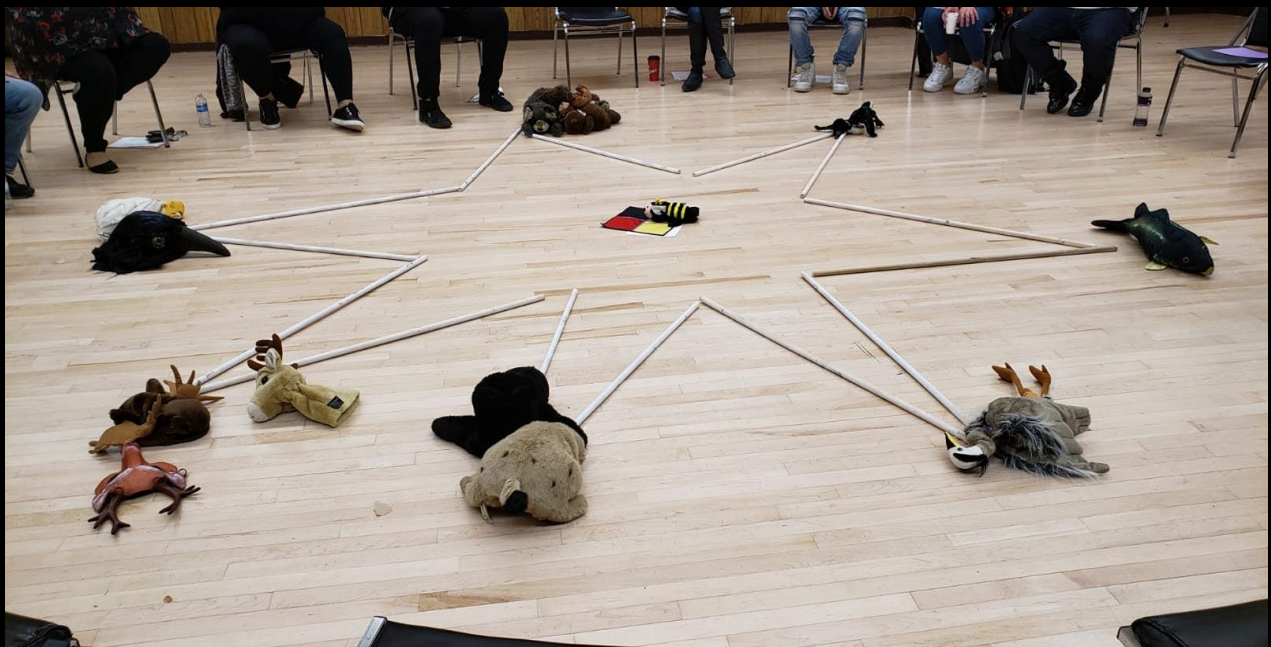


# Building Bridges: Youth-Police Dialogues in Sudbury

## Final Project Report

April 2019 – March 2020



## Authors

Kristy Pagnutti | Acting Director Educator Support  
Enisoné L. Kadiri | Director of Outreach Programs  
Jessica Reekie | Executive Director

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# Introduction

In 2017, OJEN worked with four different policing partners and two Indigenous community partners in Sudbury to pilot a version of OJEN's Youth-Police Dialogue (YPD) program. Indigenous youth, police officers, lawyers, Elders and frontline community staff came together over two days to discuss and problem-solve challenging youth-police relations. The two-day Youth-Police Dialogue program was very successful and everyone involved felt that it represented an important first-step in creating better relationships between Indigenous youth and local police officers. All the program participants recommended that they would like to see a longer, more involved Youth-Police Dialogue program that helped build connections over time. They felt that this format would prove more impactful and help develop a safer, stronger community.

Following the success of the original two-day pilot, OJEN received project funding from the Ministry of Community and Correctional Services, Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Law Foundation of Ontario to deliver this project: **Building Bridges: Youth-Police Dialogues 2.0**. This version of our YPD program expanded on the previous version. The two year period of funding allowed us to pilot the program twice, once each year.

This project report focuses on the second year, which took place between November 2019 and March 2020. Although much of the core public legal education program content from the first year was maintained, in the second year, we worked with our Indigenous community partners to incorporate more cultural activities and "learning on-the-land" opportunities to strengthen relationships between youth and police. The report is divided into two main sections: the **first** describes the program, participants, community partners and volunteers involved in the YPD program; the **second** section contains a summary of the evaluation OJEN staff conducted at the conclusion of the program.

