



WE MATTER & facebook

2018 #HopeForum

**A Gathering of Indigenous Youth Leaders
on Healing & Life Promotion**

Summary Report

CONTEXT

On January 21st and 22nd, 2018, 70 First Nations, Metis and Inuit youth between the ages of 13-26 from every province and territory across the country gathered in Ottawa, Ontario for the **#HopeForum: A National Gathering of Indigenous Youth Leaders on Healing & Life Promotion**. The **#HopeForum** was hosted by We Matter and Facebook, stemming from a new partnership developed between the two, and was the first ever national event for Indigenous youth focused on mental health, suicide and wellness. The gathering took place at the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health and was made up of two parts: two days of workshops and relationship-building for youth participants, and a National Indigenous Youth Roundtable event which welcomed the general public, media, and dignitaries.

The **#HopeForum** was organized in response to the current mental health and suicide realities of Indigenous youth and communities, and in light of the current national dialogue on the Indigenous youth suicide crisis, where these issues have not been addressed effectively. Indigenous youth have often been left out of discussions and meetings on suicide, mental health and wellness, which proves problematic when these issues affect them and their communities the most. Indigenous youth leaders also carry a lot of weight when it comes to supporting and advocating on behalf of their peers – while often dealing with their own personal connections to suicide. This gathering provided workshop sessions, facilitated by We Matter, Facebook, and safeTALK, for youth to explore their own needs as advocates and leaders of change, as well as identify specific ways to support their own wellbeing alongside the wellbeing of fellow youth. It also provided an opportunity for young leaders to lead the discussion surrounding healing on their own terms, as well as identify actionable solutions and recommendations for change at the community and national level.



PROCESS

Using our large social media platform, We Matter posted a callout on the We Matter Campaign Facebook page, inviting Indigenous youth leaders from across the country to attend the gathering as representatives and voices of their communities and regions. We also personally reached out to a number of regional and national youth councils, some of whom we already had a relationship with. Youth interested in attending were responsible for finding and securing their own travel and accommodation dollars from their band, community or organization. We Matter had a select 10 sponsored spots available, for youth unable to find their own funding. These youth were required to submit an application questionnaire as well as their own We Matter video to be eligible. The 10 youth selected for We Matter sponsorship ended up representing 5 different provinces and territories. Overall, the youth attending the **#HopeForum** represented every single province and territory across Canada, from rural and arctic communities to urban centres. Initially, We Matter had planned on having 40-50 youth leaders attend, however, due to the substantial interest from youth and communities, the total number of participants ended up being just over 70. In some instances, groups wanting to send 5-20 youth had to be turned down, due to a lack of capacity to manage such numbers.

The **#HopeForum** itself took place over the course of two full days, Sunday January 21st and Monday January 22nd. The gathering was organized and structured to fit within an Indigenous worldview and framework. The Wabano Centre venue contains a large circle room, where we were able to gather for workshops and discussions, as well as use traditional medicines for smudging when needed. In addition to the We Matter and Facebook facilitators, two elders – one Inuk and one Anishnaabe/Metis – joined the group for the full two days. They opened and closed the gathering with teachings, medicines, and prayer; provided opening prayers for the National Roundtable; and were available as supports for any youth who wished to speak them. As much of the content for the gathering centered heavy topics such as suicide, an Indigenous counsellor was also available for youth if needed. A separate self-care/support space was created for those wanting to step away, take a break, or speak with any of the supports at any point over the two days.

The framework for the **#HopeForum** was structured in wholistic way, which focused on four aspects: self, family/friends, community, and nation. The gathering started off with a sharing circle, to allow everyone to introduce themselves into the space, and then moved into a workshop titled “Unpacking Ourselves: Self-Care in the Face of Hardship”. Youth were able to reflect on themselves, their own needs and challenges in life, and how to better support those needs with self-care practices, both traditional and non. Moving from self to others, youth then participated in a safeTALK training session, learning the skills to respond to and support friends or family members who may be suicidal. From here, We Matter did a presentation on “We Matter and Supporting Your Region”, sharing how youth can use We Matter’s tools and resource to support their broader community and region when it comes to hardship, hope and healing. The second day of the gathering was then focused on the nation as a whole, and how to influence and create nation-wide change for Indigenous youth in relation to mental health, suicide and wellness. This started off with a workshop by Facebook, informing youth of social media safety tools, as well as engaging them in brainstorming on how to improve Facebook’s suicide prevention tools.



NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE EVENT

The national youth roundtable discussion was the only event of its kind to ever happen in Canada, with Hon. Minister Jane Philpott calling the event “historic”. The Indigenous youth leaders participating in the **#HopeForum**, facilitated by We Matter co-founders, led a 2-hour discussion on the issue of Indigenous youth suicide and healing, including personal experiences, thoughts, as well as identifying specific solutions and calls to action. Participating in the roundtable was national leaders and dignitaries, including Hon. Jane Philpott – Minister of Indigenous services, Perry Bellegarde – Assembly of First Nations National Chief, and Antigone Davis – Global Head of Facebook Safety. Though given time to make statements and answer and respond to questions to/from youth, dignitaries were present to listen to the youth voices. The event was also open to the media and public, with many representatives present from various national organizations and federal departments.

The roundtable was facilitated in a circle format, with youth, elders, national leaders, dignitaries, media, and the public sitting in a full circle, with the space open to any youth participants wanting to speak, which ended up being the majority of them. The discussion was also broadcast nationally through Facebook Live using a 360 degree camera, allowing anyone tuning-in online to be able to see everyone speaking. As a part of the roundtable, youth proposed a set of Calls to Action, outlining the actions they would like to see implemented in order to positively address the issue of suicide in their communities. Prior to the event, youth had the opportunity to discuss with each other their needs, solutions, and calls to action, so that all Calls to Action were agreed upon by everyone.

The full National Roundtable Discussion can be viewed at:

www.facebook.com/WeMatterCampaign/videos/1179190522214412/



REACH

The success of the **#HopeForum** was huge, with its impact reaching nationally, far and wide. Having 70 Indigenous youth participants present meant that almost 70 First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities were also reached. We Matter created and shared two videos prior to the event, promoting youth to apply and attend, and promoting people to tune-in to the National Roundtable. The application video was viewed 115,000 times and the National Roundtable video was viewed 58,000 times. Through the live broadcast, the National Roundtable discussion was seen by 16,000 people, meaning 16,000 people tuned-in to listen to Indigenous youth voices. Youth participants who attended were able to take home information and materials/resources, to further engage their own communities and regions, ensuring that the reach of the gathering continued beyond their time in Ottawa. It is hard to say how many youth and communities will continue to be reached through youth engagement and outreach, though it is certain many will be.

The **#HopeForum** also had a number of national media outlets cover the event, which has led to an even greater national reach. Youth participants had the opportunity to do interviews with highly regarded media outlets, further empowering their voices and bringing attention to the **#HopeForum** and need for positive change. The power of getting national media coverage enabled the general Canadian public to also be able to engage with Indigenous youth voices and experiences, from a first-hand account, bettering their understanding of present Indigenous youth issues. The media outlets which covered the event were:

- CBC Ottawa: “‘We matter a lot’: Indigenous youth gather in Ottawa to tackle suicide crisis”
- CBC The Current: “‘We Matter’: Indigenous youth raise their voices in the fight against suicide”
- CBC All In A Day: “Seventy Indigenous youth from across the country are in Ottawa today for a summit called the Hope Forum”
- APTN National: “Youth forum opens up about suicide to bring hope”
- CTV Power Play: “Meeting to Prevent Indigenous Suicide”
- CTV Power & Politics: “Forum gathers on preventing Indigenous youth suicide”
- National Observer: “‘You don’t have to be anybody to be somebody’: Indigenous youth stand up to suicide crisis”



#HopeForum 2018

We Matter

about 3 months ago · 🌐

APPLY today to attend the **#HopeForum**, hosted by We Matter and Facebook. We'll be funding the travel costs of FOUR **#IndigenousYouth** to Ottawa from anywhere in Canada!

To apply or register email info@wemattercampaign.org. Tag friends/family/youth leaders below, and SHARE!

