



Circles For Reconciliation

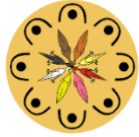
Research Report: End of Circles Survey
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April 24th, 2021

“Reconciliation begins with each and every one of us”

Acknowledgements

Circles for Reconciliation would like to thank many people who made this research possible. First, the participants who complete the End of Circles Survey. We are grateful for the participants who took the time to tell us about their experience in their Circle. Their comments are an inspiration to us to continue on our quest for greater justice in our society through reconciliation. Second, our dedicated facilitators who guide participants throughout their Circle, distribute and remind participants to complete the survey, and provide invaluable feedback themselves. Finally, the generous funders who have supported the costs of compiling this research report including:

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Circles for Reconciliation

Research Report: Executive summary

In the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) the Commissioners state: “Survivors told us that Canadians must learn about the history and legacy of residential schools in ways that change both minds *and* hearts” (TRC Final Report, Honouring the Truth Reconciling for the Future, page 234). The Commissioners also tell us over and over that reconciliation is above all “creating and maintaining respectful relationships.” That is the vision of our circles. At each circle, we educate participants through the presentation of a different theme each week. The longest part of each meeting is sharing the life experiences of the participants. We ask participants to take part in a circle that last 10 weeks, on the premise that creating mutually respectful relationships takes time.

We have completed nearly 100 ten-week circles, both in-person and virtual meetings with participants across Canada. Since 2017, at the end of each circle participants are asked to complete our End of Circle Survey. Over 263 participants have completed the survey and provided us with invaluable feedback to improve our program.

FINDINGS

Two of the four open-ended questions ask respondents what they liked best about circles and what they felt could be improved. The overarching pattern of responses indicate that participants in circles are very satisfied with the experience. In addition to the very positive comments, we received the pattern of responses to the structured questions was also very positive.

95.5% of participants would recommend circles to others.

93.1% of participants believe everyone has a chance to share during discussion.

93.5% of participants felt the sharing was honest.

92.6% of participants found the overall experience positive.

Participants, however, also have some concerns. The most prevalent response is disappointment when participants withdraw from a circle prior to the end of the 10 weeks. A second concern is the sense that there is too strong an academic approach to the presentation of the themes. A number of participants express that simplified themes, guest speakers, and videos would enhance the experience of the circles and engage more participants. A third frequent comment was to the effect that fewer circle meetings may be beneficial for participant engagement and retention. For example, offering seven instead of 10 meetings, but longer in content (2 hours instead of 90 minutes). In each case, the concerns are being addressed by the Circles team and by a feedback session with facilitators.

Contents

- Part 1: Introduction 4
- Part 2: Demographics..... 5
- Part 3: Circle Procedures 8
- Part 4: Participant Experience..... 12
- Part 5: Recommendations..... 15
- Part 6: Conclusion 18
- Part 7: Index 20

Part 1: Introduction

In the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) the Commissioners state: “Survivors told us that Canadians must learn about the history and legacy of residential schools in ways that change both minds *and* hearts” (TRC Final Report, Honouring the Truth Reconciling for the Future, page 234). The Commissioners also tell us over and over that reconciliation is above all “creating and maintaining respectful relationships.” That is the vision of Circles for Reconciliation. At each Circle, participants learn through the presentation of a different theme each week. The longest part of each meeting is sharing the life experiences of the participants. Participants are asked to take part in a Circle that last 10 weeks, on the premise that creating mutually respectful relationships takes time.

From the very beginning of Circles for Reconciliation, an evaluation of its impact has been an important component. Survey distribution began in 2017 following the first in-person Circles. Participants were provided paper copies of the survey at the end of their 10th week of Circle meetings. Participants were asked to either complete it at the end of the meeting or mail it in a self addressed stamped envelope. The paper surveys resulted in 195 responses between 2017 and December 31, 2019. In 2020, Circles for Reconciliation ventured into virtual territory and offered Circles via Zoom. Participants met virtually once a week via Zoom and responded to surveys using Google Forms. Since July of 2020, 68 surveys have been submitted by participants in Zoom Circles. See Index for the current survey.

Circles for Reconciliation is committed to ethical research practices. The End of Circle Survey has been reviewed and approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board. Information collected from participants, including any identifiable information, is kept strictly confidential. Access is restricted to the Project Coordinator and the Researcher. Contact information is kept confidential and participants are only contacted for follow-up surveys upon providing prior permission.