## Part One

### About the program

OJEN's **Building Bridges: Youth-Police Dialogue 2.0** program expands on the successful elements of OJEN's YPD program but adapts the program for an Indigenous youth audience in Sudbury, Ontario. The program uses role-plays and scenario-based learning to facilitate greater understanding of roles and perspectives by creating shared learning opportunities. The program encourages a culturally appropriate approach to public legal education that prioritizes community building. In addition to the legal information sharing and skill-building exercises used in all of OJEN's PLE initiatives, this program integrated cultural activities including food sharing, talking/sharing circles, cooking, medicine walks as well as traditional teachings from Elders and cultural teachers in the community.

#### Goals of Building Bridges: Youth-Police Dialogues 2.0:

- Youth and police develop trust and mutual respect
- Youth and police learn together about Indigenous culture
- Youth learn about their legal rights and responsibilities during interactions with the police
- Youth develop leadership, communication and advocacy skills
- Youth and police co-create and present solutions to current challenges in youth-police relations in their community

## Building Bridges (Year 2) Program Plan

*All sessions were 4 hours in length*

Session	Description
<b>Session One</b>	<b>Point of View, Community and Communication</b> Youth, police and program facilitators engage in an activity called “My Personal Journey to a Career in Law,” and participate in cultural activities (led by an Elder) that allow them to explore where perceptions come from and how they impact our interactions with each other.
<b>Session Two</b>	<b>Medicine Walk: Mental Health and Healing</b> Youth, police and program facilitators participate in a medicine walk led by a cultural teacher. Youth have an opportunity to build their understanding of the role of police and identify avenues of support and healing within their community. As a group, all participants collectively explore mental health, community identity, community responsibility, policing and legal responsibilities in the context of community safety.
<b>Session Three</b>	<b>All Souls Day Feast</b> Youth, community partners and police officers participate in an All Souls Day Feast. (All Souls Day is a day set aside for remembering all of our family, friends and ancestors who have passed on to the spirit world.) Led by a cultural teacher, participants engage in smudging, prayer and a feast.
<b>Session Four</b>	<b>Indigenous Veterans Day</b> Everyone participates in an Indigenous Veterans Day ceremony at Atikameksheng First Nation. After the ceremony, youth, police officers, community partners and program facilitators engage in a group discussion and are encouraged to reflect on the dedication and service of Indigenous veterans.
<b>Session Five</b>	<b>Careers in the Law &amp; Legal Issue Spotting</b> Youth, police officers, community partners and program facilitators travel to the local university and learn about various careers in the law and courses available at the university that will help them prepare for these careers. Through scenario-based learning, the youth learn to spot legal issues and explore options for help and support for some common legal problems. The cultural activity for this session focuses on a pipe teaching.
<b>Session Six</b>	<b>Tour of Police Station and Courthouse</b> Youth, police officers, community partners and program facilitators meet with the local Chief of Police and a local Judge from the Superior Court of Justice. Everyone participates in a tour of the local police station and courthouse. Participants are encouraged to share perspectives and engage in conversations about unconscious bias and Indigenous representation in the Canadian legal system. Youth receive mini digital cameras to use in a project of capturing images that represent the justice system from their perspectives.
<b>Session Seven</b>	<b>Bringing it all together</b> Everyone receives a dream catcher teaching and are encouraged to reflect on language and interconnectedness to explore the way to improve relations between Indigenous youth, police and the court system. Through an art-based activity, youth create visual representations of what they learned during the program.
<b>Session Eight</b>	<b>Culminating Event</b> Youth and police co-present their ideas to strengthen relationships to an audience of stakeholders (e.g parents, community members, local politicians, members of the police service, etc.)

Youth, police officers, lawyers, elders, staff from OJEN and community partners participated in the eight different sessions. Each session was four hours in length and took place on Saturdays from 11:00 am until 3:00 pm, beginning in October 2019 and concluding in January 2020. Staff from OJEN and the N'Swakamok Native Friendship Centre co-facilitated the program sessions with help from a cultural teacher or Elder.

We recruited fifteen (15) youth for the program. The youth ranged in age from 16 to 24 years old. Several of the youth participated through court-ordered diversion; some youth were recruited through the Rainbow District School Board Aboriginal liaison, or were in care (and participated through the Family Court Worker program).

