

Indigenous Identity and the Urban Environment

Architecture for Uncovering and Restoring Indigenous Cultures in the
City of Toronto

By
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This thesis is dedicated to the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

Miigwech

Abstract

Colonization has traumatized Indigenous peoples across Canada and the world for centuries. Due to failure to recognize rights and traditional ways of life, many Indigenous people are forced to relocate to urban areas in search of social and economic opportunities in hopes of a better future. However, the urban built environment currently does not support these urban Indigenous peoples where their identity is both physically and conceptually concealed behind colonial facades. Thus, even in an attempt to provide culturally specific space, the city is still guilty of inflicting trauma. This is especially true in the city of Toronto where, despite having the largest Indigenous population in Ontario, cultural identity is virtually non-existent.

As such, the question being investigated is, how can Indigenous presence in the city of Toronto be strengthened through restorative architecture that enhances cultural identity, not hinder it? This thesis will explore the ways in which agency can be returned to Canadian Indigenous peoples through the creation of a Living Learning Centre; a hybrid program that supports the practice of Indigenous culture in the city while fostering the education of non-Indigenous people in order to strengthen inter-cultural relationships. In doing so, the objective is to generate greater discussion about issues faced by Indigenous people, serving as a catalyst for change on a larger scale.

Key Words: Indigeneity, Identity, Urbanity, Culture, Education

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Chapter One

Introduction

For centuries, Indigenous peoples across Canada have been traumatized by colonization resulting in loss of traditional culture, language and land. Not only do these actions represent a dark part of Canadian history, they are detrimental to the well-being of all Indigenous people whose culture is essential to understanding who they are and where they come from.¹ Indigenous communities across Canada and world wide continue to battle critical challenges involving water, health, security and overall inequality; a few examples of the intergenerational systemic injustices inflicted by Canada's colonial legacy.² Today, these issues continue to echo throughout public policy and programming. One of the most significant reasons for this ongoing discrimination is a lack of advocacy for their rights, not only as Indigenous people but as human beings, due to a lack of awareness of the general public regarding the injustices they are subject to. As a result of societal failure to recognize their rights and traditional ways of life, many Indigenous peoples are leaving their communities to seek economic and social opportunities that are currently non-existent.³ Most often, those seeking better qualities of life relocate to urban areas in hopes of a better future; becoming refugees in their own country. Over 85% of Indigenous people in Canada live in urban areas, making the city just as much a norm for contemporary Indigenous culture as government designated reserves.⁴ As of 2018, the province of Ontario has the largest Indigenous population in Canada representing about 21.5% of the nation's total Indigenous peoples.⁵ Within the province, most are located in the city of Toronto, followed by Ottawa,

1 B. Joseph, "Why Continuity of Indigenous Cultural Identity Is Critical," *Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.*,

<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/why-is-indigenous-cultural-continuity-critical>.

2 "History, Culture & Diversity," in *Urban Indigenous Action Plan*, Government of Ontario, 2019, 11.

3 Ibid.

4 "Urban Indigenous People in Ontario," Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, 2013.

<http://www.ofifc.org/about-us/general-information/urban-indigenous-people-ontario>

5 Ibid.

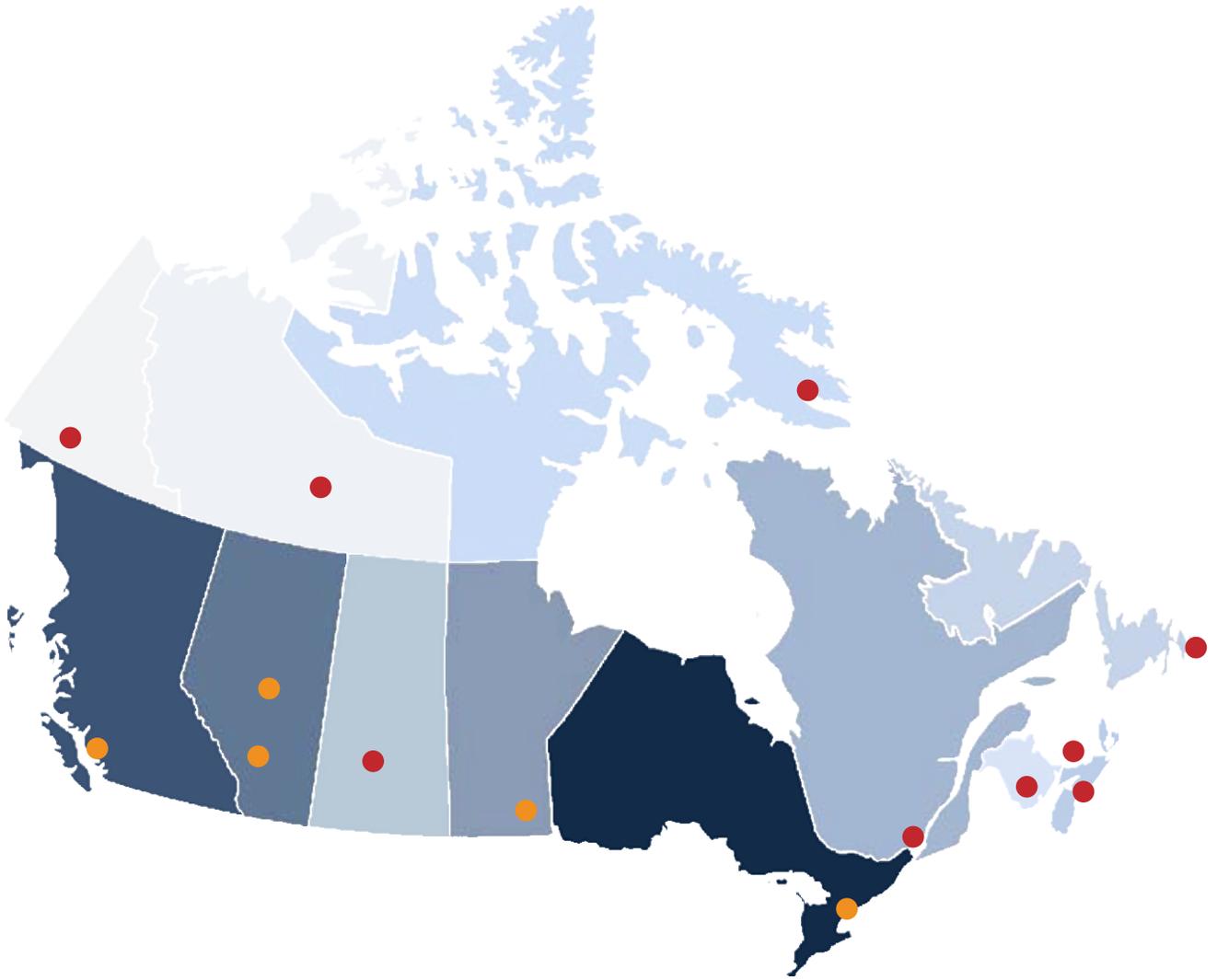


Figure 1.0 Indigenous Population Map

This map depicts the provinces in Canada with the largest densities of Indigenous populations. The gradient of colour represents the density in that particular province with the darkest having the largest Indigenous population and the lightest representing the smallest. Evidently, the province of Ontario has the largest population of Indigenous people (374,000). The red circles represent the cities in each province with the most Indigenous people. Those in orange represent the top 5 cities.

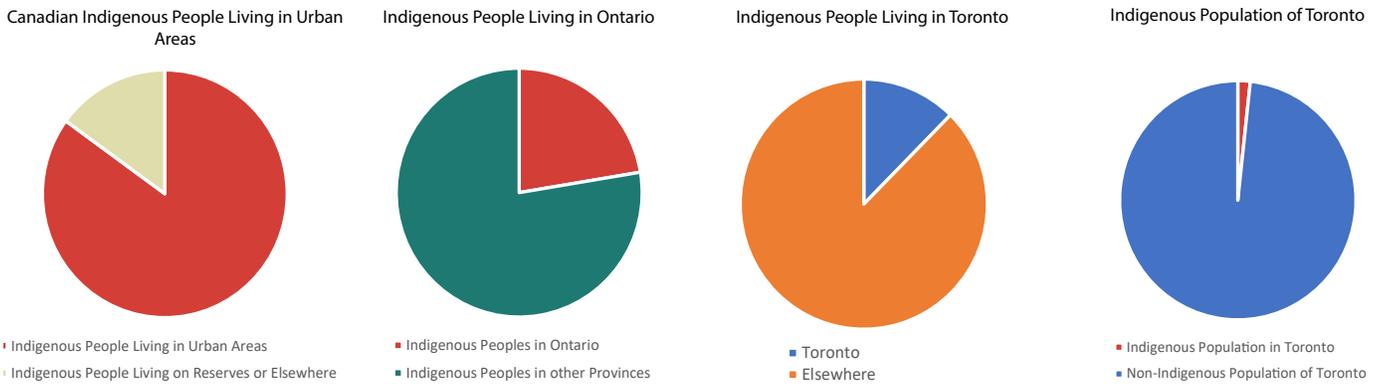


Figure 1.1 Urban Indigenous Statistics

Sudbury, Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie.⁶ In the 1950's roughly 300 Indigenous people were recorded to be living in the city of Toronto and, as of 2016, this population had grown to approximately 46,315 people.⁷ However, this number is likely significantly higher and is misrepresented due to inappropriate government methods of data collection.⁸ With more Indigenous people living in urban areas, the city is becoming an integral part of Indigenous lives, representing a modern cultural reality. This transition generates its own new set of challenges including the search for employment and interacting with other value and belief systems to name a few.⁹ What's more, policies implemented by the Canadian government intended to "protect" Indigenous culture are generally only applicable to those living within the jurisdiction of the reserves, leaving urban Indigenous peoples in the in-between with little political support.¹⁰

In addition to the statistical evidence that suggests Toronto is a site of interest, the region has a long history of Indigenous occupation that has been traced to a time well before the arrival of European settlers. Yet, even with a past ingrained in tradition, the city of Toronto fails to support and represent Indigenous identity in the built environment. This leads to the question of why, in a city that prides itself on diversity and acceptance, are Indigenous peoples excluded? Furthermore, how can Indigenous presence in Toronto be strengthened through restorative architecture that enhances cultural identity, not hinder it? This thesis will explore the ways in which agency can be returned to Canadian Indigenous peoples through an architectural intervention in the city of Toronto that addresses the lack of awareness and education of the general public about social and political injustices and encourages advocacy for the equitable distribution of

⁶ "Urban Indigenous People in Ontario," Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, 2013,

<http://www.ofifc.org/about-us/general-information/urban-indigenous-people-ontario>

⁷ "Indigenous people of Toronto," City of Toronto, 2016, <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/indigenous-affairs-office/torontos-indigenous-peoples/>.

⁸ Megan Mueller, "Toronto has twice as many urban Indigenous people than previously believed," York University Research and Innovation, 2019, <https://research.info.yorku.ca/2019/05/toronto-has-twice-as-many-urban-indigenous-peoplethan-previously-believed/>.

⁹ David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, "Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples," Government of Canada, 2013, 5.

¹⁰ Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation Council Members, interview with author, Hagersville, Ontario, November 12, 2019.

social opportunities to Indigenous people. This thesis is developed in response to the ongoing systemic injustices experienced by Canadian Indigenous people as a direct result of Canada's colonial legacy and culturally genocidal actions. In doing so, this project will contribute to greater movements of reconciliation and cultural healing. This will be accomplished through the creation of a Living Learning Centre - a hybrid program that supports the practice of Indigenous culture in the city of Toronto while fostering the education of non-Indigenous people in order to strengthen inter-cultural relationships. In doing so, the objective is to generate greater discussion about issues faced by Indigenous people, serving as a catalyst for larger scale change.



Figure 1.2 Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres supports community building in the city

Chapter Two

Jiigbiig - Along the Shore

A Brief History of Indigenous Peoples in Tkaronto

There is an enduring myth that, before the arrival of Europeans, most of North America was an untouched wilderness; a story often used to justify settler takeover of Indigenous lands. As a result, many histories of North American places begin with the arrival of settlers which contributes to the erasure of Indigenous presence within these locales.¹¹ The history of the city of Toronto is also misleading as it continues this pattern. Despite common belief, the Toronto region has been occupied by Indigenous peoples for at least 11,000 years.¹² At the time Europeans started visiting the North shores of Lake Ontario in the 17th century, there were already approximately 65,000 Indigenous people inhabiting the region who were later known by settlers as the Iroquois.¹³ Over time, the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples have each lived in the Toronto area, leaving a distinct environmental legacy that is still evident in the city's landscape and often in place names.¹⁴

Toronto is located on the traditional territory of the Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation who are part of the Ojibway Nation; one of the largest in North America.¹⁵ This came to be after many years of conflict over territory between both Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations. The arrival of Europeans in the early 1600s caused tensions among Indigenous

11 Victoria Freeman, "Indigenous Hauntings in Settler-Colonial Spaces: The Activism of Indigenous Ancestors in the City of Toronto," in *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 213.