Survey response rates have fluctuated over the past four years. Of the almost 100 10-week completed Circles, email addresses were not provided for almost a third. Some Circles were offered within organizations and contact information was not provided back to Circles for Reconciliation for follow-up. Further, the paper survey format may have hindered survey response rate, as it was the participant’s responsibility to complete and mail it back to the Project Coordinator (although they were provided a stamped, self-addressed envelope). Survey completion following Zoom Circles has yielded a significantly higher response rate because the survey is available online.

The End of Circle Survey has been revised several times and resulted in a condensed, user-friendly survey. Survey 1 to 154 included four open-ended questions and comment sections: 1) what did you like best about your circle? 2) how could your Circle be improved? 3) any comments on the Manitoba Museum Tour? 4) Please feel free to add below any other comments you would like. In early 2019 the survey was revised and these four qualitative questions were slightly modified. Currently, the four open-ended

questions read: 1) what was the best part of the Circle experience for you personally? 2) And what about the Circle experience did you not like, or felt could have been better? 3) In what way has your participation in the Circle changed your understanding or perspective? 4) please provide any additional comments about your Circle experience. As of April 11th 2021, 263 participants have completed the End of Circle Survey.

Survey responses have informed program development. For example, the results of the survey shed light on the issue of Indigenous participant retention. In order to address this issue, Circles for Reconciliation initiated policies to provide transportation provisions and relocate Circle host locations to more central, neutral sites (moving away from the church setting). Other program recommendations include the model of sharing the role of reading the themes with participants rather than the facilitators reading the whole theme at the beginning of the Circle meeting, reducing the length of the themes to an average of 1,700 words each, and avoiding scheduling Circle meetings during December or over the holidays as participant's schedules are too busy and results in less attendance.

Part 2: Demographics

Participants are asked if they identify as Indigenous or non-Indigenous, the age group they fit into based on five pre-determined categories, and the gender (sex) with which they identify.

Indigenous and Non-Indigenous participants

Non-Indigenous participants continue to respond to the survey at higher rates: 68.4% of all survey responses.

Non-Indigenous participants specify that they have learned a great deal and appreciate the opportunity to meet and hear from Indigenous participants. Conversely, Indigenous participants express appreciation of non-Indigenous participants working towards reconciliation.

"I appreciate the non-Indigenous people trying to make a difference. It's refreshing" (245, Indigenous Participant)

"I like the honest sharing between settler and Indigenous persons. The sharing was about what was near and dear to each" (37, Non-Indigenous Participant)

"I liked the opportunity to sit in discussion with indigenous and non-indigenous people. I liked that there was no judgement on my ignorance of the indigenous history and present day cultural struggles. I liked that the time lines were followed" (126, Non-Indigenous Participant)

Indigenous participants comprise only 30.4% of all survey responses. One reason for the reduced response rate may be the survey format. The Project Coordinator and Indigenous Ambassador have indicated some Indigenous participants report discomfort in filling out surveys as a way of reporting on their participation. The formal survey

format can be off-putting, intimidating, perhaps even a reminder of the colonial process of record keeping. It is encouraging to report there is an increased rate of survey responses from Indigenous participants since implementing in Zoom Circles. This may be indicative of more Indigenous participant retention through Zoom Circles and accessibility of the survey format.

Indigenous status (In-Person Circles) 2017 -December 31, 2019

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Indigenous	53	27.2	27.2	27.2
	Non-Indigenous	140	71.8	71.8	99.0
	No response	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	195	100.0	100.0	

Indigenous status (Zoom Circles) January 1, 2020 – April 11, 2021

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Indigenous	27	39.7	39.7	39.7
	Non-Indigenous	40	58.8	58.8	98.5
	No response	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Age

The survey results indicate that Circles for Reconciliation has effectively engaged with older adults. The age of participants cluster in the 45 and over age range. 76% of participants are ages 45 and older. The majority of End of Circle surveys are completed by the oldest age category (55 and over). The mean is 4.27 which indicates that the average participant is 45-54 years of age. The median is 5 which indicates half of the survey respondents are 55 and over. Youth and young adults continue to be underrepresented survey respondents in Circles for Reconciliation. Participants ages 15 to 24 account for only 1.5% of survey responses. Offering an online survey format may encourage more youth to complete the survey.

