims to provide cultural and engaging opportunities to as many northern Indigenous youth and emerging leaders as possible. Based on the statistics shown below, the investments made into OV and its programs and initiatives have made a substantial impact in increasing regard for youth engagement, building connection (through things like social media presence), and experiential learning opportunities, which include:

- ▶ Cultural activities held at the Yukon College and beyond
- ▶ Annual Summer Gathering
- ▶ Lunch and Learn events
- ▶ Our Voices Leadership Retreat
- ▶ A2E, videos highlighting student successes in post-secondary school

Our Voices is a project of Tides Canada Initiatives (TCI), as part of the Tides Canada Foundation.

Steering Committee

5+ members

Responsible for strategic direction, with considerations and recommendations from the Advisory Committee and employees. The SC is also responsible for financial decision-making. All SC members are volunteers.

Advisory Committee

20+ members

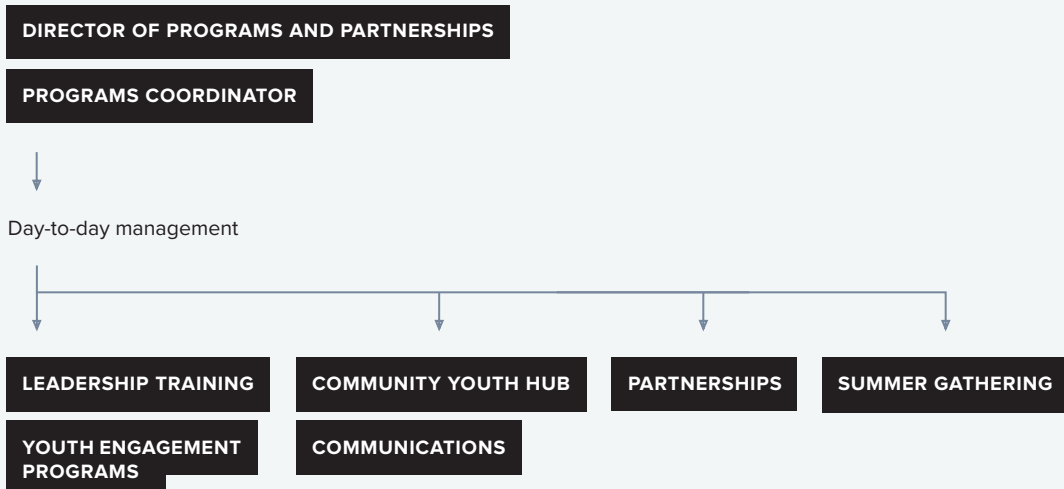
The current Advisory Committee is made up of 20-25 local Yukon Indigenous Emerging leaders, and the Committee meets annually. In addition to local elders and other Yukon First Nation leaders who support Our Voices, this body provides recommendations, current and future programming, and updates on financial status, partnerships and long-term planning. All Advisory Committee members are volunteers. Leadership retreats are held for yearly a face-to-face with the Steering Committee.

Staff

2 current employees

In November 2017, Steering Committee members welcomed a Director of Programs and Partnerships and a Program Coordinator in efforts to advance Our Voices' initiatives.

An Overview of Our Governance Structure



Steering Committee

MEMBERS

- ▶ 5+ members
- ▶ 35 years of age and under
- ▶ Comprised of Indigenous youth and emerging leaders

PORTFOLIOS

- ▶ Governance
- ▶ Partnerships
- ▶ Administration and finance
- ▶ Program management

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- ▶ Strategic direction
- ▶ Key decision making
- ▶ Administration and finance
- ▶ Securing funding
- ▶ Communications and information management
- ▶ Program implementation
- ▶ Project management and evaluation
- ▶ Training and development
- ▶ Stakeholder engagement

Advisory Committee

MEMBERS

- ▶ 35 years of age and under
- ▶ 20+ members
- ▶ Comprised of Indigenous youth and emerging leaders

REFERENCES

Project Management Training Murray Dion, Banff Centre

Strategic plan, tactical plan, overview, and additional supportive materials

Discovery and Business Planning Session Keith Halliday and Anguel Dimov, The Boston Consulting Group

Our Voices Gatherings, 2014–2016

Photos

Our Voices c/o local photographers and host First Nations

More information

tidescanada.org/projects/our-voices/

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Annotated bibliography for community project on Yukon First Nation Youth and Student Engagement: Yukon First Nations Emerging Leaders Gathering

Alderman, J., Balla, S., Blackstock, C., & Khanna, N. (2006). *Guidelines for the Ethical Engagement of Young People*. Ottawa, ON: First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada.