12 A. Rodney Bobiwash, "The History of Native People in the Toronto Area, An Overview," *The Meeting Place: Aboriginal Life in Toronto* (Toronto: The Native Canadian Centre, 1997), 7

13 *Ibid.*, 11

14 Jon Johnson, "The Indigenous Environmental History of Toronto, 'The Meeting Place,'" in *Urban Explorations: Environmental Histories of the Toronto Region* (Hamilton: L.R. Wilson Institute for Canadian History, 2013), 59

15 "The History of the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation," Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Ontario, <http://mncfn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-History-of-MNCFN-FINAL.pdf>. 1



Figure 2.0 Indigenous Place Names of the Greater Toronto Area

communities and increasingly complex economic and political alliances with two main competing European groups - England and France.¹⁶ As the Iroquois desired access to territories with an abundance of fur bearing animals in an attempt to monopolize the fur trade, conflicts between nations had intensified by the 1650's with the Iroquois attacking the neutral Huron groups.¹⁷ Survivors sought refuge in distant areas, many of which the Anishinaabe people of the north took in.¹⁸ In the early 1690s, the Anishinaabe peoples of the upper Great Lakes Region allied as The Three Fires (Ojibway, Odawa and Potawatomi) and initiated a series of attacks, of which the Mississaugas played a key role, that pushed the Iroquois back into their original territory south of Lake Ontario.¹⁹ At this point, as the Anishinaabe peoples moved into southern Ontario, the Mississaugas settled on the land between Toronto and Lake Erie.²⁰ They came to view this area as their traditional territory, which specifically includes the lands spanning from the Rouge River to the Thames River, then southerly to Long Point on Lake Erie then down the lake to the Niagara River and back to the Rouge River.²¹ The trading posts that developed in the region belonging to both the English and the French by the 1750s often extended trading credit to the Mississauga people at a particular river location in the Toronto region.²² As a result, the river became known as the Credit River and the Indigenous people inhabiting the region became known as the Mississaugas of the Credit.²³ However, with increasing Euro-Canadian settlement in the Toronto area after 1800, pressure on the Mississaugas of the Credit intensified and, despite petitions to the colonial government to secure land rights, the Mississaugas of the Credit realized their livelihoods were in jeopardy.²⁴

16 "The History of the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation," Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Ontario, <http://mncfn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-History-of-MNCFN-FINAL.pdf>. 5

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 10

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 9

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid. 12

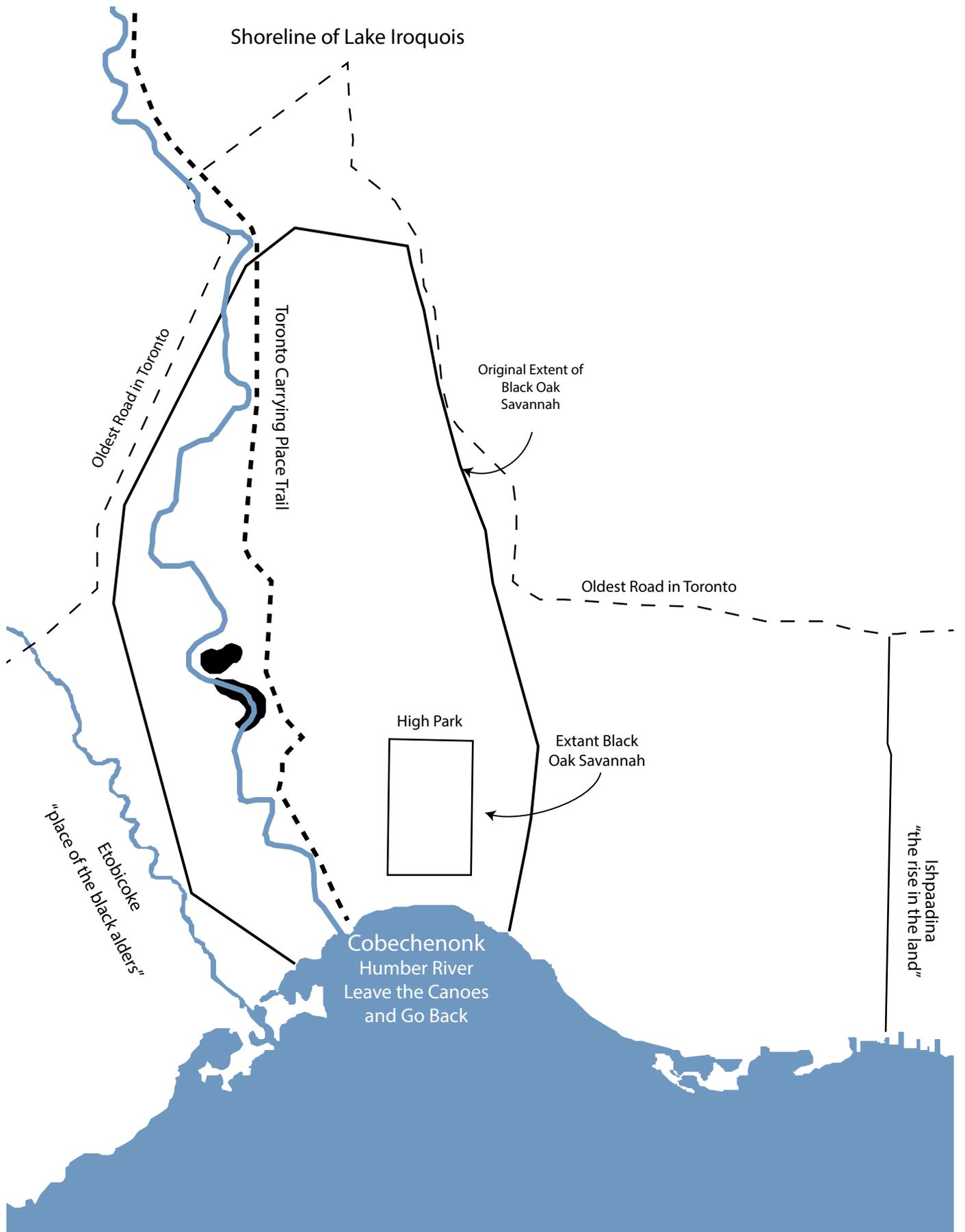


Figure 2.1 Indigenous Place Names of Downtown Toronto



Figure 2.2 Paul Kane's painting of "Ojibway encampment at Lake Ontario"

The community would need to relocate to an area less disturbed by settlement to protect their people and traditional ways of life. After much consideration, the Mississaugas of the Credit accepted an offer from the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy in 1848 to establish a new settlement on a portion of land adjacent to their own reserve in what is known today as Hagersville, Ontario.²⁵ Ironically, this land, in the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, had been granted to the Six Nations for settlement upon request of the British government in 1784.²⁶ While the Mississaugas of the Credit have relocated to the outermost edge of their land, evidence of their presence in Toronto and the greater region of southern Ontario remains.

Along with a history of Indigenous

²⁵ "The History of the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation," Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Ontario, <http://mncfn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-History-of-MNCFN-FINAL.pdf>. 12.
²⁶ Ibid.

inhabitation, the Toronto landscape has various environmental and geographical features that have historically allowed Indigenous societies to thrive in the area by developing a spiritual connection with the landscape. Through this relationship, Indigenous lands and Indigenous peoples became extensions of one another. The Toronto islands were an important element of the land, described by Indigenous societies as places of healing and spiritual renewal.²⁷ The region also offered rich habitat for both Indigenous societies and various species of flora and fauna due to the climatic phenomena made possible by the lake. With the water's ability to moderate seasonal temperatures, the lake created favourable climatic conditions for groups practicing hunting and gathering as well as agricultural activities with milder winters and longer summers.²⁸ Furthermore, the area became known as "The Meeting

²⁷ A. Rodney Bobiwash, "The History of Native People in the Toronto Area, An Overview," *The Meeting Place: Aboriginal Life in Toronto*, 5.
²⁸ Ibid.



Figure 2.3 "Gathering wild rice in late September" by Captain Seth Eastman

Place" where Indigenous societies traveled from all over for purposes of commerce and ceremony thousands of years prior to European contact.²⁹ Artifacts found in the region suggest that complex trading networks were developed with objects identified as being from as far as the Ohio Valley and Gulf of Mexico to the north shore of Lake Superior and James Bay.³⁰ Interestingly, the city of Toronto is still very much a meeting place as a contemporary city.

In addition to documentation of people and artifacts that have been found, the city of Toronto still uses traditional knowledge of the land in modern day through place names. Many names of streets, cities, rivers and neighbourhoods in the city are derived from land based knowledge of various First Nations groups that inhabited the area over time.³¹ For

example, the busy Toronto street known as Spadina comes from the Anishinaabe word *Ishpaadina* which translates to 'rise in the land' and refers to the natural bluff which runs east to west at the northern terminus of Spadina Road. This geographical feature marks the original shoreline of a glacial lake known as Lake Iroquois at the base of which (today Davenport Road) is a historic footpath traveled by the Mississauga people for centuries, making it the oldest road in the city.³² The abundance of rivers in the area that connect to other waterways between the Great Lakes and along the St. Lawrence River also made this region desirable for Indigenous peoples as they were able to facilitate movement over vast areas with ease. Of these aquatic travel routes, the Humber River played a particularly significant role in terms of travel and trade. The river is accompanied by a major portage route known as the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8

³¹ Jon Johnson, "The Indigenous Environmental History of Toronto, 'The Meeting Place,'" in *Urban Explorations: Environmental Histories of the Toronto Region*, 59.

³² Donald Smith, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 23.

'Carrying Place Trail' which was used by Indigenous people to travel between Georgian Bay, Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario.³³ The Mississauga people called the river Cobechenonk which translated to 'leave the canoes and go back' or 'portage' making this one of the fastest routes between Barrie and southern Ontario.³⁴ With ease of transportation, several Indigenous villages were known to have existed along the river.³⁵ However, with the establishment of cities and growing urban populations, this traditional understanding of the land and the relationships Indigenous people share with the land have been forever changed.

Along with displacement, another injustice experienced by Indigenous peoples is discrimination, actions that continue in the 21st century. Particularly in the city of Toronto, there is a long history of stereotyping reinforced with media stories involving violence, crime and poverty.³⁶ Not only has this contributed to an overwhelming stigma that misrepresents Indigenous people and culture, it has also resulted in an extremely unwelcoming environment for those who migrated to the city in the early 20th century until today. This is evident in Toronto's Indigenous programming where most services are focused on rehabilitation in relation to health, disease and legal counsel, not community and culture. Another way in which this discrimination continues is through methods of data collection. The ability of a nation or municipality to count its inhabitants is important to be able to appropriately serve the population and ensure that marginalized groups receive adequate health and social services. Indigenous peoples constitute one of the demographics in Toronto that are underrepresented with insufficient social services due to a misunderstanding of the size of the population.

³³ Jon Johnson, "The Indigenous Environmental History of Toronto, 'The Meeting Place,'" in *Urban Explorations: Environmental Histories of the Toronto Region*, 61.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jasmine Chorley, "Disappearing into White Space: Indigenous Toronto, 1900-1914," *Active History*, 2015, <http://activehistory.ca/papers/disappearing-in-to-white-space-indigenous-toronto1900-1914/>.



Figure 2.4 OFIFC Mural

Urban Indigenous peoples in particular have been historically misrepresented in various forms of data collection due to lack of participation from Indigenous peoples based on factors including poverty, non-fixed address, distrust of government, colonial policies and questions regarding Indigenous identity.³⁷ Altogether, inappropriate methods of gaining information about the city's population further contributes to the hardships already being experienced by the urban Indigenous community and increases implications for other impoverished groups within the city.

In summary, the city of Toronto and its greater region have a long history of Indigenous occupation that predates the arrival of European settlers into the territory. While many documented histories begin at the time of contact, many Indigenous societies had already inhabited the area for thousands of years prior and had developed spiritual and familial connections to the land. Today, elements of the Greater Toronto Area, including place names, are whispers of Toronto's Indigenous environmental history, alluding to both historical and ongoing relationships with the land. Despite inscriptions of First Nations history, there is currently a lack of recognition of Indigenous presence on these lands both in the past and in present day. The widespread displacement of Indigenous people from their traditional lands undermined treaties that had been established between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as well as the mutual relationships of reciprocity that Indigenous societies fostered among themselves and their territories.³⁸ The destruction of these relationships and the corresponding loss of traditional knowledge based on the land has been detrimental to Indigenous people, not just in southern Ontario, but across the country. While efforts to re-establish this connection to the land are gaining momentum, increasing awareness of historic and current Indigenous presence in urban areas is vital to contributing to cultural healing.

³⁷ Megan Mueller, "Toronto has twice as many urban Indigenous people than previously believed," York University Research and Innovation, 2019, <https://research.info.yorku.ca/2019/05/toronto-has-twice-as-many-urban-indigenous-peoplethan-previously-believed/>.

³⁸ Jon Johnson, "The Indigenous Environmental History of Toronto, 'The Meeting Place,'" in *Urban Explorations: Environmental Histories of the Toronto Region*, 69.



Figure 2.5 Toronto City Hall, Nathan Phillips Square

Chapter Three

The Significance of the Urban Cultural Centre A Typology of Evolution

With continual growth of the urban Indigenous population, the metropolitan cultural centre is becoming an increasingly important architectural typology. While urban built environments often obscure cultural presence, these places, also known as Friendship Centres, come to represent collective Indigenous identity with trajectories that generally lie beyond the realm of architecture and design. For Indigenous peoples who have relocated to urban areas, these cultural centres are more than a building; they are serving as places of emergence that support the practice of traditional culture, education and service provision in an unfamiliar environment.³⁹ Emerging from a transnational grassroots movement in the 1950s, these centres became community hubs where Indigenous peoples living in urban areas could access culturally appropriate services that allowed urban Indigenous peoples to thrive.⁴⁰ While contemporary Indigenous identity is constructed in complex ways, the significance of these cultural centres is that they are often extra-architectural such that they actively facilitate reconciliation and are constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of the people in addition to the contemporary realities of Indigenous culture. In other words, these metropolitan cultural centres are places of familiarity for urban Indigenous people where they can find familial and spiritual connection to their culture in a safe space.

During colonization, Indigenous peoples were often moved to the periphery of the settlement

³⁹ Janet McGraw and Anoma Pieris, "Introduction: cultural centres, identity and assemblages," in *Assembling the Centre: Architecture for Indigenous Cultures Australia and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.

⁴⁰ "Welcome to the OFIFC," Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, 2013, <http://www.ofifc.org/>.



Figure 3.0 Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, 1997

where their presence was furtive and limited to appropriations of highly colonial buildings.⁴¹ Indigenous presence gained visibility globally in the 1960s in the form of protests and other political occupations in an attempt to allow colonist cities to see First Peoples from a new perspective.⁴² As an architectural response, the urban Indigenous cultural centre became legitimized as a mechanism for facilitating political reconciliation in the 1990s, though informal cultural centres were established by urban Indigenous peoples much earlier.⁴³ For the city of Toronto, the first Indigenous Friendship Centre was established in the 1950s by members of the urban Indigenous community who

began meeting at the YMCA located on College Street, becoming known as the Canadian Indian Club.⁴⁴ Consisting of volunteers who organized social events, cultural activities and provided some social services, the objective of the Canadian Indian Club was to strengthen relationships between members of the urban Indigenous community in the city of Toronto while assisting those who were new to the city to navigate urban life.⁴⁵ Eventually, the Canadian Indian Club moved out of the YMCA and relocated several times before finally moving to 16 Spadina Road [figure 3.2] in 1976 where they remain today.⁴⁶ The name of the Centre was also changed to the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto

41 Janet McGraw and Anoma Pieris, "Introduction: cultural centres, identity and assemblages," in *Assembling the Centre: Architecture for Indigenous Cultures Australia and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.

42 Ibid. 3

43 Ibid.

44 A. Rodney Bobiwash, "The History of Native People in the Toronto Area, An Overview," in *The Meeting Place: Aboriginal Life in Toronto*, 25.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid. 38



Figure 3.1 20th anniversary of the Native Canadian Centre, 1997



Figure 3.2 Native Canadian Centre of Toronto

four years earlier in 1972.⁴⁷ The Native Canadian Centre is more than a building; it has been a positive force in maintaining cultural identity within the city of Toronto and has served as a place where people from diverse First Nations gather to share stories and work together to develop the Indigenous community that exists in the city today.⁴⁸ Moreover, the intent was to provide a place for Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Toronto community to interact in order to promote equitable relationships between the people of the four directions.

These urban cultural centres are important to diverse cultural groups, even those that are non-Indigenous, as they maintain and strengthen relationships to an individuals' ancestral roots. As such, each cultural group is deserving of an architecture that appropriately expresses culture and provides space that is effectively able to meet the needs of users. However, in many urban centres such as the city of Toronto, Indigenous cultural centres and respective programming are often limited to appropriations of buildings where they are hidden behind colonial building facades; physically and conceptually concealing the presence of Indigenous peoples in the city. This contributes to the historical trend of Indigenous people in the city being "invisible" or non-existent. Also, while there are some services available for the Indigenous community of Toronto, they often do not meet all user needs due to both a lack of availability and funding.

Through an analysis of cultural centres in the Toronto area, it is evident

47 A. Rodney Bobiwash, "The History of Native People in the Toronto Area, An Overview," in *The Meeting Place: Aboriginal Life in Toronto*, 38.