Indigenous status * Age

		Age					No response	Total
		15 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 and over		
Indigenous status	Indigenous	1	10	7	24	35	3	80
	Non-Indigenous	3	24	8	44	97	4	180
	No response	0	0	0	2	1	0	3

Total	4	34	15	70	133	7	263
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Zoom and in-person Circles demonstrate similar age cohort participation. Ages 55 and over are consistently the most likely to participate and complete the survey. Many Circles (including the Zoom Circles currently underway) are operating during the daytime. The time of day Circles are offered may indicate a correlation with the ages of participants. Individuals between 15 and 55 are likely to participate in the workforce and may be less likely to participate during working hours. Unless the Circles are offered at a place of business or other organizational setting, retired individuals are more likely to attend daytime Circles.

Age (In-Person Circles) 2017 -December 31, 2019

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 15 - 24	3	1.5	1.5	1.5
25 - 34	26	13.3	13.3	14.9
35 - 44	9	4.6	4.6	19.5
45 - 54	54	27.7	27.7	47.2
55 and over	96	49.2	49.2	96.4
No response	7	3.6	3.6	100.0
Total	195	100.0	100.0	

Age (Zoom Circles) January 1, 2020 – April 11, 2021

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 15 - 24	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
25 - 34	8	11.8	11.8	13.2
35 - 44	6	8.8	8.8	22.1
45 - 54	16	23.5	23.5	45.6
55 and over	37	54.4	54.4	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Sex

Participants in Circles for Reconciliation are predominantly female: 75% of all participants identify as female. 72% of non-Indigenous participants are female and 83% of Indigenous participants are female. Female participant survey responses have increased slightly from Zoom Circle participation. Male participation in Circles and specifically the End of Circle Survey is a mere fraction of female participation. Engaging males in Circles for Reconciliation may be indicative of a larger gendered social issue. Societal constructs of masculinity dictate that men not show too much emotion or share their feelings openly. Circles for Reconciliation is often an emotional experience and will likely continue to attract more female participation. Another factor that contributes to the male and female participant disparity is that Circles for Reconciliation has offered

multiple “women only” Circles. Male participants tend to be in greater numbers when a specific organization, which has male employees, hosts a Circle. Far fewer men simply register online as individuals independent of an organizational affiliation. Future Circles may address this issue by offering “men only” Circles. Offering sex specific Circles encourages participants to feel that the Circle is a safe space for sharing.

“I appreciated the opportunity to share my experiences and learn from other perspectives. It was also really nice to have a sharing circle with exclusively women, I feel like that helped our group converse more easily” (9, Indigenous Participant)

Sex (In-Person Circles) 2017 -December 31, 2019

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	44	22.6	22.6	22.6
Female	147	75.4	75.4	97.9
Other	1	.5	.5	98.5
No response	3	1.5	1.5	100.0
Total	195	100.0	100.0	

Sex (Zoom Circles) January 1, 2020 – April 11, 2021

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	14	20.6	20.6	20.6
Female	53	77.9	77.9	98.5
Other	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Part 3: Circle Procedures

Each Circle meeting requires 10 participants: five Indigenous and five non-Indigenous. Participants are asked to commit to a 10-week Circle, meeting once per week for 90 minutes. Circle meetings began as 75-minute Circles but have moved to 90 minutes when it became clear that most Circles found 75 minutes too brief. The only exception is in the case of some businesses who prefer 75-minute lunch breaks as the best time to offer a Circle. During the meeting, participants read a 13 – 15-minute theme, followed by a discussion period facilitated by passing a talking stick. Zoom Circles changed the format slightly. A “virtual Circle” is managed by the co-facilitators to determine the order of sharing. Co-facilitators choose the order of the sharing in virtual Circles to ensure sharing doesn’t follow the same order of participants each week. Each component of Circle procedures is subject to evaluation through the End of Circle survey.

The Number of Circle Participants and Retention

10 Circle participants is a large enough group to hear a variety of perspectives, but also intimate enough to build relationships and hear from each participant.