## Adjustments & Modifications to the Program

An Indigenous cultural teacher was involved in the design and implementation in both the first and second years of the program. Instead of devoting one session to the facilitation of an Indigenous cultural activity (as we did in the first year), Indigenous teachings were incorporated into all eight of the sessions in the second year. An elder or cultural teacher led both an opening, including smudging, and closing for each session.

The cultural teacher also secured space at the University of Sudbury for land-based activities. The University of Sudbury provided indoor space when N'Swakamok Friendship Centre was not available. We arranged for buses to bring youth from the Friendship Centre to the University.

On two occasions, we had to modify the YPD program due to weather conditions. We had to cancel an on-the-land activity that involved a Fire Teaching, due to a snowstorm. We substituted this session for one in which youth and police officers attending the All Souls Day event at N'Swakamok Friendship Centre. We also had to replace a teepee building session for youth and officers with a pipe teaching, due to inclement weather.

## Community Partners/Hosts

**N'Swakamok Friendship Centre** hosted program participants and contributed significantly to the planning of the program. They identified and recruited youth from their Wasa Nabin program, Aboriginal Courtwork and Family Courtwork programs, as well as their alternative school. They also recruited an Indigenous caterer who provided food for all of the program sessions.

## Volunteers

Program volunteers included:

- Police officers
- Indigenous elders
- Cultural teacher
- Judge
- Court staff
- University staff

A total of eight police officers were recruited from the Greater Sudbury Police Service and the Ontario Provincial Police. Four police officers from GSPS and the OPP also worked with OJEN staff and community partners in the design and delivery of the program. The police officers who participated in the program:

- listened to and connected with youth in honest conversations;
- developed their understanding of the community by participating in cultural teachings led by an Indigenous Elder;
- described their role in the justice system, the factors they take into consideration as police officers (police discretion), and addressed public safety;
- identified shared goals and solutions to form connections and build better relationships with Indigenous youth.

For the final culminating session, other justice sector professionals including the Sudbury Chief of Police and a local Superior Court judge listened to the youth's presentation and participated in the final discussion and activities. The Mayor of Sudbury also attended the feast and presentation. An elder or a cultural teacher began sessions with a smudging and an opening and led a closing at the conclusion of each day. The cultural teacher assisted with the overall program design and secured space at the University of Sudbury for land-based activities. Two University of Sudbury staff members contributed to the program by delivering a session that focused on careers in the legal system.

## Staff

Two OJEN staff worked with community and policing partners to adapt OJEN's core Youth-Police Dialogue program content to create a public legal education program that was relevant and culturally appropriate. They also co-facilitated sessions with Elders, cultural teachers, community partners and police officers.

OJEN also hired an Indigenous young person as a part-time Project Officer, who supported OJEN staff, youth and community partners in the design, delivery and reporting of this program.

## Evaluation Methodology

Building Bridges: Youth-Police Dialogues 2.0 used mixed method evaluation tools to capture the impact of the project. We obtained feedback through evaluation surveys from various program participants and the youth Project Officer recorded observations and took notes at each session. At the conclusion of the program, we held a sharing circle for the youth participants, community partners and justice sector volunteers, where we asked everyone to reflect on their experiences in the program. We also distributed questionnaires and post-program surveys (paper and electronic) to police officers involved in the program.

## Part Two

### Youth Feedback

#### Perceptions of police and lawyers at the start of the program

We asked youth participants<sup>1</sup> to rate their experience with (or perceptions of) the **police** before the program on a scale of “mostly negative” (1) to “mostly positive” (5):

- **11%** reported their perceptions as **“mostly negative”**
- **22%** reported their perceptions as **“a little negative”**
- **56%** reported their perceptions as **“neutral”**
- **11%** reported their perceptions as **“mostly positive”**

We also asked youth to rate their experience with (or perceptions of) **lawyers** before the program on a scale of “mostly negative” (1) to “mostly positive” (5):

- **56%** reported their perceptions as **“neutral”**
- **33%** reported their perceptions as **“a little positive”**
- **11%** reported their perceptions as **“mostly positive”**



During discussions about communication between police officers and members of their community, youth expressed concerns that police act aggressively and do not communicate effectively causing fear in the communities they [police] serve.

When asked to **describe one word** that came to mind when seeing a police officer, youth participants used terms like:

- afraid
- disconnected
- nervous
- anxious
- confused

One participant drew from their lived experience as a child who was taken away by police from their home; they shared how they felt when police used excessive force against a parent in this process.