48 Ibid. 25



Figure 3.3 Native Canadian Centre Totem Pole

that those intended for non-Indigenous cultures are freely able to express their cultural identity through colour, signage and symbols making them easily identifiable and iconic within the city. Many of these centres are also state of the art facilities that have been designed by high profile architects informed by specific cultural groups with multi-million dollar budgets. Such is the case with Charles Correa's Ismaili Centre in Toronto [figure 6.4]; a building that corresponds with traditional Islamic architecture and culture through a contemporary design and modern materials. On the other hand, almost all Indigenous cultural centres and other service centres in the city of Toronto are located in highly colonial buildings, often reminiscent of residential schools, with little to no expression of cultural identity. In doing so, the city is still inflicting trauma that directly undermines the significance of the cultural centre as a site of cultural healing. Based on these continual acts of indirect cultural elimination, there is a growing need for metropolitan Indigenous cultural centres that serve the urban Indigenous community and celebrate culture in a way that both the Indigenous community and the city of Toronto can take pride in. Now more than ever, the presence of Indigenous identity in the built environment is vital to the maintenance and revitalization of culture in order to counter colonialism.

While the city of Toronto is currently lacking Indigenous space in the built environment that is culturally expressive, the establishment of a Living Learning Centre in the city of Toronto would support the crafting of Indigenous culture in the city through architecture that is culturally reflective. In doing

so, the Living Learning Centre will begin to address decades of Indigenous identity being concealed within the city and create a new standard for the future architectural development of Indigenous spaces that both the city and the urban Indigenous community can take pride in. Through consultation with various Indigenous groups and organizations that represent Indigenous people in the city, a design for the Living Learning Centre can be imagined that is culturally appropriate based on regional contexts while also providing a welcoming space for Indigenous peoples across the country.



Figure 3.4 Ismaili Centre, Toronto



Figure 3.7 Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, Toronto



Figure 3.5 Noor Cultural Centre, Toronto



Figure 3.8 Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, Toronto



Figure 3.6 Chinese Cultural Centre, Toronto



Figure 3.9 Aboriginal Education Centre, Toronto

There is an undeniable physical difference in the way that Indigenous Cultural Centres are represented in the city of Toronto in comparison to non-Indigenous Cultural Centres. Many non-Indigenous cultural centres, a few of which are depicted on the left of the adjacent page, are multi-million dollar facilities often designed by world renowned architects. These Centres are reminiscent of culturally relevant architecture and relate to traditional forms through colour, symbolism, signage and material. Indigenous Cultural Centres, on the other hand, are hidden in highly colonial buildings that are not culturally expressive in anyway. Furthermore, many of them are reminiscent of Residential Schools which can make gathering in these places a traumatic experience for some people. While many of the Indigenous organizations that occupy these buildings are proud of the space they have, the urban Indigenous community is deserving of a state of the art facility that celebrates cultural identity in the same was as other Centres in the city.

Chapter Four

Uncovering Indigenous Identity in the Urban Environment Initiatives of Cultural Acknowledgment Underway

Based on the need to increase awareness of indigenous Presence throughout the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), several projects are already underway with a similar trajectory of educating non-Indigenous peoples about the history of the land in which they inhabit. A few examples of these movements include the Moccasin Identifier Project, the Residential School Survivor Legacy Project and the inclusion of Anishinaabemowin places names on street signs in an attempt to recognize the history of the area. The objective of these projects is to increase awareness of Indigenous presence in and around urban communities and to educate the public about Indigenous history. These projects, spearheaded by members of local Indigenous communities, are important to strengthen Indigenous identity in areas that have been densified by non-Indigenous populations and in making a statement that Indigenous peoples have been integral to urban developments that exist today; a contribution that needs to be acknowledged and one they should continue to be an integral part of. These projects symbolize a sort of next step in land acknowledgments in order to educate non-Indigenous peoples about whose land they are on. The objective of the Giiwed Living Learning Centre is to contribute to these efforts of recognizing Indigenous territory through the creation of a space that assists in educating the public at a more intimate level.



Figure 4.0 Anishinaabemowin Place Names



Figure 4.1 Residential School Survivors Legacy



Figure 4.2 Moccasin Identifier

Chapter Five

Maanjiwe Nendamowin - Gathering of Minds

Community Engagement

To ensure that the Living Learning Centre appropriately serves the urban Indigenous community of Toronto, a significant portion of research has focused on community consultation. Three primary groups have been engaged to help inform this design project and include the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation whose traditional territory includes the Toronto area as well as the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres and the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, both of which aim to improve the quality of life for urban Indigenous people. These groups have a strong understanding of how urban Indigenous peoples can be better served as well as the ways in which the built environment fails to support them currently.

Based on preliminary consultation, these groups confirmed that there is both a desire and a need to implement opportunities to strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and facilitate the education of the general public in order to eliminate stereotypes against Indigenous members of the urban community. Furthermore, representatives from these groups shared their vision for the future development of spaces of cultural familiarity for Indigenous peoples in the city that serve as sites where this inter-cultural interaction can occur; a place reminiscent of home. In addition to providing spaces where Indigenous peoples can connect and share stories with others, there is a need for strategies that contribute to financial sustainability in order to support existing Indigenous cultural centres and the people they serve as well as provide additional space where existing programming can occur.

With the insight gained from preliminary engagement sessions, an analysis was conducted on existing cultural centres in the city of Toronto to investigate the ways in which they are currently supporting the urban Indigenous population based on their mission statement as well as the current and projected provision of services and programming. The objective was to gain a better understanding of the elements of programming and services that are successfully serving the Indigenous community as well as those that are falling short based on a series of diverse criteria including:

1. **Governance** (working toward achieving autonomy)
2. **Cultural Education** (transmission of traditional knowledge and skills to other Indigenous peoples)
3. **Research** (investigating opportunities to improve quality of life for Indigenous people)
4. **Leadership and Development** (fostering a sense of pride in future generations to continue to work toward cultural healing and justice)
5. **Outreach** (improving relationships with and educating non-Indigenous people about traditional culture)

This analysis was conducted on three of the primary Indigenous cultural centres in the city of Toronto which include the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre and the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. While there are other organizations in the city that offer services and programming for matters such as health, legal council and the arts, these centres provide a vast spectrum of programming and focus most closely on offering diverse cultural activities. To accomplish this, the characteristics of each cultural centre was mapped in order to achieve a more precise comparison.



Figure 5.0 Flags in Nathan Phillips Square

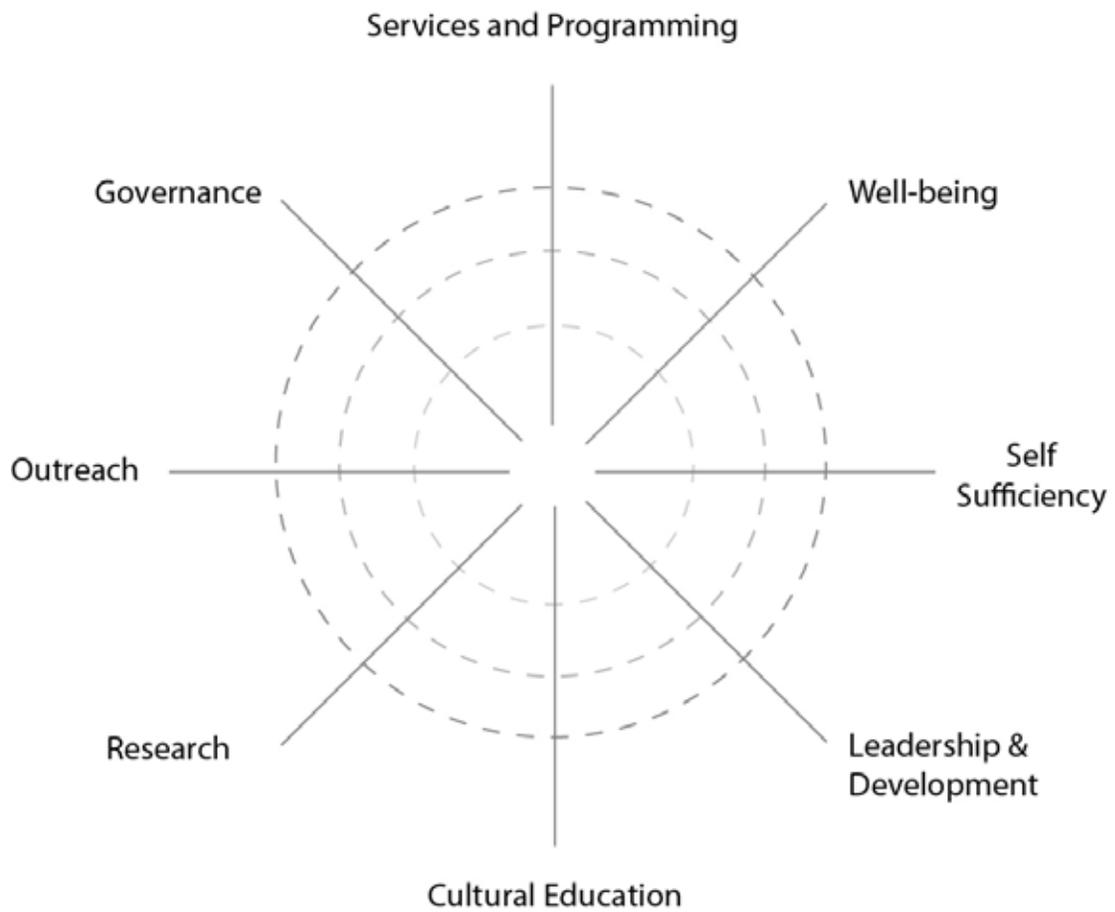


Figure 5.1 Criteria developed for program analysis of exiting social infrastructure based on consultation

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres is an organization that works to support and build capacity of membership for affiliated friendship centres across the province. These friendship centres emerged in the 1950's and served as community hubs for Indigenous peoples living in towns and cities that provide culturally based services to Indigenous peoples on a daily basis.⁴⁹ While the OFIFC does not necessarily provide services through their own centre, they help to ensure that urban Indigenous people have access to them at local levels throughout Ontario with the 29 other friendship centres that they serve. As such, this organization is constantly seeking new and innovative ways to address challenges faced by Indigenous peoples while improving their quality of life in whichever city they are located in. Upon investigation, it became apparent that the OFIFC's primary focus is community-based research and the development of a research framework that allows Indigenous peoples to control the priorities, methodologies and actions associated with research. In addition to this, another important aspect of the OFIFC is associated with leadership and development where they are seeking opportunities to instill a sense of leadership in younger members of urban Indigenous communities. This will ensure that current efforts and ongoing movements will continue in the future. While this organization does not provide services and programming to members of Toronto's Indigenous community specifically, they play a much larger role in overall community well-being.

The next analysis was conducted on the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, a vibrant cultural agency that is committed to the well-being of urban First Nations People. The centre provides counselling and other direct services to the Indigenous Toronto community to enhance spiritual and personal growth. The centre focuses on using culture and traditional language as the basis for all work and to encourage the Indigenous

⁴⁹ Julian Robbins, Research Associate at the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, interview with author, Toronto, November 14, 2019.

community to participate in the areas of arts and culture, family, education, business and information technology. Based on this exploration, it is obvious that the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre puts great emphasis on the provision of culturally relevant services and programming as well as the well-being of the Indigenous community in the city. The centre also provides cultural education to members of the community and assists in fostering leadership among members.

The final centre that was analyzed was the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, the city's oldest friendship centre. Since the 1960s, this centre has been an important meeting place for people of all nations across the country and has maintained a focus on spiritual, physical, emotional and mental well-being.⁵⁰ While this centre shares many traits of the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, such as supporting cultural education and promoting physical and spiritual well-being, the centre also emphasizes the importance of governance.

While existing cultural and friendship centres in the city of Toronto provide a generally well-rounded array of services, this analysis revealed that these centres are currently not addressing the concerns expressed during preliminary community consultation. Based on a review of my analysis, the mapping identified gaps in existing program and service provision, making it apparent that current programming is lacking in terms of outreach to improve relationships with non-Indigenous members of the community and financial self-sufficiency [figure 5.4] This study aided in the development of the Living Learning Centre program through the discovery of

the ways in which it could better serve the urban Indigenous community in the city of Toronto by filling in programmatic gaps that existing infrastructure currently cannot fill.

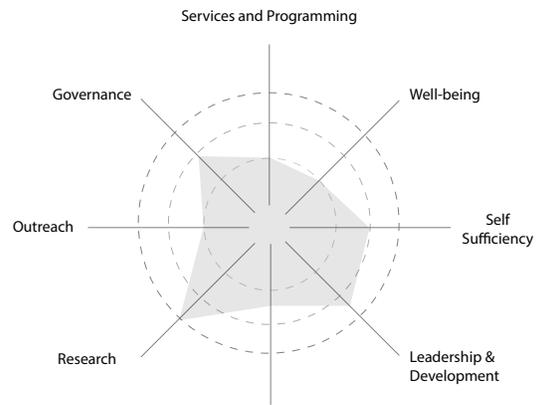


Figure 5.2 OFIFC Analysis

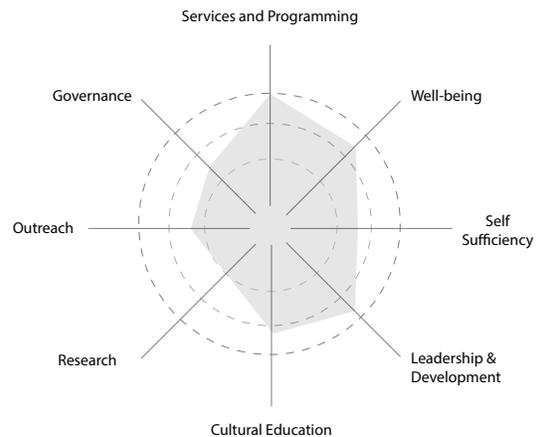


Figure 5.3 Toronto Council Fire Analysis

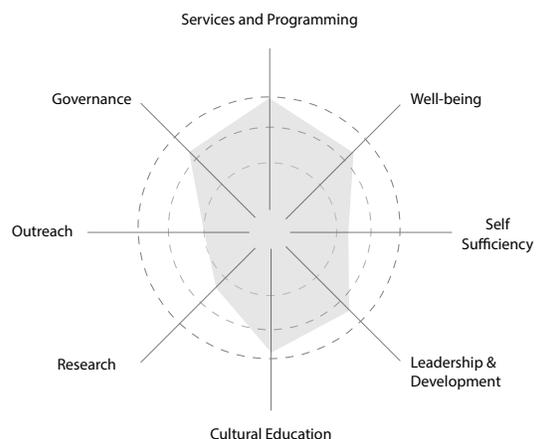


Figure 5.4 Native Canadian Centre Analysis

⁵⁰ "History," Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, 2019, <https://ncct.on.ca/about-us/>.