“Our was small enough to allow for intimacy. Everyone had a chance to share and allowed for non-judgemental discussions” (136, Non-Indigenous Participant)

Circle participant retention has been and continues to be addressed as one of the most significant ongoing concerns for both Circle coordinators and participants alike. When a Circle for Reconciliation loses participants and does not have equal Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, it always seems to be the case that there are more non-Indigenous participants completing the Circle. This situation often leaves one, two, or three Indigenous participants sharing with five non-Indigenous participants. Indigenous participants have expressed feeling pressure to have answers. Non-Indigenous participants recognize this burden and express concern that the one or two Indigenous participants are in a “fish bowl” situation, facing pressure to represent the Indigenous perspective. When asked what Circles for Reconciliation could improve, one Indigenous participant noted enjoying the Circle and appreciating the experience but also feeling pressure to not let people down:

“More Indigenous participation – there was myself and [facilitator] who is Metis – very different cultures – I enjoyed sharing but I felt pressure to have answers.” (111, Indigenous Participant)

Non-Indigenous participants express concern that when Indigenous participants stop attending their Circle, they worry they weren’t comfortable. Participants withdraw from Circles for a number of reasons. We must respect that in addition to health issues, work changes, family responsibilities, traumatic experience of residential schools may all contribute to participants withdrawing from Circles before completing the 10-week Circle.

Number of Circles

The majority of participants attend 10 Circles (35%). Most participants attend between 7 and 11 Circle meetings. Participants acknowledge the importance of 10 weeks to establish meaningful relationships.

Number of Circles attended

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	7	2.7	2.7	2.7
	2	2	.8	.8	3.4
	3	4	1.5	1.5	4.9
	4	1	.4	.4	5.3
	5	4	1.5	1.5	6.8
	6	10	3.8	3.8	10.6

7	19	7.2	7.2	17.9
8	34	12.9	12.9	30.8
9	58	22.1	22.1	52.9
10	92	35.0	35.0	87.8
11	20	7.6	7.6	95.4
12	2	.8	.8	96.2
14	1	.4	.4	96.6
15	1	.4	.4	97.0
18	1	.4	.4	97.3
20	1	.4	.4	97.7
No response	6	2.3	2.3	100.0
Total	263	100.0	100.0	

[what do you like best about your Circle?] “The people and discussion. I really enjoyed the people – the length of time was necessary to really get to know each other” (107, Non-Indigenous Participant).

“I think meeting for 10 weeks created rapport and connections with the other participants” (118, Non-Indigenous Participant)

The majority of participants agree the numbers of meetings is right (87.4%). However, qualitative feedback suggests that although participants agree the number of meetings is right, there is room for improvement. Participant feedback notes the time commitment of 10 weeks is significant. A commitment of 10 weeks can be daunting, and several participants indicate they would like the option to participate in fewer Circle meetings but longer discussion periods.

Sharing

Sharing is cited as the most enjoyable aspect of Circles for Reconciliation. Sharing, working together, creating relationships and friendships, honesty, respect, and creating a safe space are highlights of the Circle experience. The vision of creating mutually respectful relationships is being felt by the vast majority of Circle participants. This is the main goal of our project and therefore very rewarding to see participants mention this most frequently in an open-ended question.

The majority of participants agree that everyone has a chance to share (92.6%). However, one aspect that can be improved is the allotted sharing time. Some participants note that fellow participants shared too long, and they didn't get the chance to fully share their thoughts.

“Topics were discussions quickly, were not in detail and moderator did not have time allocated to take a deep-dive into many topics that I would have liked to learn more about. (75 minute sessions were not long enough to cover many of the topics)” (172, Indigenous Participant)

Participants express desiring more time to discuss and share during their Circle meeting: *“I’d actually like longer and more meetings” (170, Non-Indigenous Participant)*. Offering an option of Circles that meet for fewer weeks with longer discussion periods may improve the overall experience and may address the issue of participant retention. Circles for Reconciliation could offer seven weeks of Circle meetings with two hours of discussion time each week.

Honest sharing is highlighted as one of the best aspects of Circles for Reconciliation. The majority of participants agree that people are honestly sharing their thoughts and feelings during a Circle for Reconciliation (93.5%).

“The sharing and all the mutual respect – understanding – viewpoints of both sides. Much honesty and respect for all” (93, Indigenous Participant)

In a feedback session with the facilitators following the completion of first Zoom Circles in 2020, facilitators shared that after about the 5th meeting, openness in sharing increased significantly. Building rapport and comfort with the same group of people each week contributes to openness and sharing freely, so emphasizing the importance of attendance each week is crucial to achieving open and honest sharing.

While there is high agreement that people are sharing honestly, there is some feedback that indicates some participants are unsure of what to share. Some non-Indigenous participants express uncertainty about the quality of their input: what to share. They express a sense of empathy for Indigenous participants who share very traumatic and vulnerable experiences. Several non-Indigenous participants reflect on their hesitancy to share their thoughts because it feels trivial compared to sharing from Indigenous participants. What would be valuable to Indigenous participants, who are often sharing their very difficult experiences?

