

# BREAKING THE DAWN

Reimagining  
reconciliation  
through  
re-education



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# an invitation

## AN INVITATION

*'I'm going to tell you a story,' Atsìa says. 'It's about how the universe began.'*

*'Oh, you mean it's about how the university began?' I ask.*

*Atsìa laughs out loud, 'Aju! No,' He says. 'You must be one of those professors or academics. You always get it mixed up the first time when...'*

*'But I'm not...'*

*'And they always interrupting me. They always in a rush to know the end of the story, even before it begins! Just pour us some tea and sit down and let me tell you a story. Then you can go and tell others, which way you like.'*

I pick up a leather glove next to the wall of stones encircling the campfire and use it to grab the handle of the kettle on the fire. I pour two cups of dark and thick campfire tea with small bits of ash floating on top. I hand it to grandpa and he takes it and places it next to his seat. He motions with his hand for me take the seat across from him. I pull out my notepad and pencil and he shakes his head.

*'Aju. No. Your only work right now is to listen'*

*'But, what if I remember it wrong?' I ask.*

*He laughs again. 'Oh granchil', you will get it wrong! So you don't worry about that, for now. Just listen.'*

# an offering

## AN OFFERING

*The first thing those guch'an got wrong was telling us that we begin by acknowledging the land<sup>1</sup>. Granchil', our whole being flows from the land. We are part of the land.<sup>2</sup> We offer prayers and practice ceremonies to show our love and respect for the land and each other. We sing the songs that the ancestors gave us<sup>3</sup>. It is from our prayers and our songs and our ceremonies that our love spills out and fills each other's spirits. We do this so we can feel whole and know that we are connected. We do this so we can stay strong together. We do these things not only to remember but to imprint our memories on the land and know that she will return our love.*

*Sing with me...*

<sup>1</sup> Refer to many sources in the reference section for critical reflection on land acknowledgements.

<sup>2</sup> This is adapted from one of the most defining statements ever documented about the relationship between Yukon First Nations and their lands, as expressed by Virginia Smarch from Teslin. While describing her life in relation to the cycles of the seasons and her country, she says, "That's why I don't hesitate to say an old native person is part of the land, part of the water..." Cited in McClellan, C., Birckel, L., Bringham, R., Fall, J.A., McCarthy, C., & Sheppard, J.R. (1987). Part of the land, part of the water: A history of the Yukon Indians.

<sup>3</sup> In reference to Annie Ned's teachings, "This song is what Indians think about, long time. So you've got to think about it." Cited in Cruikshank, 1990, p. 328.e

# A STORY

*Granchil', this story is about 'The Bear That Did Not Want Light.' When you share this story with others, you tell them that Elder Jessie Joe from Burwash told it to Daniel Tlen on November 9, 1984. She gave permission to Daniel to record and share it so that we remember to listen to each other.<sup>4</sup>*

**A** long, long time ago, animals used to be just like people. They lived and talked like them. One time, all the animals of this world came together and had a big meeting. The world was dark because there was no sun or moon or stars at that time. When all the animals gathered together, the Bear was boss over all of them.

Two foxes were sitting by a lake, blowing bubbles through a willow bark they had twisted off and saying that it would be like this when a person dies and sinks to the bottom very slowly. When the Bear saw them, and heard what they were saying, he picked up a big rock and threw it into the water. The heavy rock made a big splash and disappeared. He told them that it would be like this when a person dies, he would not ever come back.

"And now you tell me, why should they come back?" he asked the Fox. The Fox got mad at him and told him that they didn't like what he did, and they ran away from him.

After that, all the animals gathered in one

place and asked each other how they could change this world, because they were all tired of living in this constant darkness. They had never seen any light, it was always dark. "What can we do to make it be daylight during the day and dark only at night?" The Bear stood up and asked why they should change anything and make daylight. "It should always stay dark," he told the rest of the animals.

All the animals, Lynx, Fox, and Wolf, all these animals wanted it to stay dark, because they said the hunting was better in the dark. The rest of the animals like Moose, Sheep, Caribou, and other animals all said they were tired of living in the dark all the time and wanted some changes in this world.

The Bear had a big black packsack, he picked this up and disappeared into the bush.