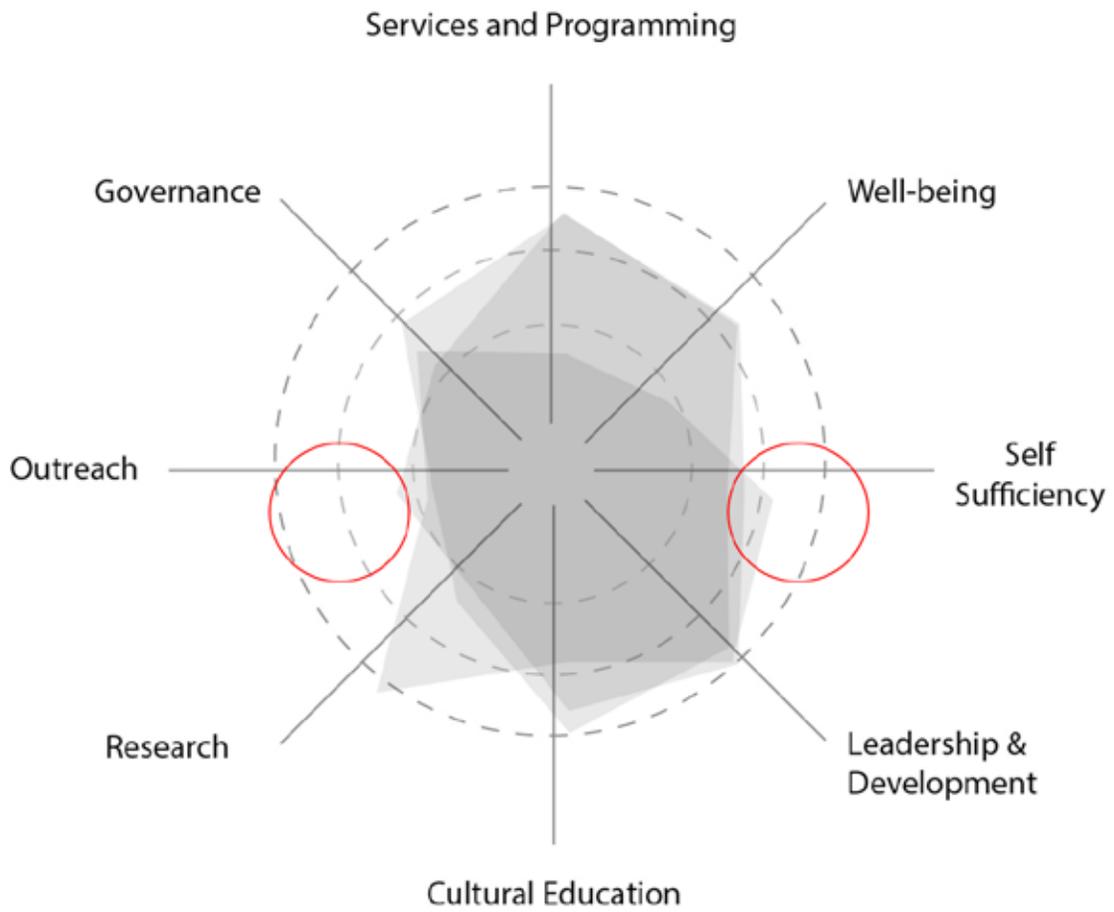


Figure 5.5 Areas that current Indigenous programming in the city of Toronto are not addressing

Chapter Six

Story of the Site

A Complex Narrative

The proposed site for the Living Learning Centre is adjacent to Nathan Phillips Square in downtown Toronto. Located just off the podium of Toronto City Hall, this direct relationship to the civic hub literally and metaphorically demands the attention of the metropolis by bringing the urban Indigenous community into focus and ensures that their social, political and physical presence will no longer be concealed in the urban environment. This is supported by the variety of public events that take place in Nathan Phillips Square year-round, creating abundant opportunities for settler societies to interact with the Living Learning Centre. This proximity also allows for the potential of the centre to support external events through the provision of additional indoor space which may also contribute to the generation of income for the urban Indigenous community when the space is rented out to other organizations. Therefore, even if the public is not engaging with the Centre directly, this careful site selection allows the architecture to indirectly impact the Toronto community through its omnipresence in the city's core. With heavy pedestrian and vehicular traffic along the major arterial route known as Queen Street (West), the architecture serves as a reminder of Indigenous presence in our community and the need to move forward in order to better achieve healing and reconciliation.

The immediate and surrounding context of the proposed site for the Living Learning Centre contributes to the greater narrative of reconciliation. Critically wedged between Toronto City Hall and Osgoode Hall, the Living Learning Centre juxtaposes adjacent civic and legal programs by suggesting a new way of engaging with the ways in which citizens and, by extension, our country is

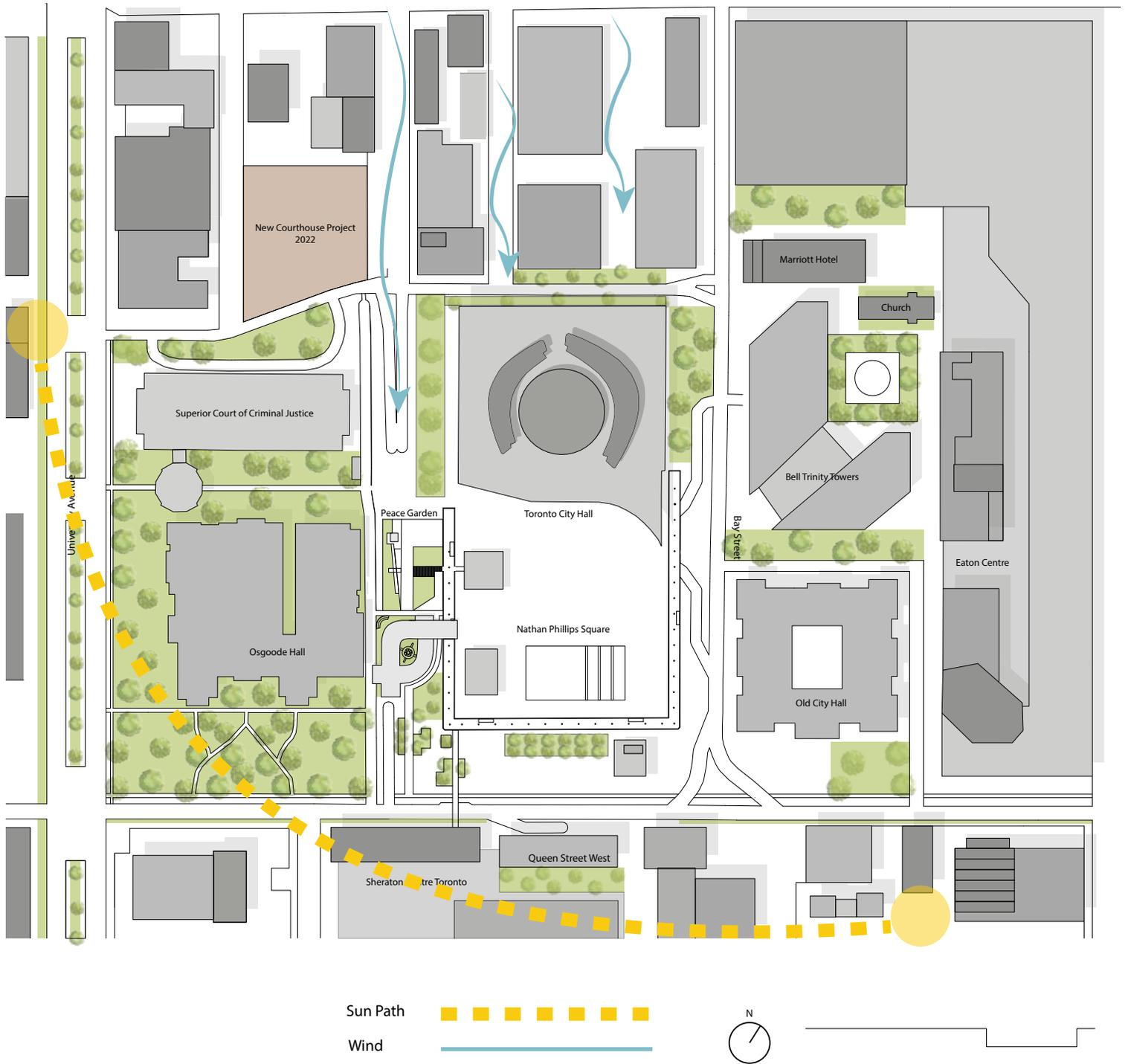


Figure 6.0 Site Plan



Figure 6.1 Site Model

governed and presents itself. Furthermore, in the midst of this highly political site, the Centre serves as a reminder of the presence of Indigenous peoples in the city and their role in its development both in the past and in the future. This is particularly controversial as the concepts of hierarchical government and written law represented by the courthouses and civic centre are not used by Indigenous peoples and thus are not native to this country. In doing so, the site tells the story of our failure to acknowledge Indigenous traditions in vital decision making processes that influence society and contribute to colonial attitudes. The introduction of the Living Learning Centre on this site suggests a shift in thinking toward a decolonized approach in order to continue working toward reconciliation.

This site is also in an ideal location to serve as a hub to other Indigenous

services and organizations in the city of Toronto. While most services and organizations are in the downtown core, they are located within a maximum twenty-five to thirty minute walk from the Living Learning Centre though a majority are located within a ten to fifteen minute walk. These services and organizations include friendship and cultural centres, legal council, short term housing, health clinics and more which are readily accessible to the urban Indigenous community. In serving as the hub, the Living Learning Centre is intended to be the first point of contact for Indigenous peoples who are new to or unfamiliar with the city of Toronto. Here, they will be able to gain information about culturally relevant services within the city based on individual need as well as where to find them through this information hub. Moreover, by redirecting people to facilities that already exist and



Figure 6.2 Immediate Site Context

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Nathan Phillips Square | 6. "Equal Before the Law" Sculpture |
| 2. Toronto City Hall | 7. Old City Hall |
| 3. Osgoode Hall | 8. Bell Trinity Tower |
| 4. Superior Court of Criminal Justice | 9. New Courthouse Project (2022) |
| 5. Peace Garden Eternal Flame | 10. Proposed Site for Teaching, Learning, Sharing and Healing Space |

provide culturally relevant services rather than recreating them, the Living Learning Centre supports established businesses and organizations while ensuring that Indigenous peoples in the city are well looked after.

Another significant feature of this site is that it is the future location of the permanent Indian Residential School Survivor Legacy Project; a teaching, learning, sharing and healing space that responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action 82. This action requests the establishment of publicly accessible and highly visible reminders of Residential Schools in each capital city across Canada to honour survivors and all children who were lost.⁵¹ This landscape architecture project, designed by Brian Porter and his firm Two Row Architect, is projected to be completed by 2022 and celebrates diverse Indigenous Nations while bringing awareness to the Residential School tragedies. The garden incorporates elements that represent various Indigenous cultures as well as a sculpture of a turtle with the names of all Residential Schools that operated in Ontario etched onto its shell. The turtle is symbolic of mother earth and represents all peoples and reflects Indigenous teachings making it the focal point of the project. The objective of the project is to restore what was damaged, reclaim what has been displaced and work toward restitution for future generations. With this knowledge, the Living Learning Centre can support this project and further contribute to its overall mission by revitalizing a grey institutional area to create a space that reflects the Indigenous community programmatically and architecturally. While the garden is intended to bring awareness to a dark part of Canadian history, it is also a celebration of Indigenous culture and perseverance; a place for education and building relationships within the diverse Toronto community. While the program of the Living Learning Centre emerged prior to realizing the intent of the teaching, learning, sharing and healing space, the objectives of both

⁵¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Calls to Action, 2015, 9.

projects very much coincide. While the garden is one step toward cultural healing, the Living Learning Centre will further this initiative by providing an accessible educational space with programming created in collaboration with traditional teachers, Indigenous educational institutions and the people of the four directions.

In addition to the teaching, learning, sharing and healing space there are two other sculptural pieces that contribute to the narrative of peace, equality and reconciliation as mentioned above. The first is the Peace Garden. Originally conceived in response to the city's declaration of Toronto as a nuclear-free zone in 1983, the Flame of Peace was ignited in 1984 by Pope John Paul II with

Queen Elizabeth in attendance at the official opening the same year.⁵² Within the garden the eternal flame, kindled in Hiroshima, sits in a cauldron of water brought from Nagasaki to commemorate peace between nations. While this feature of the site demonstrates the city's commitment to establishing peaceful relations internationally, little effort is being made to do the same on a nationwide scale. For centuries, European settlers have dishonoured covenants made with the First Peoples of this land which has directly resulted in the degradation of Indigenous culture. Through displacement and denial to provide the basic necessities for survival, systemic colonial legacies

⁵² Jack, Landau, "Relocated Peace Garden Rededicated at Nathan Phillips Square", Urban Toronto, 2016, <https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2016/05/relocated-peace-garden-rededicated-nathan-phillips-square>



Figure 6.3 Teaching, Learning, Sharing and Healing Space (to be built in 2022)



Figure 6.4 Existing Peace Garden and Eternal Flame

Figure 6.5 “Equal Before the Law” Sculpture



continue to inform the basis of Canadian policy with the ultimate objective of eradicating Indigenous peoples and their culture from their own lands. These disputes have yet to be properly addressed by Canadian politicians and the Calls to Action clearly outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, published in 2015 in order to work toward reconciliation have yet to be taken seriously. Therefore, when resolving conflicts with other nations while we have yet to resolve our own, are we truly at peace? More importantly, is reconciliation truly possible?

In addition to the Peace Garden, another element of the site that sparks interest is the “Equal Before The Law” sculpture located in the McMurtry Law Gardens directly North of the proposed site for the Living Learning Centre. The sculpture depicts a lion and a lamb who rest on a balanced scale despite their unequal proportions. A description of the sculpture states:

“The order of law is equality. Before and under the law we are all equal. This is a poetic work where the symbolic significance represented by the lamb and the lion are not precise, but rather open to a multiplicity of associations and interpretations all of which are encouraged.”⁵³

The sculpture suggests that, on the scales of justice, each individual is equal and shall be treated as such without discrimination. However, this has not been the case when Canadian courts are faced with a case involving Indigenous issues. This is evident in

⁵³ Eldon Garnet, Equal Before the Law Toronto McMurtry Law Gardens 2011, 2016, <https://eldongarnet.com/public-artequal/art>.



Figure 6.6 Map of social infrastructure for urban Indigenous community downtown Toronto

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Proposed Site for Living Learning Centre | 6. Native Women's Resource Centre | 12. Native Child & Family Services Toronto |
| 2. Toronto City Hall | 7. Aboriginal Legal Services | 13. Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment & Training |
| 3. Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres | 8. Nishnawbe Homes | 14. Aboriginal Legal SVS -Toronto |
| 4. Toronto Council Native Cultural Centre | 9. Anishinawbe Health Toronto | 15. YWCA |
| 5. Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy | 10. Canadian Council For Aboriginal Business | 16. Good Shepherd Ministries Shelter |
| | 11. Indigenous & Northern Affairs Canada | |

movements such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and, most recently, the Transmountain Pipeline project to name a few. Time after time, Indigenous peoples fail to be treated equally under Canadian law by being dismissed and continually silenced despite rightful and persistent requests for legal aid. Furthermore, legally binding treaties, laws and constitutions between Canada and the nations' Indigenous peoples are constantly manipulated by the Canadian government with no legal penalties or repercussions to prevent them from doing so. Thus, it can be concluded that the above statement used to describe Canada's legal system is false; not everyone is equal before and under the law, especially when equality would interfere with Canada's colonial and post-colonial agendas.