Two of the youth participants shared that police use of force in situations involving children can lead to trauma and further perpetuate negative views of police. One youth shared their perspective that police “should not use unnecessary force.” Instead, they should “talk to us in a more comfortable tone [because] officers are intimidating as is.”

<sup>1</sup> Of the fifteen youth who participated in the program in year two, we only received nine complete sets of feedback forms. When percentages are indicated in this report, 11% represents one youth, 22% represents 2 youth, 33% represents 3 youth, etc.

## Youth recommendations/suggestions

We asked youth participants to reflect on the ways youth, police, and community partners can improve relations between police, courts and Indigenous youth. Overall there was a sense that solutions could be achieved through **better communication and understanding**. The youth participants recommended that **police** should:

- “Possibly offer more information on legal issues and where to find help, especially to younger youth”
- “Treat the person [during an interaction] as an equal without the social status or the thought of having power over another.”
- “Take a positive approach and handle situations in a calm manner and use physical force AS NEEDED. Especially with younger youth as this can make a HUGE impact on youth for the rest of their lives (e.g. PTSD) “
- “Be KIND”

Youth also commented about the **importance of using plain language** when police interact with youth:

- “Police should use words that are more understandable for youth that aren't familiar with legal terms.”
- “Sometimes youth don't fully understand the terms that are being used when dealing with a police officer...if a police officer can speak in terms that are understood [it would help with communication].”

We also asked the youth participants **what would help their community to express concerns** about policing:

- “A proper dialogue system that is unbiased on both parties.”
- “Support for self-government [as it] would help change community perceptions. By helping [Indigenous] peoples becoming independent and self-governed and returning some of their old ways and teachings of justice, maybe [there] would be a mutual benefit with more respect for both sides.”

When asked what the **courts** could do to strengthen interactions with Indigenous young people, the youth participants suggested the following:

- “Offer the eagle feather during testimony”
- “Talk more respectfully to youth no matter what they do... they shouldn't be talked down to”
- “Gain more understanding of mental health and family problems”
- “Provide more information and supports about legal aid”
- “If the courts listened to youth in situations from their perspectives, it would build a better relationship with youth”



## Youth reflections at the conclusion of the program

We asked youth to reflect on or anticipate what their **future** interactions and relationships with **police** would be after the program, on a scale from “worse” (1) to “a lot better” (5):

- **56%** reflected that their future interactions/relationships would be **“a lot better”**
- **22%** reflected that their future interactions/relationships would be **“better”**
- **11%** reflected that their future interactions/relationships would be **“a little better”**
- **11%** reflected that their future interactions/relationships would be **“the same”**

We asked youth to reflect on or anticipate what their **future** interactions and relationships with **lawyers** would be after the program, on a scale from “worse” (1) to “a lot better” (5):

- **45%** reflected that their future interactions/relationships would be **“a lot better”**
- **33%** reflected that their future interactions/relationships would be **“a little better”**
- **22%** reflected that their future interactions/relationships would be **“the same”**

We also asked youth participants to self-assess whether they felt more comfortable when communicating with the police, now that they had completed the program. On a scale from “not at all” (1) to “very much” (5):

- **56%** indicated that they felt **“very much more”** (5) comfortable communicating with police.
- **33%** indicated that they felt **“much more”** (4) comfortable communicating with the police.<sup>2</sup>

When asked whether they had **gained a better understanding of the role of the police**, now that they had completed the program. On a scale of “not at all” (1) to “very much” (5):

- **78%** indicated that they had **“a very much better”** (5) understanding of the role of police
- **11%** indicated that they had a **“much better”** (4) understanding of the role of police.<sup>3</sup>

When asked to reflect on whether (and to what degree) the program had caused the youth participants to change their minds about how they see the police, on a scale of “not at all” (1) to “very much” (5):

- **33%** indicated that the program had changed their minds **“very much”** (5)
- **44%** indicated that the program had changed their minds **“much”** (4)
- **11%** indicated that the program had changes their minds **“some”** (3)<sup>4</sup>

When asked whether they “felt heard by” the police during the program **100% of the youth participants** who completed the survey reported that they **“felt heard by the police.”**

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<sup>2</sup> The ninth youth chose not to answer this question on the feedback survey.

<sup>3</sup> The ninth youth chose not to answer this question on the feedback survey.

<sup>4</sup> The ninth youth chose not to answer this question on the feedback survey.