“I frequently felt unsure of what I could share that would be of value to Indigenous participants who were sharing their own difficult experiences” (236, Non-Indigenous Participant)

People are honestly sharing their thoughts and feelings in our circle

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly disagree	4	1.5	1.5	1.5
Disagree	3	1.1	1.1	2.7
Neither agree/disagree or unsure	8	3.0	3.0	5.7
Agree	59	22.4	22.4	28.1
Strongly agree	187	71.1	71.1	99.2
No response	2	.8	.8	100.0

Total	263	100.0	100.0
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The Talking Stick

The talking stick is a program procedure used to ensure each participant has an equal opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings. It is a sacred tradition, representing respect and active listening. The talking sticks passed in Circles for Reconciliation are made and blessed at the Aboriginal Seniors Resource Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Participant feedback indicates there are some mixed feelings about the talking sticks. Many participants report the talking stick was an aspect of the Circles that they liked best:

“The discipline of one talking stick and learning to listen to everyone” (146, Non-Indigenous Participant)

“I like the honest sharing in an orderly fashion and passing the talking stick” (006, Non-Indigenous Participant)

“Listening, I do love how it is set up. It is not a discussion, it is a chance to listen to each person share something of their thoughts and experiences. To me, it was a very profound process because it didn't breakdown into a rationalizing conversation” (224, Non-Indigenous Participant)

However, a number of surveys indicate participants felt the talking stick stifled the flow of conversation. Several participants indicate that the talking stick prevented open sharing.

“Name tags would be nice. The Circle unfortunately is too one-way. The talking stick limits a question/answer dialogue” (95, Non-Indigenous Participant)

The majority of the negative feedback regarding the talking stick comes from non-Indigenous participants. While overall the negative feedback is infrequent, any dissatisfaction regarding the talking stick may be indicative of misunderstanding of the procedure and the significance of the talking stick. Future program procedure may consider including an enhanced introduction to the Talking Stick, including the history, cultural significance, and the purpose in Circle meetings.

Part 4: Participant Experience

Overall Experience

The majority of participants report positive experiences: either very positive or somewhat positive (92.6%). Inquiring about *Overall Experience* is a relatively new question on the survey. The initial 154 surveys did not include this question, therefore this total is derived from the most recent 108 surveys. Overall, the vast majority of

survey participants agree they would recommend participating in Circles for Reconciliation (95.5%).

“I feel like I have bonded with all those in circle and hope to keep in touch with them” (229, Indigenous Participant)

“The causal feel, safe environment to voice concerns, a great way to build bridges and try to heal together and move forward. Really enjoyed learning about different perspectives and that everyone got equal chance to speak. Inspired me to try and make things better” (73, Non-Indigenous Participant)

Overall experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very positive	80	74.1	74.1	74.1
	Somewhat positive	20	18.5	18.5	92.6
	Neither positive nor negative	3	2.8	2.8	95.4
	Somewhat negative	2	1.9	1.9	97.2
	Very negative	1	.9	.9	98.1
	No response	2	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	108	100.0	100.0	

COVID 19 and Zoom Circles

The COVID 19 pandemic was detrimental to society’s process of face-to-face socialization. The pandemic isolated people across the world under various degrees of lockdown and Canadians felt the effects throughout 2020. Circles for Reconciliation recognized that reconciliation cannot be put on hold. Modern technology made it possible to host Circles while still maintaining a safe social distance.

Overall, the feedback for Zoom Circles is very positive. The virtual format brought people across Canada together at a time when we were the most isolated. It gave participants the opportunity to look forward to the future when we can reconnect with each other, while reflecting on historical injustices.

Participants who engaged in Zoom Circles expressed their appreciation of being able to connect with people across Canada during a pandemic. However, at the same time, participants missed the opportunity to form relationships “face to face”. While participants recognize that this was not possible during 2020 and Zoom Circles were a logistic solution to the global pandemic, participants express looking forward to in-person Circles for Reconciliation.

“connecting with people across 'Canada', the on-line format has benefits to broad building relationships” (209, Non-Indigenous Participant)

“Getting to meet people from all over Canada- hearing personally stories- listening to the personal connections that were made between the readings and experiences (myself and others)-challenging myself differently” (217, Non-Indigenous Participant)

“it was a zoom experience which was different but we did the best we could with it and it was an enjoyable experience” (205, Indigenous Participant)

“Under virtual circumstances we did very well but much prefer face to face” (227, Indigenous Participant)

“I appreciated how Zoom allowed me to learn from people all over the country living in very different contexts. Such diversity would be unlikely with an in-person circle based in a particular community” (228, Indigenous Participant)

The logistics of hosting a Circle via Zoom proved to be a learning experience. Many Zoom Circle participants express feeling unsure and confused when it was their turn to speak and share.