👍❤️👤 626

546 Shares 115K Views



Like



Comment



Share



Comments

Up Next



Kelly Legge - We Matter Campaign

We Matter
143 Views

NWAC RISE Gathering

IMPACT



YOUTH

The impact the **#HopeForum** had on youth participants was phenomenal. Even though everyone was from different regions and contexts, in just two days, youth were able to open up to each other very quickly, and develop relationships where they felt as if they had become family. Youth felt safe enough to share their thoughts, experiences, and stories, and so they did. In feeling safe enough to share with each other, many of them expressed feelings of finding their voice and no longer feeling alone in their experiences. Feeling like 'you are not alone' is a key objective of We Matter's messaging, so this was a tremendous success. The growth of youth participants over just two days was also apparent, as many youth grew in confidence and their capability to speak and share, from the first day to the second.

The **#HopeForum** had personal impacts on all of the youth, through the stories they shared with each other; the relationships they developed; the ability to have their voices listened to and heard; and the opportunity to meet other young leaders like themselves wanting to make change. The **#HopeForum** also had very practical takeaways, as youth were able to engage in critical dialogue as well as learn about tools they can use when interacting with peers, family or community members who may be going through a hard time or having suicidal thoughts. Many youth mentioned the helpfulness of the safeTALK training, in learning how to safely respond to someone who may be suicidal. Others mentioned the helpfulness of the social media safety session, where they learned about how to keep themselves and others safe on the Facebook and Instagram platforms.

Through the far reach of the **#HopeForum** (via the broadcasted event, social media engagement, and media coverage), youth participants also felt a sense of hope and empowerment. It was empowering for them to know their voices were being listened to on a national scale, and that people valued what they had to say and share. Knowing that others cared to listen, and having the opportunity to brainstorm and discuss positive change and solutions to the issues, also created feelings of hope and agency, that as young people, they can make and see positive change happen in their communities and beyond - with the ongoing support of each other. During the gathering, youth participants organized the creation of a "**#HopeForum 2018**" Facebook group, so that everyone could stay connected after the event ended. They saw this as an opportunity to keep in touch, but to also to continue to share opportunities and support each other moving forward in their work and lives.



IMPACT

COMMUNITIES/REGIONS

Through the participation of youth leaders from all regions across Canada, communities have and will continue to be impacted by the #HopeForum as well. The #HopeForum being widely broadcast through social media, the live event, and national media meant that communities, family and peers from the participant's respective regions were able to follow the gathering, tune-in, and share in the meaningful conversation and success. Youth leaders acted as representatives of their communities, bringing a sense of pride to those who know them. Young people from the various regions were also able to hear about and see coverage of the young leaders in Ottawa, which can inspire them to see hope or get involved in changemaking.

Youth participants were able to bring back the tools and knowledge they gained at the gathering, into their own communities and regions. They are now better able to respond to instances of suicide, as well as share information around hope, healing, and social media safety with family members and other youth.

When youth participants were asked how they would describe their time at the #HopeForum, some key words that came up were:



IMPACT



NATIONAL LEADERS & GENERAL PUBLIC

Not only were youth participants and their respective communities impacted by the **#HopeForum**, but the event also had an impact on national decision-makers and the Canadian public. Through the National Roundtable event and livestream, leaders and decision-makers had the opportunity to hear direct and personal accounts and experiences of youth on the issue of mental health and suicide, as well as youth-derived solutions to these issues. These insights provide organizations, decisionmakers, and those who support and work with youth with knowledge and guidance on how best to approach mental health and life promotion efforts.

Indigenous youth voices are not always heard or amplified at the national level, so the livestream and media coverage ensured youth voices a platform to be heard by all. The Canadian public was able to hear first-hand accounts of the issues and experiences Indigenous youth face, something that is not often possible, and thus deepening understanding of the context of Indigenous youth in Canada. The Calls to Action proposed also provided the public with practical solutions to address youth issues, which can be advocated for and pushed forward by anyone.



POST-#HOPEFORUM & MOVING FORWARD

In an attempt to ensure that the impact of the **#HopeForum** is sustained post-gathering, We Matter has taken considerable thought in determining how to keep everyone engaged. We hope that positive affects can continue to ripple, especially with the continued support of We Matter as an organization and online campaign. The Facebook group created by youth participants has been very active post-gathering, with youth continuing to share opportunities and offer peer support. This is a great example of the power of peer support and youth networking, and is something We Matter plans to keep active. One thing that came out of the creation of the Facebook group, was the recommendation from some of the youth in the group to have a follow-up opportunity, for participants to discuss and process challenging and lingering feelings post-gathering. A Google Hangouts call was then scheduled, so youth could have an informal debrief session, facilitated by a We Matter staff person. This was particularly helpful for those who chose to participate, and spoke to the need for ongoing supports to be available for youth involved in gatherings.