## Youth reflections on what they learned through the program

We asked the youth participants to self-assess how much they learned about **their rights when interacting with the police**. The youth scored their learning on a scale from one (not at all) to five (very much):

- **67%** of the youth assessed themselves at a four (much) or a five (very much)
- **11%** of the youth assessed themselves at a three (some)

We also asked youth to self-assess how much they learned about **where they could go to get legal help**. The youth scored their learning on a scale from one (not at all) to five (very much):

- **78%** of the youth assessed themselves at a five (very much)
- **11%** of the youth assessed themselves at a three (some)

During the sharing circle session at the end of the program, we asked youth participants to share **something impactful that they learned during the program**. Youth commented on the cultural teachings and the importance of passing down history, traditions and ways of living by telling stories, in addition to learning about the Canadian legal system and their rights with respect to the police:

- "I've learned more about my culture and the law."
- "I have learned lots about the Ojibwe language, the root meanings and the teachings they hold."
- "I learned about goal setting, [hearing] different perspectives with police interactions and learning from group conversations."

When asked to share one word or phrase that described **what they liked best** about the program, youth participants offered:

- people
- participation
- dialogue
- food
- relationship building with youth and other mentors
- cultural teachings and on-land activities
- developing good relationships with justice sector professionals



## Youth Project Officer's Feedback

At the conclusion of the program, we asked the Youth Project Officer to share their personal reflections about the experience of helping us design and deliver the project.

*"Programs like OJEN's YPD are powerful, engaging, inclusive, welcoming, encouraging and safe -- and that's what we need, not just as individuals, but as a whole collective."*

*Building Bridges Youth Project Officer*

The Youth Project Officer shared that they had grown up in social housing, where they had respect for police officers, but feared and distrusted them. As they grew older, they learned to keep an open mind, which they recognized is not always easy for Indigenous young people who fear or distrust the police.

The impact of OJEN's Building Bridges program, according to the Youth Project Officer, was that it created a safe and inclusive space for participants to share thoughts and ideas in order to cultivate community safety. "It's needed; to keep not only the communities, but our children and ourselves safe. Being silent and shying away from conversations that touch on [policing] issues is what inhibits us."

*"I had the opportunity to be a part of OJEN'S YPD Program for two years; and it propelled me in ways I didn't know that I needed and benefited me..."*

*Building Bridges Youth Project Officer*

After the program concluded, the Youth Project Officer shared that they reached out to officers involved in the program for assistance in navigating a personal crisis. They explained, "After the YPD program, I can honestly say that my perception of cops has changed because they were gems; especially in my vulnerable state. I would never have sought [them] out previously, but OJEN bridges the gap between social communities and our services, which I continue to do."

When we asked the Youth Project Officer to share what they liked about being in that role or comment on how they benefited, they offered:

*"It helped me gain confidence and improve skills in communication. Being able to connect with youth and doing something to make an impact with youth; I had a sense of pride in doing that. The outdoor activities and cultural activities made an impact as well."*

*Building Bridges Youth Project Officer*

## Police Officer Feedback

At the conclusion of the program, four police officers who were involved in the program completed an email questionnaire circulated by OJEN staff. Two of these officers also participated in a sharing circle with the youth and community partners.

**100% of the police officers** who completed the email questionnaire reported that **the program increased their level of Indigenous cultural knowledge**. One officer shared, “the Indigenous teachings that were provided definitely expanded my knowledge base.” An Indigenous police officer involved in the program also commented:

*“I appreciated the teachings. Our culture is built in the language. You can actually break down our words and it will speak to the belief system of our peoples. Many of us have lost our language, so to have that part added into the program was such a blessing to be a part of and being given the time to learn along with the youth.”*

*Indigenous Police Officer involved in the program*

**Three** out of the **four police officers** who completed the email questionnaire reported that **the program improved their ability to communicate with Indigenous youth**.<sup>5</sup>

- One officer shared, “I think it was a good reminder to not jump to conclusions; take the time and listen.”
- Another officer explained, “I sometimes forget that the uniform is the first thing the youth see; police must make more of an effort to engage the youth.”

OJEN staff observed youth and police officers not only working together on activities during the program sessions, but engaging in informal “small talk” before and after each of the sessions, and during the lunch breaks as well.

**Three** out of the **four police officers** who completed the email questionnaire reported an **increased level of comfort in interacting with youth** as a result of their participation in the program.<sup>6</sup>

*“I’m definitely more comfortable with youth. Youth can often be our toughest group to connect with because they are in that stage of their life where they are challenging what they know. This provided an opportunity to remind ourselves to think about where the youth are in their lives and to meet them where they’re at.”*

*Police Officer involved in the program*

<sup>5</sup> The fourth police officer did not attend as many program sessions as the others and this question was removed from their questionnaire.