The Guidelines for Ethical Engagement of Young People developed through the First Nation Caring Society. It provides an in-depth understating in relation to Youth Engagement, focusing on how to engage young people, strategies, balance and accessibility, contributions made with organizations and how youth engagement should be viewed as a “*natural way of working in the organization rather than as a special program.*” Other helpful pieces of these guidelines include reflections from youth and emerging leaders and recommendations in moving forward.

Morris, G., (2009). *On Being Youth Centered: A Guideline for Individuals and Organizations, Public Health, Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection*. Crown Copyright, Province of Nova Scotia

To better understand Youth Engagement, this paper identifies strategies to ensure youth-centered approaches in relation to program implementation, participation, and focus. Using strengths based approaches, values centered approaches and valuing diversity are key themes discussed throughout the paper. To further understand how organizations, governments, and nations can engage their young citizens, the approaches identified in this paper have been very useful and guided the planning of the gathering.

Gordon, Dr. Miller, (2013). *Youth Engagement Toolkit Resource Guide, Ministry of Children and Family Development*. Province of British Columbia in partnership with University of Victoria, School of Child and Youth Care

This resource guide brings together expertise from a wide range of experience in efforts to deepen understandings of best practices and practical strategies. Engaging Aboriginal Youth and communities is discussed and provides a strong understanding in relation to holistic approaches and structural interventions. Understating how to engage youth and young people from various backgrounds is identified and special considerations and engagement tips are shared.

Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow (1977). Council of Yukon Indians (Online)

The Yukon First Nations have been working to implement their Land Claims and Self Government Agreements for nearly three decades. In 1973, the grievance document “Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow” was shared with former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, in Ottawa. The legacy of this

document is what the entire premise of the agreements forged by our leaders and ancestors were based upon. This document outlines the history, challenges of the 1970s and also identifies comprehensive solutions and recommendations in moving forward. This is an incredibly important part of Yukon First Nation history, and is being used to guide the project.

http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/pdf/together_today_for_our_children_tomorrow.pdf

Homana, G., Croninger, R., Tournay-Purta, J. (2010) *Adolescent Civic Engagement in Australia and the United States: Role of Communities of Practice Paper prepared for the fourth IWA International Research Conference, Gothenburg, Sweden, July 2010 (Online)*

This article provides insight to the realities and challenges of civic engagement in Australia and the United States. Themes identified include the public-school system and ways in which our students are influenced, sense of civic identity and understanding local policy development in relation to civic engagement in both countries. Socio-economic factors, community and school size, and the role of teachers and administrators are key themes and highlighted in the article.

http://www.iea.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/IRC/IRC_2010/Papers/IRC2010_Homana_Croninger_etal.pdf

Blanchet-Cohen, N., McMillan, Z., Greenwood, M. (2011). *Indigenous Youth Engagements in Canada's Health Care, Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health 9(1)*, National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (Online)

This article provides findings and perspectives from various backgrounds including Indigenous emerging leaders, those working in the healthcare field and youth empowerment initiatives. Given the challenges posed to many Aboriginal youth and, specifically, First Nations, the relationship between healthy living and the current healthcare system and the education system are important to consider when reflecting on needs and how to engage and create opportunities for youth. The article discusses the need for youth engagement, awareness of major health concerns and issues, and the need for less separation of youth from healthcare and education. Given that the gathering focused on healthy lifestyles, governance, engagement, and self-government and Land Claims, this is a great resource to draw upon.

<http://www.pimatisiwin.com/online/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/05Blanchett-Cohen3.pdf>

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