The proposed site for the Living Learning Centre is the ideal location for this community hub in downtown Toronto. In addition to its proximity to other Indigenous services and organizations, the site would play a significant role in the narrative of reconciliation and cultural healing. The site tells a story of equality and peace though it is tainted with hypocrisy and paints an untrue picture that does not reflect reality for many. As such, an Indigenous voice must be introduced and intensified to rectify what has been wronged for future generations. Therefore, the positioning of the Living Learning Centre on this site is vital to underpinning the true story of a place called Tkaronto before adding another layer to the narrative. Not only will this architectural intervention suggest a metaphorical statement of resiliency, it will create opportunities for collective decision-making and collaborative processes that engage both Indigenous

and non-Indigenous members of the Toronto community in order to make progress in achieving reconciliation, while simultaneously establishing a framework for other cities in their approach to addressing Indigenous issues.

Chapter Seven

The Vision of the Giiwed Living Learning Centre Going Home

As a direct result of colonization, many Indigenous peoples in Canada have been disconnected from their land, families and communities. This separation disrupts the very understanding of these individuals' personal identity in terms of who they are and where they come from. On the other hand, many Indigenous youth who grow up in urban settings or away from their traditional lands are deprived of their culture and connection to community, making it extremely difficult for them to amalgamate with mainstream society. Due to this spiritual, physical and emotional disconnect, the well-being of Indigenous peoples is in jeopardy with increased rates of suicide, substance use and violence; an epidemic that is continually ignored by Canadian politicians and health officials. In fact, suicide has become such a prevalent issue in Indigenous communities that, on numerous occasions, Indigenous leaders from various locations across the country have contacted the federal bureaucracy in charge of health funding for Indigenous peoples, seeking assistance to save the lives of community members.⁵⁴ Many communities have requested mental health professions to implement prevention programs which have been continuously denied by the government.⁵⁵ Therefore, despite the fact that lives are being lost as a result of settler-society's actions, we are seemingly unwilling to accept responsibility and implement procedures necessary to prevent these things from happening. This directly coincides with the Canadian government's actions of cultural genocide.

In response to this ongoing matter, the Giiwed Living Learning Centre is a welcoming

⁵⁴ Tanya Talaga, *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2018), 11

⁵⁵ Ibid.

space for Indigenous peoples from near and far. The name Giiwed comes from the Ojibway language meaning “to go home”. It is a place of familiarity where Indigenous peoples in the city of Toronto can find assistance, solitude and support from others who share similar experiences in a safe space. While paying homage to the Mississauga’s of the Credit First Nation, who’s traditional territory the Centre is located on, the objective of this architectural intervention is to create a sense of belonging where users can feel comfortable and acknowledged through architecture that is culturally relevant. The Centre is intended to serve the urban Indigenous community in Toronto by providing flexible space that supports existing programming in the city while replenishing Indigenous identity in the urban environment through culturally reflective architecture that currently does not exist. Furthermore, the Centre will facilitate the education of non-Indigenous peoples in the city by providing opportunities for inter-cultural interaction and learning of Indigenous culture through first hand experience. As such, the three pillars of this thesis are the urban Indigenous community, the general public and social injustices; all of which are closely interrelated. With this the objective is to generate discussion around the inequalities Indigenous peoples have and continue to face in the 21st century and encourage advocacy for Indigenous rights by the general public in order to intensify the voices of Canadian Indigenous peoples. Developing this understanding is crucial in achieving reconciliation.

The concept of the Living Learning Centre is firmly based on the principal of education while challenging conventions of Western society and colonial teaching methods. It is not a museum or interpretive centre but rather a space that celebrates Indigenous peoples and culture; both of which are very much alive. The educational environment provides a space for members of the urban Indigenous community to gather, learn and share their culture by doing. On the other hand, the Centre also serves as an educational

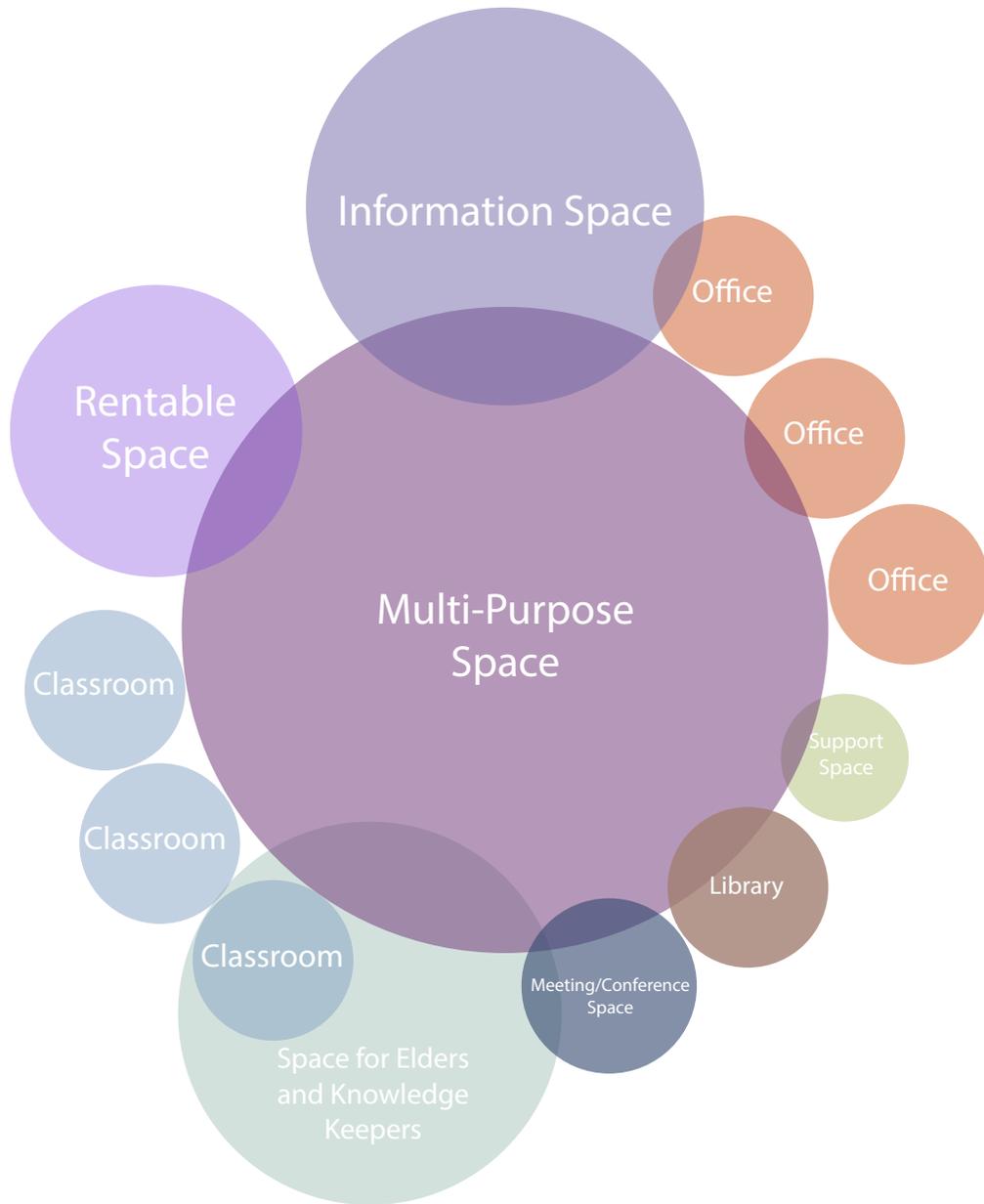


Figure 7.0 Preliminary Program Diagram for the Living Learning Centre. This diagram provided the basis for discussion during design discussions.

facility for non-Indigenous peoples by providing opportunities for residents of Toronto to learn about the city's true history and about Indigenous culture through real accounts and first hand experience. The intention is that this will help to eliminate the distribution of false information about Indigenous culture, reduce racism within the city and catalyze a broader discussion about the social justice issues Canadian Indigenous people are experiencing. The objective is that, through this sharing of information and cultural learning, inter-cultural relationships within the greater Toronto community will be strengthened so that cultural stigmas can be eliminated and the city can truly begin working toward reconciliation and healing.

To accomplish this, the Giiwed Living Learning Centre provides various types of spaces to ensure the flexibility of the building so that it can be adapted to meet various user needs. Through these spaces which have varying levels of publicness and intimacy, the Centre can be used for a variety of activities and accommodate small and large groups of people. Moreover, flexible space allows the Centre to support and host other activities that are going on in the community. While space is limited in the city of Toronto and particularly for the urban Indigenous community, many existing cultural centres are over-booked with inadequate space to hold activities. This means that events are often cancelled. However, space made available through the Living Learning Centre will prevent events and activities from being over-booked, ensuring that no opportunities to serve the community are missed. This additional

space may also permit more programs to be created for the Urban Indigenous community, increasing resources available to Indigenous people.

The program for the Living Learning Centre was developed based on feedback provided by Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres and Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre collected during preliminary community consultation at the beginning of this thesis. This consultation resulted in the creation of a preliminary program list which was further refined during a discussion with members of the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres. Based on this consultation, the following program list was developed:

- Reception
- Information Hub
- Atrium
- Kitchen
- Classrooms
- Artists' Cooperative
- Gallery/Exhibit Space
- Children's Play Area
- Offices
- Elder's Lounge
- Elder's Offices
- Library & Storytelling Space

In addition to refining the spaces above to be included in the design, two main considerations for design were also discussed during the charrette. The first consideration was the importance of connection between indoor and outdoor space. Individuals who participated in the charrette felt it was very important that visitors to the Centre should be able to experience

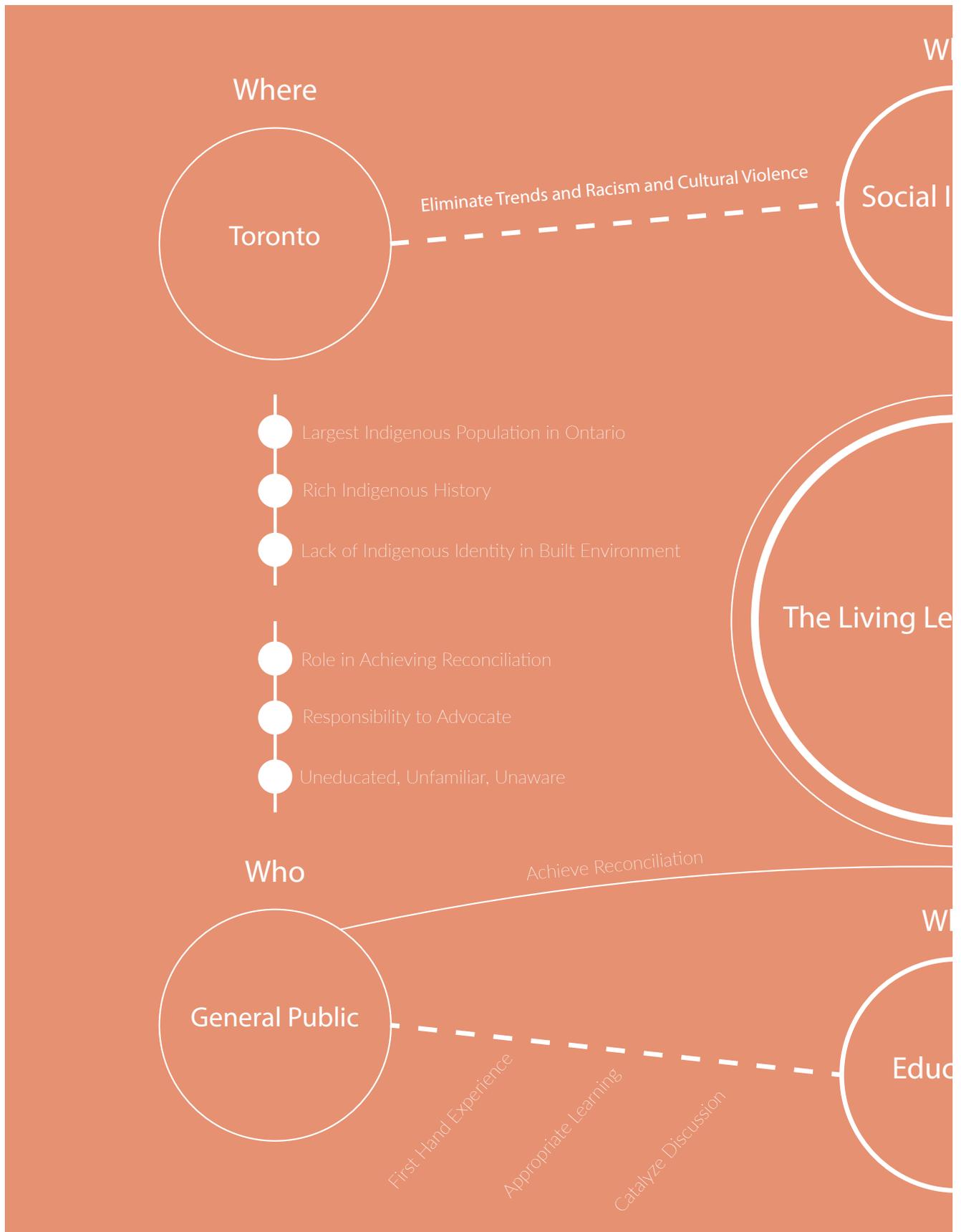
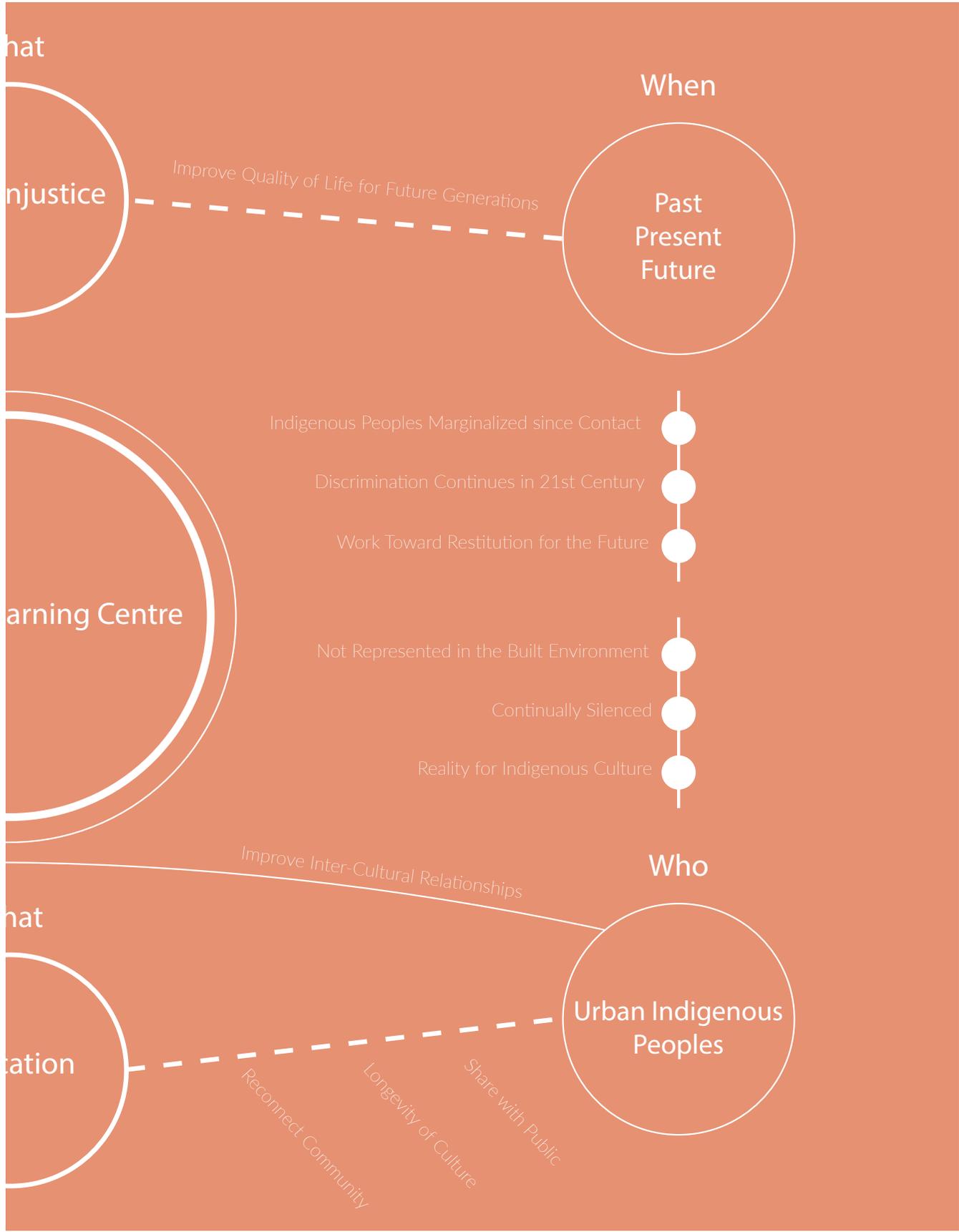