The disadvantage to using Zoom to facilitate Circles is expressed by several participants who reflect on the importance of non-verbal communication in building relationships. In-person Circles allows participants to acknowledge their cohort using a smile, nod, make eye contact to ensure they are connecting. In-person Circles also allow participants more immediate opportunities to informally chat before and after Circles. Participants felt it was harder to build relationships through Zoom Circles.

Overall experience (Zoom Circle Participants)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very positive	55	80.9	80.9	80.9
Somewhat positive	11	16.2	16.2	97.1
Neither positive nor negative	2	2.9	2.9	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Impacts on Reconciliation

The majority of survey participants indicate their participation has changed their understanding or perspective on reconciliation (71%). 70% of female participants and 77% of male participants indicated “yes” their participation has changed their understanding or perspective on reconciliation. 65% of Indigenous participants and 73.4% of Non-Indigenous participants feel that their participation has changed their understanding or perspective on reconciliation. However, as participants had a chance to elaborate on their response, many who indicated “no” their understanding has not changed then clarified they already had strong understanding and insights on reconciliation.

“I have more understanding of other peoples' point of views, as well as more concrete ideas for participating in reconciliation” (238, Indigenous Participant)

Beginning with survey #155 and onwards, participants were asked to elaborate on how their participation has changed their understanding or perspective on reconciliation. Participants indicate they developed an appreciation of shared experiences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, they now have more knowledge about reconciliation and barriers Indigenous people have faced and hearing different perspectives about the themes and current social issues.

“I learned non-Indigenous people (residents) are very caring, loving and respectful. residents also gave us what they went through during the holocaust period and what happened to the jews, which is similar of what indigenous residential school survivors experienced” (157, Indigenous Participant)

“I really liked getting to know the other members and their stories and different points of view. We all had very different upbringings, backgrounds, ages, and thoughts on important issues, but we respected each other. I enjoyed listening” (60, Non-Indigenous Participant)

Many participants indicate they are now aware of the long path towards reconciliation and they are encouraged to learn more and take action. Understanding that the past impacts the present and future. Participants note a better understanding of intergenerational trauma. Participants reflect on their ability to recognize their role in the process of reconciliation, and better prepared to engage in conversations about reconciliation in everyday life.

“I think for me it was that I saw how powerful creating solid relationships are to reconciliation. I was more under the impression if Canada just honored the treaties and gave Indigenous people governance over their land that is what was needed. But we are all so intertwined and I see more now then ever that we need to work together to solving the many issues facing Indigenous people in our country” (202, Indigenous Participant)

“That I can play a bigger role than I have been!” (212, non-Indigenous Participant)

“Reconciliation is a touchy subject and most feel it cannot happen. It does through these circles” (256, Indigenous Participant)

“I always had the feeling that the indigenous folks were expected to do all the work of reconciling. I know that some other people are doing the work, also. It good to know.” (221, Indigenous Participant)

Part 5: Recommendations

The following program recommendations for Circles for Reconciliation are based on the feedback collected from 263 surveys. While the majority of survey feedback expresses

satisfaction with the Circle experience, one survey question asks participants to reflect on what Circles could improve, and the majority of the suggestions in this section are based on participants' answers to this question. A number of recommendations have been made throughout the report, which will also be summarized here.

Participant Retention

The most cohesive theme in the survey responses involves what Circles could do to improve the program effectiveness. The majority of comments regarding what could be improved indicate that participant retention is the most disappointing aspect of the Circles experience. Participants notice the difficulty retaining Indigenous participants. Many indicate they felt they didn't get to experience Circles the way they were advertised: they signed up for a Circle of 10 participants of equal representation and their Circle did not deliver expectations. Some participants express concern for the individuals who didn't return. Since the first Circles in 2017, a large number of participants have indicated that Indigenous participants have a tendency to stop attending and it is the one aspect that they suggest would improve Circles. Circles for Reconciliation has attempted to address the issue of retention in a number of ways since 2017, as noted at the beginning of this report.