The animals built a big fire and they all gathered around it to decided what they wanted to do. Then they heard the Bear hollering in the dark for someone to come and show him the way back into the fire. He had

lost his way in the dark. No one wanted to help him so they left him alone to find his way back by himself. The Moose told the others, "Leave him alone. He thinks he's so smart just because he is bigger than most animals. Let him find his own way back." So all the animals left him alone. They kept hearing him hollering for a long time and all the animals were laughing at him for getting lost.

Finally, after a long time they started calling to him to show him the way towards the fire. The Bear saw the fire and found his way back to them. When the Bear returned and he saw all the Moose and Sheep around the fire with all the rest of the animals, he got mad, because that is what he was hunting for. All the animals gathered around his pack and asked him what he had in there and wanted him to show them. The Bear reached into his packsack and pulled out some large bear roots. All the animals started laughing at him. The Bear got really mad at them for laughing at him. They told him now maybe he could see why they wanted it to be daylight, so that they could see when they are out hunting for

food. They told him that they would take care of everything and make it light. The Bear still did not want light. He told the animals that he was the boss and if he wanted darkness, it would stay dark.

Finally, the foxes had enough of this argument. They told him, "Just look in your pack and see what you brought back. It's just full of roots that no one can eat, and besides, you get lost in the dark."

"We want to be able to hunt in daylight too," they told him.

The Bear still insisted that he did not want daylight. Then a Crow flew down to them. The Fox jumped straight up into the sky after the Crow and jumped right through the Sky and broke daylight. They call this breaking the dawn (kamba k'ench'äl). That was how daylight was brought to this dark world. Old times say that it was the Fox that broke daylight.

Tl'áhų

*That's all. Now you tell it, which way you like.*

<sup>4</sup> For this particular story - *The Bear that did not want light* - Elder Jessie Joe (from Burwash) told the southern Tutchone version to Daniel Tlen on November 9, 1984. She gave permission to Daniel to record it and share it so that we remember to listen to each other. Margaret Workman translated this recording from southern Tutchone into English. When collecting these stories, the Elders told Margaret that 'they didn't want these stories to get lost.' These stories need to be shared because they want everyone to learn how to respect all living things. Stories are how we learn to respect and talk to each other. (Pers. Communication, M. Workman, October 31, 2023).

# breaking the dawn

## BREAKING THE DAWN

OUR STORY TO REIMAGINE RECONCILIATION  
THROUGH RE-EDUCATION

### Honoring

Yukon University's 13 campuses and land-based classrooms are nestled within the ancestral lands of the 14 Yukon First Nations, lands that Yukon First Nations have known and loved for thousands of years. Their placenames reveal an intimate knowledge of the lands and waters and often provide the instructions one needs for ways to be in good relation when traveling across the landscape. Their stories and memories are imprinted into the land and span generations of knowledge keepers and knowledge seekers. For members of Yukon University, our journey of learning is also a journey of reconciliation. And as guests to these lands, we are committed to meeting our shared responsibilities in advancing reconciliation with all Yukon First Nations and honouring the teachings that emerge from these lands and her people.



*Once you honour the history of the land,  
you're going to honour the people.*

Participant from 2018 workshop, Indigenizing the University Governance Report  
(October 2018)

### On reconciliation

#### SHAAN TLEIN CAROL GEDDES

*The Chair of the Indigenous Advisory Circle on Reconciliation*

Reconciliation reflects a spirit of renewal that is needed in returning to healing relationships not only between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Yukoners but also across our human and more-than human relations. Just as traditional cultural practices operated through a shared set of principles based on respect, trust and diplomacy between nations, Indigenous Peoples now engage those very practices in pursuing reconciliation. For Yukon University, the commitments to reconciliation must align with the integrity of those cultural practices and teachings.



Artist: Shadunjen van Kampen

# messages

## MESSAGES

### *Shaan Tlein* Carol Geddes

#### **A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE INDIGENOUS ADVISORY CIRCLE**

As Chair for the Board's Indigenous Advisory Circle, I welcome the opportunity to continue to support and guide the University in realizing these commitments set out in the Reconciliation Framework. More than a plan, this marks a time for reconciliation-in-action.

Having been involved in higher education for decades, it's a great personal pleasure to witness a small revolution at Yukon University wherein Indigenous education has achieved an entrenched status that truly marks a transformational vision for the future of education.