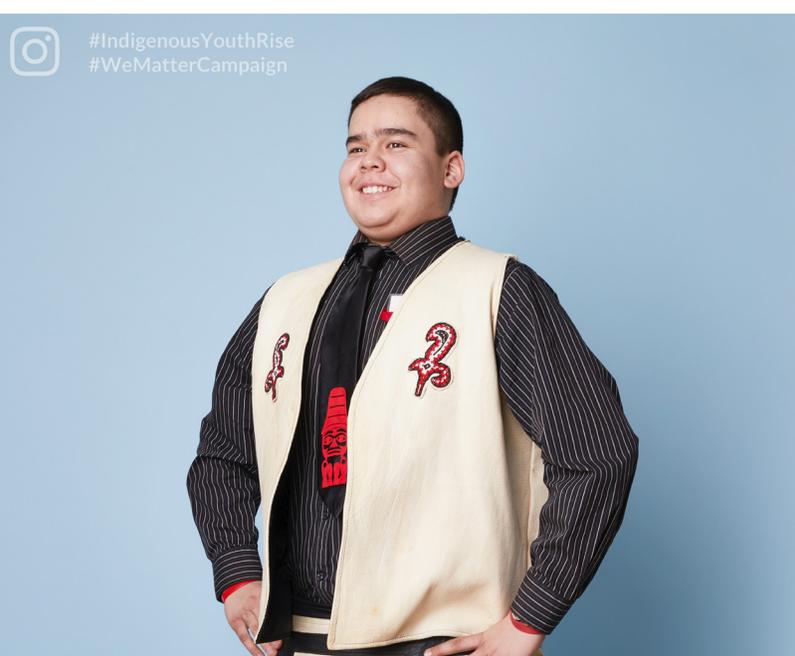
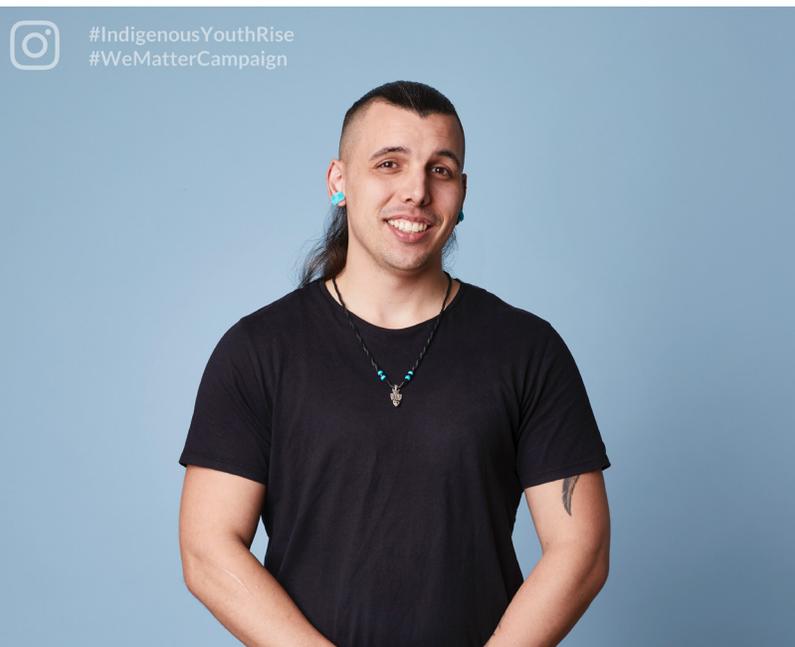
We Matter also used the **#HopeForum** as an opportunity to gauge interest from youth for a We Matter Hope Council – a council of youth involved in the brainstorming, consultation, review, and creation of We Matter content, resources, and projects. 27 youth participants expressed interest in becoming a part of a Hope Council, which would ensure youth representation from most all regions. This group will be the voice behind the direction of We Matter as an Indigenous and youth-led organization.

During the National Roundtable discussion, the Minister of Indigenous Services expressed the possibility of maintaining a relationship with the youth involved, so as to provide consultation and youth voice around policy decisions regarding mental health and life promotion. We Matter will also be making the final set of Calls to Action public, and continue to push for the implementation of these calls at the national level.