Figure 7.1 Initial Programmatic Brainstorming



the building without feeling like they are inside. The second consideration that was communicated during the design sessions was a concern for visitor safety. While Toronto City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square are high traffic areas with a heavy police presence, members of the OFIFC were concerned about how adding an Indigenous building to this site would affect this presence and how that might in turn impact building users. The city of Toronto has a long history of discrimination against Indigenous peoples with little improvement today. As such, individuals who participated in the discussion felt that design considerations for user safety were vital to the success of the project. This process helped to confirm that the voices of the communities the project intends to serve were accurately being translated into architecture to ensure that the Living Learning Centre would fulfill its purpose. Furthermore, this continued engagement with the urban Indigenous community in the city of Toronto allowed them to guide the project. The following chapter on the design of the Giiwed Living Learning Centre will discuss the elements of the building in further detail to explore the ways in which this program is translated into built form.

Chapter Eight

Design

Translating Design Vision into Built Form

The design of the Giiwed Living Learning Centre adds another layer to the architectural discourse that currently takes place on the site. The building form is inspired by the City Hall towers which were rearranged to create a weaving of the building elements while creating a circular flow of movement within the building. This allows the Centre to maintain its relationship to City Hall and other circular forms on the site while simultaneously being suggestive in its design. The building was also designed in response to the surrounding site and, while the Centre does not directly resemble “Indigenous” architecture, it maintains many traditional principals that allow the building to work with the natural environment. This was inspired by information shared by a Knowledge Carrier at the McEwen School of Architecture. He once asked, “what does wind do when it hits a wall?” to which I replied “it goes around”. He followed with, “and what does wind do?” to which I replied, “it goes around.” Then he asked me, “what do humans build?” and when I hesitated he responded with “walls”. When considering traditional Indigenous architecture, structures were made with materials gathered from the surrounding site and were designed in response to the natural environment and climate. However, as Western architecture infiltrated North America, this architectural response to the environment was lost. This further validated the curvilinear form of the building as it will allow wind to pass around more fluidly while redirecting North Westerly winds which are dominant in the site. The taller mass in this direction of the building also ensures that the courtyard and building entrance are protected from harsh wind conditions. The lower mass toward the South-East area of the building also ensures ample sunlight can reach into

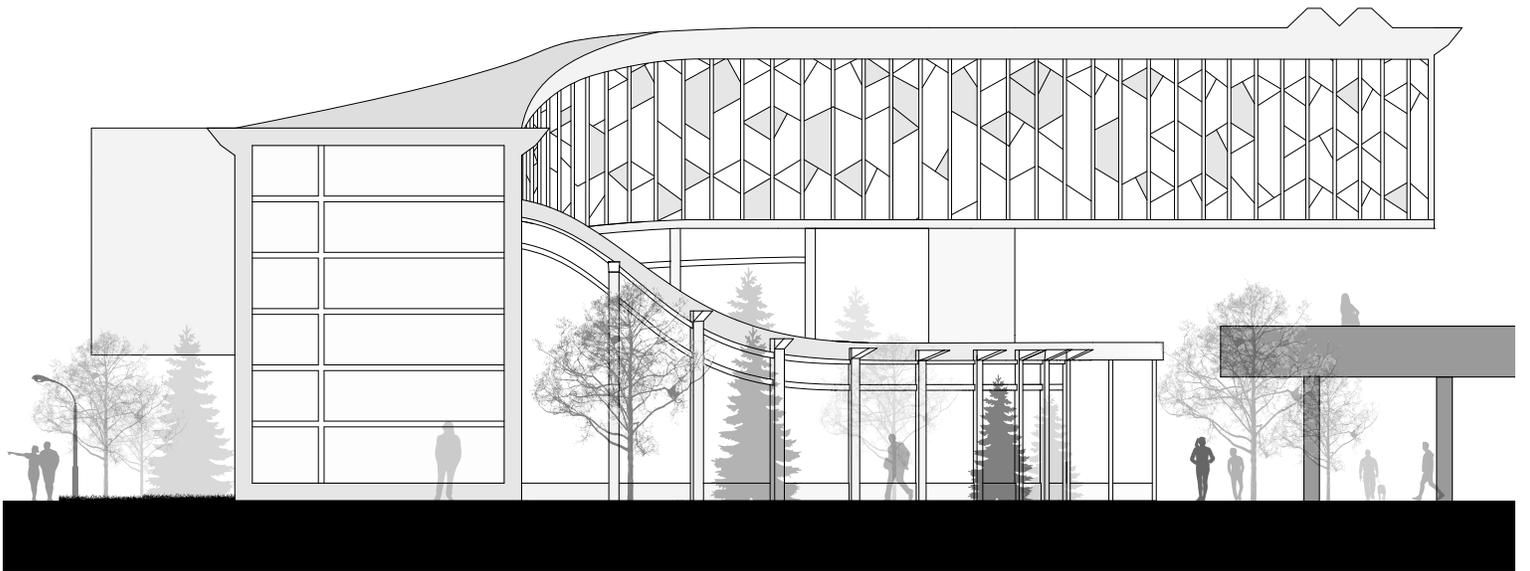


Figure 8.0 South Elevation

the courtyard and spaces located on the North side of the Centre.

The building is divided into two primary categories:

Open to All – While the first floor is openly available for use by members of the urban Indigenous community, the space may also be used by the general Toronto community when public events are taking place. This may include conferences, workshops, teaching sessions or art exhibits that the public may be invited to.

Open to Community – The upper floor of the Living Learning Centre is generally more private and contains offices, meeting spaces and Elders’ areas. Members of the public will generally not access these areas.

These two realms of the building transition through the children’s play area and the library, both of which have varying levels of publicness and privateness and are spaces which members of the public may have access to on special occasions.

The design of the Living Learning Centre corresponds with the teachings of the medicine wheel; an ancient symbol and cultural tool for Indigenous peoples that is predicted to be more than 5,000 years old.⁵⁶ The medicine wheel teaches that there is a human association with each of the four directions:

North – Mind
East – Spirit
South – Body
West – Emotion

Programs located within the centre coincide with these important cultural teachings. Spaces having to do with the mind are located on the north side of the building. This includes the classrooms, Elder’s offices, Library and Storytelling area.

⁵⁶ William, Morin, Ancient Patterns in Indigenous Culture, 2018

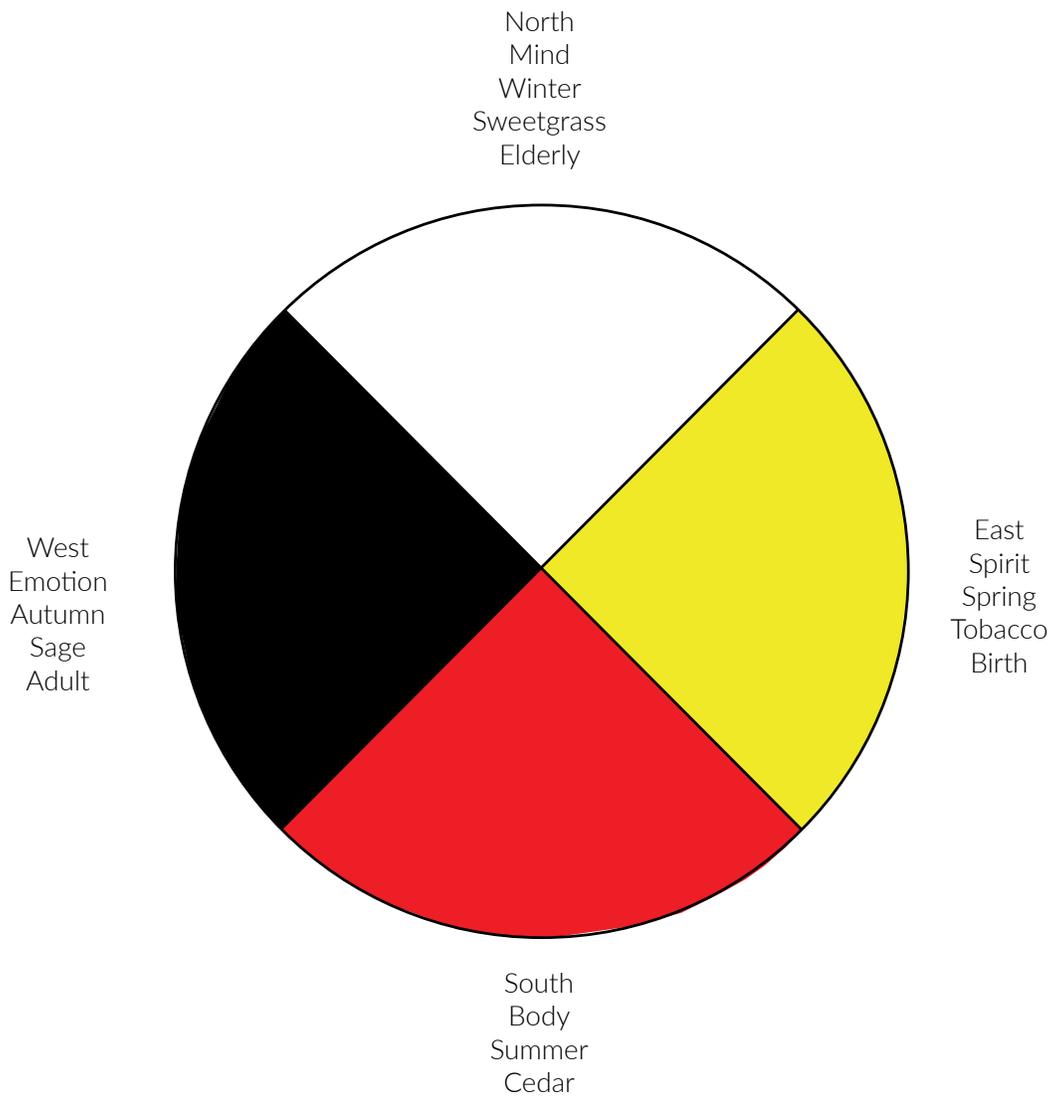
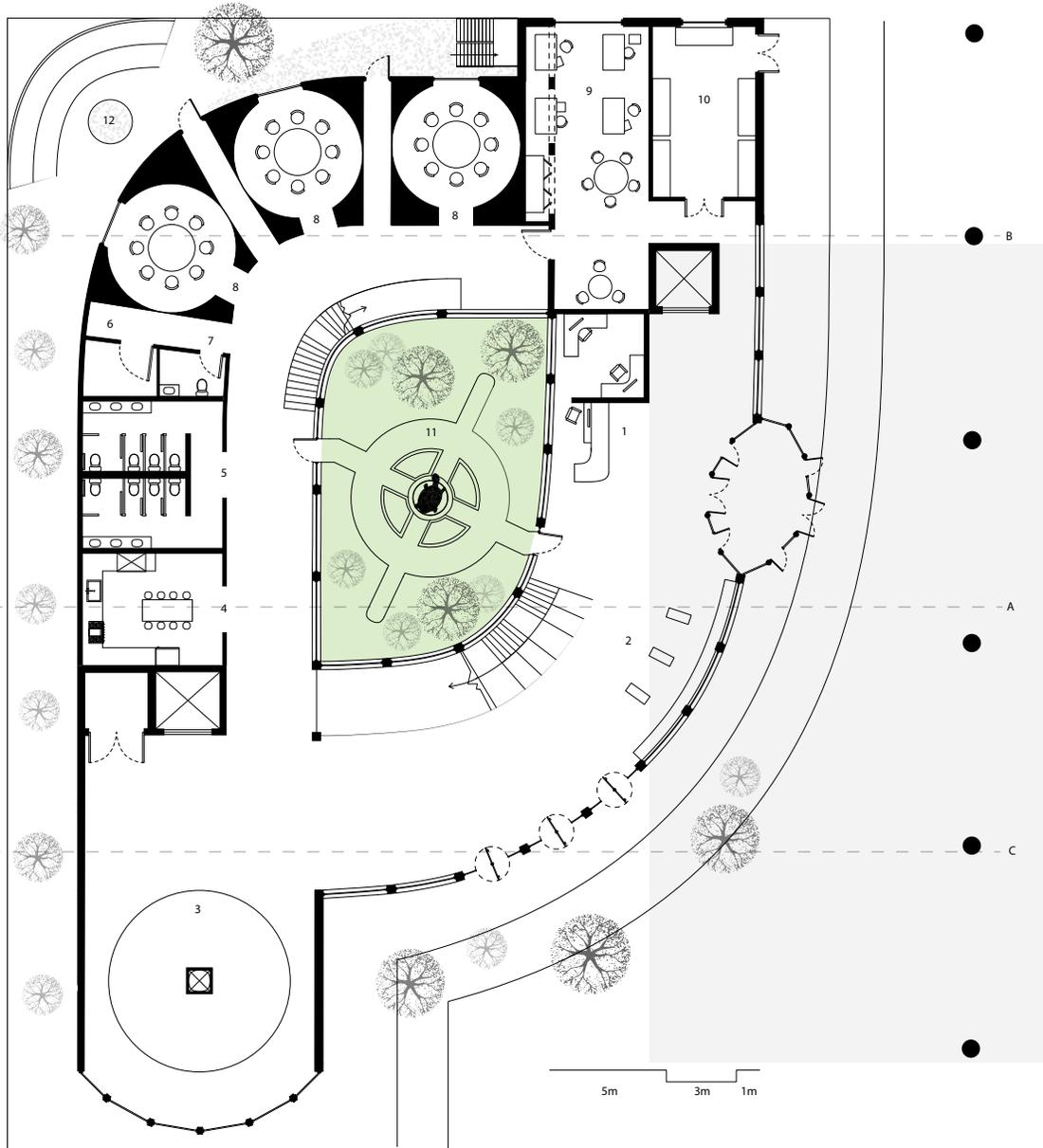
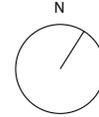