There are many reasons participants stop attending their Circle: It may be trauma related, life circumstances, work and family schedules, unmet program expectations, or many other reasons. Until we know why participants stop attending, this aspect of Circles may not be addressed and restructured. An immediate program procedure to address the expectations on the part of Circle participants is a reminder prior to the Circle that it will be an emotional and perhaps traumatic experience. A brief precursor that sometimes participants stop attending for this reason may increase empathy, a small reminder that while everyone signs up for Circles hoping to participate in the full 10 weeks, we all have our own lived experiences, and we should not judge those who cannot continue Circle meetings. Circles for Reconciliation is a sharing Circle but no facilitator is expected to be a counsellor or therapist, therefore significant trauma cannot be fully addressed or managed in the scope of a Circle. Mental health resources and supports are further program procedures that can be incorporated into Circle operations as funding allows. In brief, while we continue to address barriers to retention, we do not consider withdrawal from a Circle to be a sign of failure to "dropping out".

Survey Response Rate

While almost 100 10-week Circles have been completed, 263 completed surveys may not sound like a lot. Encouraging participants to complete the End of Circle Survey has been an ongoing priority and challenge. In-person Circles were encouraged to complete the survey at the end of the meeting or were provided a stamped, self-addressed envelop to return the completed survey to the Project Coordinator. Missing contact information and reluctance to mail a survey has undoubtedly contributed to light response rates. Since moving to online surveys distributed via Google Forms, response rates have improved dramatically. Accessibility and convenience are major factors,

however alternative survey formats will need to be developed and implemented keeping in mind accessibility for participants uncomfortable with the internet survey format.

Another disparity the surveys exposes: Indigenous participants are less likely to complete the End of Circle Survey. As mentioned previously, Indigenous participants report discomfort completing surveys as a way of reporting on their participation. Future research may consider offering alternative survey methodologies. For instance, interviewing participants as an Indigenous storytelling narrative methodology may be more culturally appropriate and yield more responses from Indigenous participants. Following a similar survey format as the End of Circles Survey, conducting interviews with participants and transcribing their responses would provide an opportunity for participants to really delve into their reflections on their experience.

Ending a Circle

While Circles for Reconciliation does offer multiple suggestions for taking action on reconciliation at the end of a ten-week Circle, there is a desire for more explicit expressions of hope. Participant feedback highlights what we know about the Circle experience: they can be heartfelt, emotional, heavy and sometimes to the point of resurfacing past trauma. Participants recommend ending Circles with solutions or a positive action or intention for the week. Debriefing participants at the end of a Circle meeting may boost participant morale. Circles for Reconciliation already has resources available for participants who need some additional support, but simply ending each Circle with a positive intention for the week may be a way to help every participant. One simple method is to end a Circle meeting by asking everyone to take a turn answering: “what is something that made you smile this week?” or “what is something you are looking forward to this coming week that makes you happy?”. Additionally, ending Circles with a discussion of successful reconciliation efforts from across Canada may inspire participants to pursue reconciliation despite the difficult discussion.

Themes

The themes are another aspect of Circles that could be improved. Participants enjoy learning and mention the themes are helpful and interesting. Some participants note it was their favourite part of the Circle. However, some feedback suggests the themes are too academic. While the goal of writing the themes has been to make them in plain English, most themes are written by academics and experts in their fields. The themes are well researched and carefully written, however participants continue to note they feel a higher degree of education is required for following the themes, which may alienate some participants. For instance, one Indigenous participant noted the Indigenous Spirituality theme diminished the significance of the teaching: *“Indigenous Spirituality information felt very mechanical when reading aloud to the group and uncomfortable with the information being linked to the RCMP” (214, Indigenous Participant)*. Conscious of these concerns from participants, the revision of themes is an ongoing activity and priority.

Reading through the theme at the beginning of the Circle has mixed reviews. Many participants express it is not engaging. Including visual material and guest speakers are suggestions to improve engagement.

Fewer Circle Meetings, Longer Discussion Periods

Some participants express an interest in fewer Circle meetings but longer discussion period. Offering a condensed version of the Circle, such as seven Circle meetings of two hours each may attract some participants unable to commit to 10 weeks. Seven Circle meetings may be suitable and in harmony with the 7 sacred teachings.