POST-#HOPEFORUM & MOVING FORWARD

As a part of the gathering, youth had the opportunity to get portraits taken by a professional photographer. This session was made possible through our Facebook partnership, and was an empowering experience for the participants, who through the portraits, were able to reflect on their power and pride as Indigenous youth. Using the photos taken, We Matter and Instagram launched a photo series via social media titled #IndigenousYouthRise. The #IndigenousYouthRise series promotes the #HopeForum youth as well as inspiring messages and quotes given by them at the time the photos were taken. This allowed We Matter's social media followers to see and celebrate the youth leaders who attended, for the youth to see themselves celebrated publicly, and also inspired other Indigenous young people following our feeds.



ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Considering this was the first **#HopeForum** to be organized and take place, it was a considerable success and achievement on many levels. That being said, there are always improvements to be made. Open-ended feedback questions were sent to We Matter and Facebook team members, youth participants, the support counsellor, and elders. The feedback provided through these was extremely positive and constructive. Some of the more constructive comments mentioned the fatigue of long days as well as the desire for more cultural sessions and activities. In the future, the **#HopeForum** can potentially be an extra day, to allow for shorter days and more session options. All feedback will be considered in the planning of any future gatherings and events, though, a common sentiment among youth participants was the hope for another **#HopeForum** to take place in the near future. This leads We Matter and Facebook to explore the possibility of regional, annual, or bi-annual gatherings.



January 21st & 22nd, 2018 // Ottawa, ON

CALLS TO ACTION

To the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Governments

- Create a policy immediately, which recognizes on-the-land and cultural activities as a key aspect of Indigenous mental health, wellness, and suicide prevention – ensuring funding dollars be available for these types of projects
- Train and provide resources for healthy adults and mature youth within communities to be effective in responding to mental health and suicide issues (this can include creating paid part-time support roles)
- Create low-barrier micro-grants available for community healing programs proven to be successful, such as: one-on-one role model mentorship programs for youth, culture-specific suicide response training, restorative justice, healing circles, and on-the-land projects
- Every youth should have the CHOICE, if they are at risk for suicide, to receive mainstream care OR funded traditional care from a healthy, trained, community member
- Every youth must have education in schools about issues like suicide and hopelessness, making clear their link to historical events and what Indigenous people have gone through. Similar education should be given to support workers, doctors, or anyone who works with Indigenous youth
- For any formal projects or positions in communities related to the above, *it must be insisted* there is a Two Spirit/LGBTQ+ teaching or awareness component involved

To Indigenous Leaders and Chiefs

- If you are spending time working and engaging with government or industry, spend equal amounts of time promoting health and healing within your community. This can include engaging in regular dialogue about emotional/mental/spiritual health, organizing intergenerational community events, and spending time with youth
- There should be a youth rep in every leadership meeting, and a youth council in every community

January 21st & 22nd, 2018 // Ottawa, ON

CALLS TO ACTION

Indigenous Communities and Parents

- Volunteer as much as you can. Cultural and recreation activities should happen every evening, regardless if people are getting paid or not (and even if it takes awhile for it to have an impact)

To Employers who have Indigenous Employees or Customers

- Work more to educate yourself so that you know how to interact with who we are and better address issues like racism, which can exist in the workplace

To Media and Public

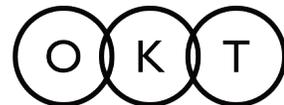
- Don't only focus on negative things about Indigenous youth and communities. Celebrate us and all the amazing things about us as much as possible. Learn about who we are and the things we are doing, uplift our voices, check out our art, listen to our music, support our movements, and share cool things about us on social media!

All these Calls to Action fit within the guidelines of the **United Nations Declaration of Human Rights** of Indigenous Peoples, and specifically relating to **Article 24**, for which implementation is very important to us.

These Calls to Action were agreed upon by **70 Indigenous youth** attending the **We Matter and Facebook #HopeForum** in Ottawa Jan 21st and 22nd 2018. The youth represented First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities from every region across Canada.

THANKS

THE 2018 #HOPEFORUM WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT
OUR PARTNERS, SUPPORTERS & FRIENDS:



To learn more about We Matter, get involved, or become a sponsor, please visit:
wemattercampaign.org



info@wemattercampaign.org



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