Figure 8.1 Medicine Wheel Teachings

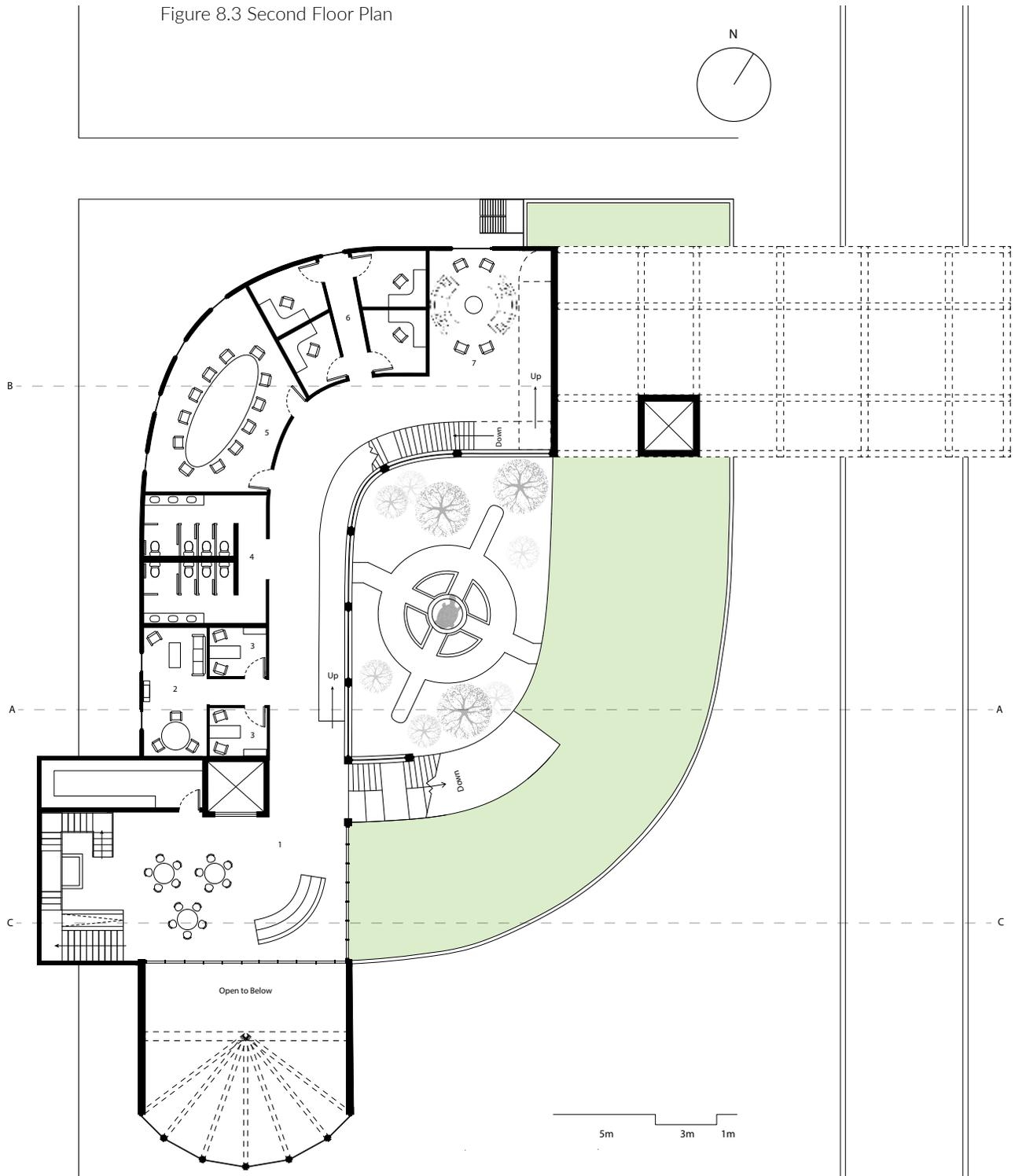
Figure 8.2 First Floor Plan



- 1 Reception
- 2 Information Hub
- 3 Atrium with Fire Pit
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Washrooms
- 6 Storage

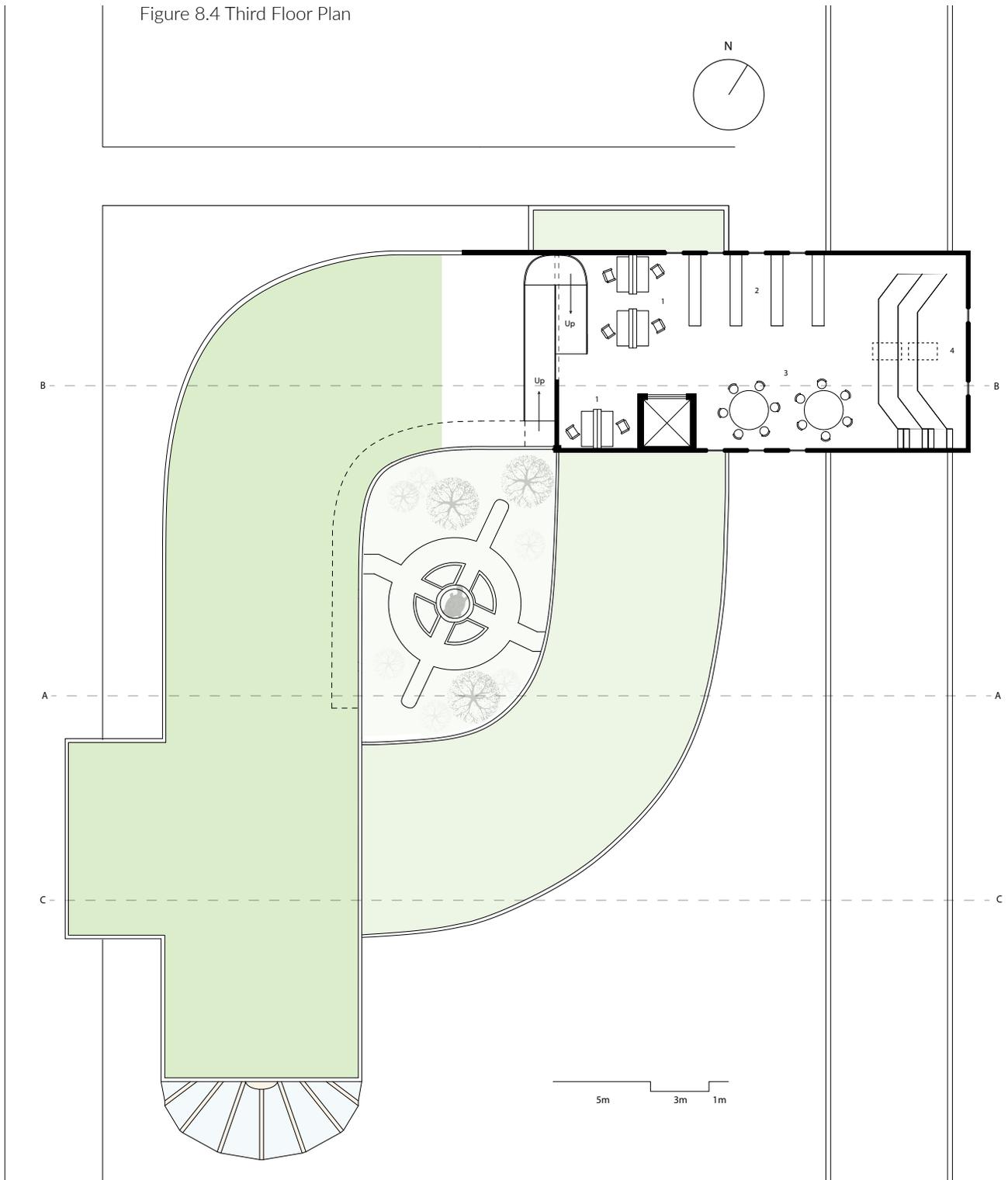
- 7 Gender Neutral Washroom
- 8 Classroom
- 9 Artists' Cooperative
- 10 Gallery/Exhibit
- 11 Teaching, Learning, Sharing & Healing Space
- 12 Outdoor Teaching Space

Figure 8.3 Second Floor Plan



- 1. Children's Play Area
- 2. Elder's Lounge
- 3. Elder's Private Office
- 4. Washrooms
- 5. Meeting Room
- 6. Private Offices
- 7. Breakout Space

Figure 8.4 Third Floor Plan



- 1. Private Study Area
- 2. Book Collection

- 3. Work Stations
- 4. Storytelling Area

The entrance is representative of spirit and is located at the east side of the building as is custom in Indigenous culture with the rising sun. As this is the first space visitors will encounter upon arriving at the centre, this space is filled with art work, cultural artifacts and other elements that embody the spirit of place and Indigenous culture.

Located at the south of the building are the children's play area and atrium space that will facilitate larger gatherings and activities such as drumming, dancing and singing. Both of these spaces are closely associated with the body and movement and correspond with the medicine wheel teachings.

Finally, the kitchen is located on the west side of the building which is traditionally associated with emotion. The kitchen is a space of communal gathering and socialization around food which help to improve the emotional well-being of visitors through communal interaction. While this space is intended for more intimate gatherings and teaching, the kitchen can also support larger gatherings such as community feasts in the preparation of food.

In addition to the spaces described above, there are various other programs located within the building which assist in its fulfillment as a teaching space that celebrates Indigenous culture and serves the urban Indigenous community in the city of Toronto. The following text will describe these spaces more in depth.

Information Hub

Since there are several other facilities in Toronto that already offer a variety of services and programming for urban Indigenous peoples, the Living Learning Centre will serve as a community and information hub. It is intended to be the primary destination for Indigenous peoples who are new to or unfamiliar with the city to obtain information on where to find culturally appropriate



Figure 8.5 Reception Area

services such as shelter, health clinics, support groups or Friendship Centres. This will ensure that Indigenous people in the city can easily find and access culturally relevant programs and services which contributes to a greater sense of belonging, well-being and safety in the urban environment. Additionally, this will ensure that existing Indigenous service providers continue to be used in order to contribute to financial sustainability and growth in the competitive Toronto market. The information hub which is located at the building entrance adjacent to the reception allows visitors to ask staff for assistance or use digital kiosks to look up information.

Generating Revenue

The Giwed Living Learning Centre will also contribute to the generation of revenue for the urban Indigenous community itself through two main

strategies; the first being the provision of an artists cooperative. With many Indigenous and non-Indigenous makers located in Toronto, creative space is hard to come by. Therefore, the Centre will provide professional facilities for local Indigenous artists and craftspeople in the city including studio space, galleries and educational resources needed to create, showcase, celebrate and sell exclusively Indigenous art and crafts. This space, fully operated by Indigenous artists, will foster the artistic development of local people while providing freedom to the makers to create. Space in the cooperative can be rented by Indigenous craftspeople to make and store their art and supplies as well as provide optimal space to engage with buyers, especially with the adjacency to Nathan Phillips Square and Queen Street West. This will ensure that artwork can be accessed by non-Indigenous peoples and more broadly advertised to attract more people with the provision of larger

spaces. Therefore, not only will the artists' cooperative generate income for the Centre, it will also support local Indigenous makers.

The second strategy that will contribute to the generation of income is that the Centre itself may be rented out to other organizations and businesses for events. Since the Centre may not be in use full time, the building, or parts of the building, can be used by other Indigenous or non-Indigenous organizations who need additional space for conferences, art shows or markets for example. The large atrium and multi-purpose space will be attractive for renters as they can host a large number of people for a variety of functions in a well-designed architectural space. This will help to address the concern of self-sufficiency as the Centre will serve as a major source of income for the Indigenous community through this rentable space. Furthermore, this cross-

programming and availability of use by non-Indigenous peoples allows the Toronto community to engage with the building, people and artifacts within. This way, even if members of the Toronto community have not interacted with the building and its teachings directly, they can still be exposed to Indigenous culture indirectly by passively engaging with the space.