Introducing the Talking Stick

A number of participants express a dislike of the talking stick protocol. Most of the feedback comes from non-Indigenous participants which may indicate a lack of understanding about the significance. More detailed teaching about the talking stick may help participants understand why the talking stick is passed and the importance of listening rather than having a conversation or responding. A theme outlining the significance of the talking stick (along with other significant traditions) would be a valuable addition to the Circle teachings. One participant reflected on their level of knowledge as a newcomer and their desire to learn very basic concepts. Introducing important traditions such as the talking stick will improve overall Circle experiences as participants understand why they are in place.

Zoom Circle Format

Zoom Circle participants express confusion about the format of passing the virtual talking stick. Clarifying the Zoom procedures and tailoring them to the online format will help the flow of the Circle. Participants need to know how and when it is their turn to share. Facilitators will need to ensure the procedure is clear and monitor the virtual Circle perhaps even more diligently than in-person. After the Circle meeting is complete, allocating time for participants to stay online and informally visit would also help build relationships. Virtual meetings have made building relationships more difficult for participants. Pre-pandemic, participants would stay after the meetings and sometimes meet for coffee. Virtual meetings are missing this aspect of interaction and participants feel this loss. Participants may benefit from informal Zoom meeting time prior to or after the Circle meeting.

Levels

Circles for Reconciliation address many complex topics. One solution might be to offer different levels of Circles. Level 1 Circles would include preliminary themes such as intergenerational trauma and reconciliation. Level 2 Circles would include more comprehensive themes such as the Justice System and the Pass System. Level 1 Circles would be offered in the seven-week format and participants would need to complete level 1 as a pre-requisite before participating in level 2 Circles.

Part 6: Conclusion

Overall participant satisfaction is excellent. Participants appreciate the experience and opportunity to meet, share and discuss prevalent issues surrounding reconciliation.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants alike appreciate the willingness of others to work towards reconciliation. Circles for Reconciliation can implement some program procedures that will improve participant experiences, including mental health resources, theme revision and overall structure of Circle meetings. The End of Circle Survey will continue to be distributed to participants at the end of their Circles, and this report will be ongoing. A new follow-up survey is forthcoming and will continue to inform our approach. These surveys are invaluable and shed light on the ongoing impact of the experience of Circles for Reconciliation.

Part 7: Index

Current End of Circle Survey:



**Circles For
Reconciliation**

End of Circle Evaluation Survey

We would like to ask that you take a few moments to provide us with some feedback on your experience with the Circles for Reconciliation. Your feedback will be very helpful in two ways: First to help us improve our Circles. Secondly, to inform Canadians how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can engage in real sharing, and create respectful relationships. Your answers will be treated confidentially, that is, not shared with anyone in a way that would identify you. Even your specific circle will not be identified. You are free to leave blank any question you prefer not to answer.

The evaluation asks five questions about your experience with the Circle, and will not take long to complete. May we ask you to please complete this now and return to the facilitator in the attached envelope. If you prefer, take it home with you and return by mail in the next few days.

First, so we know something about you:

a. Today's date

— — —

b. Do you identify as:

- Indigenous
- Non-Indigenous

c. In which age group do you fit?

- 16 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 and over

d. Your gender is

- Male
- Female

- Other

e. How many Circle meetings did you attend?

___ number of Circles

2/ ...

Now, there are several questions about your experience with the Circle meetings:

1. How would you rate your overall experience participating in this Circles for Reconciliation?

- Very positive
- Somewhat positive
- Neither positive nor negative
- Somewhat negative
- Very negative

2. What was the best part of the Circle experience, for you personally?

Please specify

3. And what about the Circle experience did you not like, or felt could have been better?

Please specify

4. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements,

as they apply to your experience with the Circles.

a. People are honestly sharing their thoughts and feelings in our Circle

- b. Everyone has a chance to share in our discussion periods.
- c. The number of meetings I was expected to attend is about right
- d. I would recommend participating in Circles to others

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree/disagree or Unsure
- Agree
- Strongly agree

5. Has your participation in the Circle changed your understanding or perspective on what reconciliation is about?

- Yes
- No
- Too early to say

5a. If Yes to Q.5, in what way has your participation in the Circle changed your understanding or perspective?

Please specify

6. Please provide any additional comments about your Circle experience.

7. Would you like to receive a periodic UPDATE and/or know about other events promoted by Circles for Reconciliation? If so, please provide your email address so that we can contact you. This will not be shared with any other organization and your name will not be linked to your responses to this questionnaire.

Yes

No

(Please print email address clearly)

Thank you for taking the time to provide this feedback.

Please place this form in the stamped and self-addressed envelope provided, and leave with the facilitator or send in by mail.