<sup>6</sup> The fourth police officer did not attend as many program sessions as the others and this question was removed from their questionnaire.

**100%** of the **police officers** who completed the email questionnaire **observed increased communication and leadership skills of the youth participants.**

*"I think the youth understood and felt encouraged to know that their voice was both important and powerful. It was amazing to see them and their barriers come down by the last sessions when the youth presented what they did in the program with the Chief of Police, Dep. Chief of Police and the Mayor as their audience. The youth didn't hold back."*

*Police Officer involved in the program*

**Three** out of the **four police officers** who completed the email questionnaire also reported that their experience in the program **strengthened connections with community partners.**

*"This part was one of my favourite parts of participating in OJEN; it was great to learn and know that we (police and N'Swakamok staff) are in this for the youth; that we shared that supporting the youth was the most important part of the program and it helped to build our bond as program support staff. We learned that we can rely on each other more."*

*Police Officer involved in the program*

During the sharing circle, both police officers commented on the **importance of effective communication** to build understanding. One of the officers shared, "I have learned that dialogue between people needs to happen to have an understanding with one another." The other police officer drew from the experience of one of the youth participants, who shared their encounter with police during an arrest to underscore the significance of explaining clearly the arrest procedure during police encounters. They explained, "The arrest is a moment of crisis and the language needs to be broken down into language [for youth] to understand the arrest, their rights and where to go from there."

**100%** of the **police officers** who completed the email questionnaire were able to recall at least two factors that the youth explained could impact youth-police relations (i.e. from the final, culminating presentation). The factors that the officers personally recalled were:

- "The youth need to feel safe to be able to share. It can be scary to tell your story when you think you might be judged and it was good to have not just Indigenous Officers, but the Non-Indigenous Officers present."
- "Being able to have a dialogue, and getting to know the stories of the youth and also, getting to know the culture along with the youth."
- "The police have to make more of an effort to meet with youth and not to underestimate the youth's awareness of the laws."
- "[The need] to be patient and listen and timing... don't try to make many points during crisis, learning will happen afterwards when it's easier to converse..."

*What was the most valuable part of this program, in your opinion?*

*"The time allotted to be together. You cannot rush a relationship, you need time together."*

*Police Officer involved in the program*

When asked to **list two things that you learned through your participation in the program**, police officers comments included:

- "I learned to never judge a book by its cover. As a Police Officer, I'm always paying attention to body language and in one session I had thought a youth wasn't paying attention. Later in a group discussion, [the youth] shared that it was their favourite part of the day, and he was clearly listening."
- "I was not aware of the knowledge that the youth possessed in regards to the social services that are available to them in the City of Sudbury."
- "I learned that the youth still do not trust the police."
- "Everyone has a different story to tell."
- "Not to judge first hand when interacting with youth."
- "That we need to share the lessons/experiences/stories with our entire staff, not just the staff who participated in the project."
- "That impressions from both groups [i.e. youth and police] can change for the positive."

## Feedback from community partners

Three staff members from our community partner completed the post-program survey. They expressed great satisfaction with how the program engaged their youth. They also indicated that they were able to learn from the program, and appreciated the incorporation of cultural activities in a public legal education program. They liked learning from the youth and being able to collaborate with them to raise their voices to key community stakeholders about the concerns that young people have while dealing with police.

Throughout the program, OJEN made sure to introduce and profile reliable and accessible sources of public legal information and assistance that could help our community partners' staff support their work with youth. The community partners indicated that the legal knowledge shared in the program was relevant to the young people with whom they work.

Community partners commented that they appreciated the community partnership and the "buy-in" from all participants involved in the program. One community partner shared that they appreciated "watching the youth and police work together, learn at the same pace, and respect each other." Another community partner commented that giving the young people an opportunity to share their lived experience, participate in more cultural activities and share their concerns directly with key stakeholders in their community was invaluable.

## Recommendations and suggestions

Several of the people involved in the program expressed a desire to increase the length of the program even more. They felt that more time together, more activities undertaken together would only help build better relationships. Police officers also expressed a wish for future (follow-up) opportunities to connect with the youth. One community partner suggested seeking support from government and local agencies for funding to continue the cultural activities that all the participants thought were so valuable to the program.