Library & Storytelling Area

One of the most important parts of the Living Learning Centre is the library. Unlike the conventional Western library, this space is intended for verbal communication and interaction. While the library may be used for reading, studying and tutoring, the intention is that the library is a place for storytelling where Elders and Knowledge Carriers can gather and share stories through oral tradition with the Toronto community in a warm and welcoming environment. Elders and

Figure 8.6 Interior Atrium facing Queen Street West





Figure 8.7 Section A

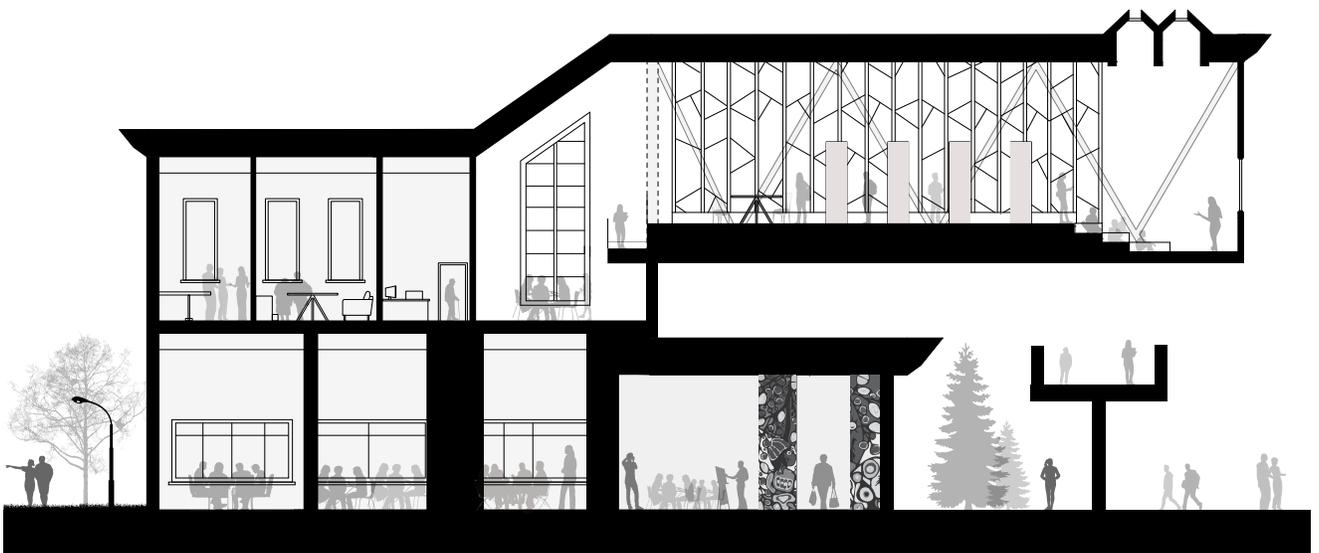


Figure 8.8 Section B

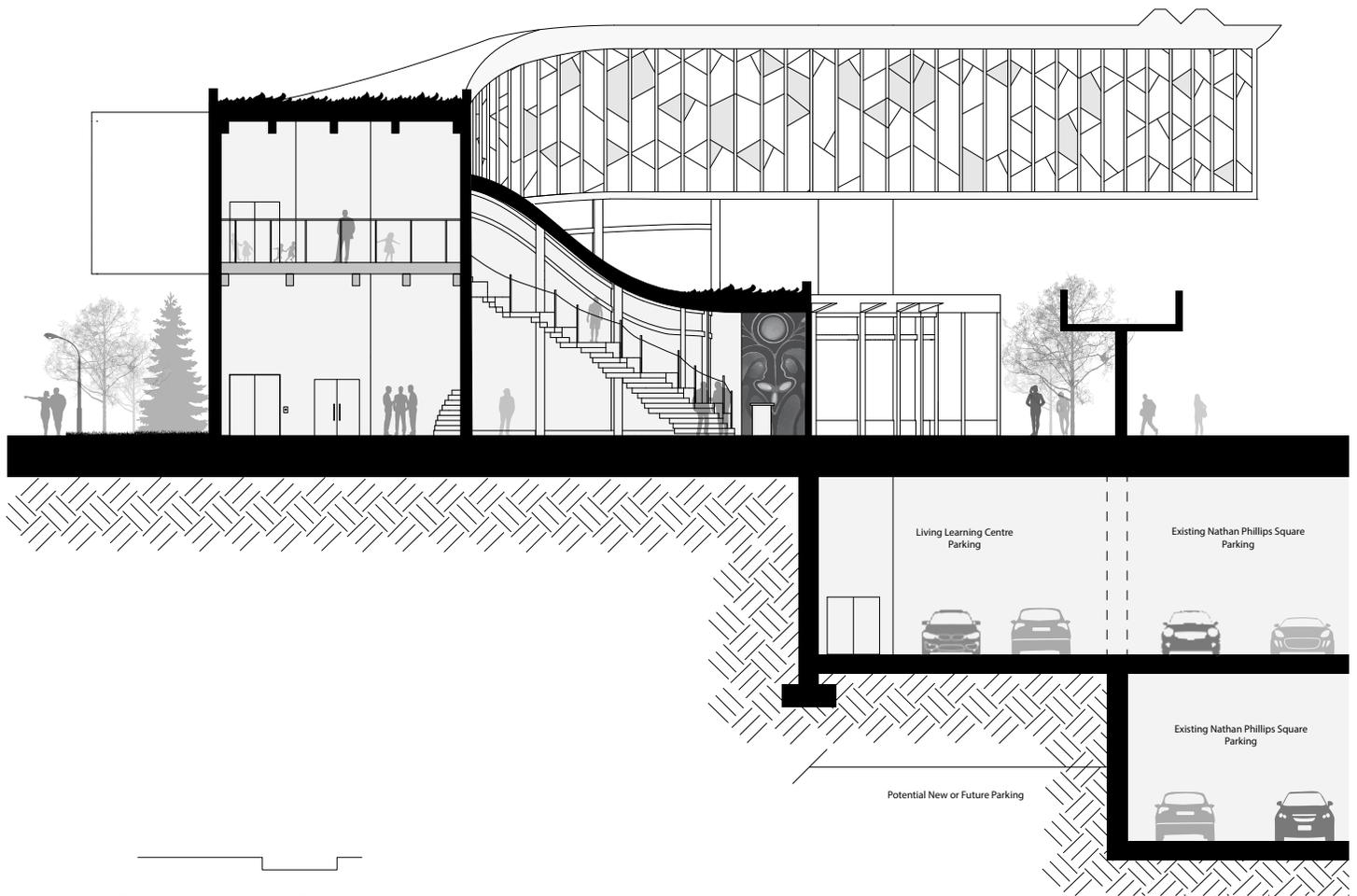


Figure 8.9 Section C



Figure 8.10 Library

Knowledge Carriers play a crucial role within their communities by supporting the education of others, particularly Indigenous youth, by imparting knowledge about land, culture and values through storytelling and are the most highly regarded teachers for Indigenous peoples. However, as fewer youth participate in traditional practices and more become disconnected from tradition, there are fewer opportunities for Elders and Knowledge Carriers to share their stories, often leaving them questioning the relevancy of their role.

The library will serve as a storytelling space where local Elders and Knowledge Carriers can engage with the Toronto community both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Passing down traditional knowledge is important to both the maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous culture, particularly in urban

areas, to ensure that cultural information is continually passed down from generation to generation. By allowing the Elders and Knowledge Carriers to play a significant role in the Centre, the intention is that they will become more assured of the significance of the role they play in the lives of others.

The library will also be a place where the urban Indigenous community can begin developing their own collection of relevant texts. A major challenge encountered during this thesis was the availability and ability to access culturally relevant texts and other written information. While the importance of oral tradition in understanding Indigenous culture and developing relationships is understood, having the opportunity to read books, interviews, journals or other documents written by or in association with Indigenous peoples compliments

oral tradition and provides another layer of cultural learning. By providing a space where the urban Indigenous community can curate the collection of culturally relevant texts and lend them out to members of the Toronto community, they are given the agency to determine what information is available and the ways in which they are represented in literature.

Classrooms

The Giiwed Living Learning Centre also provides a variety of classroom spaces that facilitate more intimate gathering and learning. These classrooms challenge conventional Western classrooms by subverting concepts of hierarchical learning. These spaces foster the development of cultural skills and traditional teachings by privileging the communal sharing of information. These smaller spaces may adapt to fit user needs and accommodate a variety of activities from language classes, beading, craft making or other activities that involve smaller groups of people. These classrooms further contrast those that western society has come to understand through the provision of dynamic spaces that can adapt to serve various functions while challenging the ideas of the classroom spatially by providing round spaces that encourage circular gathering. This reflects the idea that, even in a classroom setting, all voices are equal and one shall not be privileged over others. Furthermore, the openness of the classrooms encourages passers-by to stop and listen as well as to encourage participation from Elders by ensuring everyone has the opportunity to access cultural teachings.

In keeping with the concept of culturally relevant education, there is

also an opportunity for the Giiwed Living Learning Centre to develop working relationships with schools and school boards across the Greater Toronto Area. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action document specifically requests a change in the way Indigenous culture is represented in Western education as well as the ways in which students are taught about Indigenous culture in their education. This is identified in Call to Action 62.i which states:

"We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students."⁵⁷

As well as Call to Action 63.i:

"We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools."⁵⁸

With this, the Giiwed Living Learning Centre can assist in responding to these calls to action by providing a space where students from surrounding schools can come and learn about Indigenous culture from Elders and Knowledge

⁵⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2015, 7

⁵⁸ Ibid.



Figure 8.11 Interior showing Grand Staircase

Carriers while participating in cultural activities in an appropriate manner. This concept of active learning as well as engaging with Indigenous peoples will help in eliminating stigmas and the discomfort in asking questions about Indigenous culture in order to create an inter-cultural dialogue that is more open. Furthermore, this will also prevent Indigenous peoples from being misrepresented in textbooks and curriculum that currently exist in Canadian education.

Offices

The Living Learning Centre provides a variety of office spaces. The offices located on the first floor are intended for the operation of the Centre itself while the offices upstairs can be rented out to other individuals in the community or can be utilized by Centre staff if need be. Office space for Indigenous organizations in Toronto is scarce, often

leaving people with unpleasant and crowded work places. The additional office space provided by the Centre can assist with some of this pressure by providing an enjoyable alternative place to work.

Arguably the most important element of the Giiwed Living Learning Centre is the Teaching, Learning, Sharing and Healing garden. The design for this project was informed by architect Brian Porter and his firm Two Row Architect in association with Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre. The garden was originally intended to take up the entire site between Nathan Phillips Square and Osgoode Hall. However, after proposing the Living Learning Centre to him and highlighting the important relationship between the two projects, Porter suggested that there was a greater opportunity for the two projects to support one another. Based on this feedback, the decision was made to incorporate the Teaching, Learning

Sharing and Healing space into the Living Learning Centre where it is now the main focus of the project and a spectacle from all areas of the building. In doing so, the building now frames the garden where building users can visit it in a more controlled environment and where Elders and Knowledge Carriers are available to speak about its importance in relation to the Truth and Reconciliation movements. Furthermore, this will protect the garden from vandalism and will promote visitor safety by ensuring the space is continually monitored and well-maintained. Safety was a major concern brought up during consultation and design charettes with apprehensions of racial profiling and harassment, particularly from police, being that the building is located in an area that already has a heavy police presence. By featuring this garden in a courtyard design, it ensures that visitors can enjoy the garden without fear of harm to ensure that this monument of reconciliation and healing is a positive experience for all.

The design of the Living Learning Centre includes green roofs. Not only will this design element ensure visitors on the upper floors of the centre have a pleasant view, it will also contribute to reducing Toronto's urban heat island effect; a phenomena that causes temperatures in urban areas to generally be higher due to tightly packed city blocks and an abundance of paved surfaces. Furthermore, the building will also be serviced by existing underground parking located beneath Nathan Phillips Square. Since the site is easily accessible by subway, streetcar and other methods of public transit, there is no need to add additional parking to the site. This will also discourage the use of personal vehicles to reduce the number of cars on the road

which will assist in reducing traffic and pollution due to emissions.

The potential story of the Giiwed Living Learning Centre is complex and multi-faceted. Intended to serve diverse user groups, with opportunities for cross-programming, the Centre is a space that celebrates Indigenous culture in the city of Toronto while de-mystifying social relationships so that they may be improved upon. Moreover, while the Centre's primary focus is serving the urban Indigenous community, the variety of flexible spaces ensures that the Centre is able to support the crafting of Indigenous culture in a variety of ways so that opportunities to serve the community are no longer missed out. Despite this complexity, there is potential for the Living Learning Centre to set the benchmark for Indigenous architecture in urban areas to establish these interactive educational centres as part of a national and perhaps global movement to achieve reconciliation and justice for Indigenous peoples.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

“Planting the Seed of a Tree We Will Never Sit Under”

The knowledge carried by Indigenous communities is invaluable. However, due to colonization and enduring colonial legacies in Canada, Indigenous culture is at risk of being lost. The truth can no longer be twisted, the historical and present day actions committed against Canadian Indigenous peoples are acts of cultural genocide and immediate actions should be taken. While Indigenous communities have been mobilizing to address concerns and fight for cultural healing, it is also our responsibility to amplify their voices and advocate for social change. Now more than ever, the presence of Indigenous identity in the built environment is vital to maintaining Indigenous culture in order to push back against colonialism. Cities in Ontario and across Canada need to be better able to support the practice of traditional culture in a way that both the city and the urban Indigenous community can take pride in. This is why the proposed implementation of the Giiwed Living Learning Centre in the city of Toronto is so important; not only to support existing programming and social infrastructures to better serve the community, but to strengthen relationships between the people of the four directions to catalyze discussion surrounding issues faced by Indigenous communities on a much greater scale. The proposed Centre will contribute to larger movements of cultural healing and reconciliation while celebrating Indigenous history and culture in the city

by liberating the voices of Indigenous peoples who have been suppressed by class structures, neo-colonialism and poverty. The establishment of the Living Learning Centre also presents the opportunity for it to become integrated into the larger network of Indigenous organizations, services and infrastructure in downtown Toronto, making the Centre a hub for Indigenous peoples in the city.

We are at a pivotal moment in history that will determine the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples moving forward into the future. While this architectural thesis will not resolve all challenges faced by Indigenous people, it is understood as “planting the seed of a tree we will never sit under.” In other words, the intention is to implement and advocate for social change at a small scale so that it will one day grow into a larger movement of cultural healing for Canadian Indigenous peoples which current generations will likely not see. Change is slow but it is undeniably happening. By introducing the Giiwed Living Learning Centre in the City of Toronto, which amplifies the need for change, the Centre has the potential to play a significant role in furthering the cultural well-being of Toronto’s urban Indigenous community through the creation of an architecture symbolic of change.

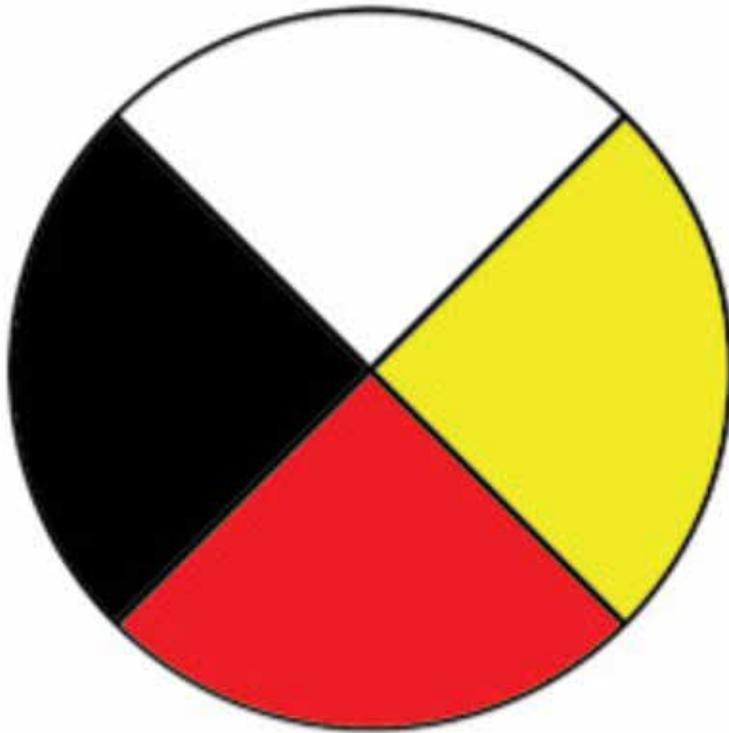


Figure 9.0 Prophecy of the Medicine Wheel

While the medicine wheel is an important teaching tool for Indigenous peoples, it also represents a prophecy of the people of the four directions. The prophecy suggested that, at some point, people of the four directions would come to live on Turtle Island together. People of European descent are represented by the colour white, people of Asian descent are represented by the colour yellow, people of Indigenous descent are represented by the colour red and people of African American descent are represented by the colour black. However, the people of the four directions are not living in balance as the medicine wheel depicts and so greater efforts in achieving reconciliation and cultural healing are necessary in order for the prophecy to be fulfilled.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ William, Morin. Ancient Patterns in Indigenous Culture, 2018.

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