I raise my hands to the leaders that dreamed of a University in the Yukon that would support Indigenous students. I am so grateful for the trails they blazed and for the journeys our leaders-in-training will take.



*Shaan Tlein* Carol Geddes  
Artist: Yataya van Kampen

### *Gàgala-ǎiǎatko* Nadia Joe

#### **A MESSAGE FROM THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT OF RECONCILIATION**

With a light dusting of snow just visible across its ridge, the mountain beckons me. As I write, all of the signals from the land tell me that it is time for harvesting. It is the time when *nänätthän*, the animals are getting fat, and the lessons from my grandparents for living *dän k'e*, a good life, remind me to step gently, speak softly, be kind-hearted and take only what I need. These are the lessons that continue to inform the steps that I take as I, too, journey towards reconciliation.

As a child of two survivors of Indian Residential School, the journey to transform our educational systems feels daunting; an impossible task, really. But then I reflect on the story my father sometimes shares with me as we're driving out to our fish camp in the fall. It was about this time of year when the Indian agent would drive to our village and collect all the Indian children in the back of a truck for the six hour drive on a dusty gravel road to arrive at the Residential School. He tells me that his mother would always pack a small brown bag filled with some food, clothing and a few other gifts and place it tightly in his hand as he was leaving. He always wondered why she insisted, each year, to send him away with this care package. There was no rational reason behind this act, because every year the brown bag would be taken from him and thrown out immediately upon arrival at the school. A gift wasted.

But each time I return to our fish camp in the fall and witness the abundance, I am reminded that no gift is wasted. The story of my grandmother's love, wrapped in a brown paper bag, continues to feed me. It is a story that echoes across this landscape and somehow the mountains in the distance appear less insurmountable.



*Gàgala-ǎiǎatko* Nadia Joe  
Artist: Yataya van Kampen

It's been an honour to stitch together the many voices you'll hear in this document: a re-telling of many dreams and stories that have long held the hopes of the ancestors. The hope that we may continue the journey of transforming our educational pathways through *kamba k'ench'äl*, 'breaking open the sky' to illuminate our worlds. And I stand in deference to such wisdom that a journey of transformation first requires a personal transformation. So, much like the animals in story 'The Bear that did not want light,' I am choosing first to learn, love and live in the light of an emergent world. And I invite you to learn with us.

## Dr. Lesley Brown

### A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND VICE CHANCELLOR

Yukon University is honoured to present our Reconciliation Framework "Breaking the Dawn: Reimagining Reconciliation through Re-education"

While this document is new, the work that created it has been happening for a very long time and the words here are a reawakening of the knowledge that has always been here in the Yukon.

Decolonizing education and Indigenizing scholarship in the Yukon and in Canada is an urgent priority. As we say in these pages, this document "creates an opening for the entire Yukon University community to build a shared understanding of our role in advancing reconciliation as a post-secondary institution."

Education is at the heart of reconciliation, and this Reconciliation Framework reaffirms our commitment to make space for Yukon First Nations ways of knowing, doing and being in all that we do. Our goal is to enhance the educational experiences and outcomes for all our students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, so that we can do our part in making Canada a better place for everyone.

My deep thanks to all who have contributed to this document.



Dr. Lesley Brown  
Artist: Yataya van Kampen



Day and Night  
Artist: Robert Chassé, age 12

# about this framework

## ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK

In planning for reconciliation through re-education, this document draws from generations of Yukon First Nations pedagogical practices – prayer, story, song, weaving, dreaming – available in materials and recordings from, or prepared for, the Yukon Native Language Centre, Council of Yukon Indians (now Council of Yukon First Nations) and Yukon College (now Yukon University). Much of the thinking, dialoguing, and dreaming that is reflected in this document – the Reconciliation Framework – happened long before our institution became a university. This document is simply reawakening the knowledge and memories of the land and the ancestors so that we all “learn to respect and talk to each other.”<sup>5</sup> This is the meaning of reconciliation through re-education.

Yukon University has a unique responsibility to “respect and honour Yukon First Nations’ knowledge, worldviews, cultural and traditional practices and educational priorities in the university’s educational programming, training, research, services, governance, administration, policies and facilities” (Yukon University Act, 2019). This Framework represents our commitment to the original spirit and intent of Yukon First Nation Final and Self-Government Agreements.

Like the seasonal harvesting rounds of Yukon First Nations, our journey is envisioned to move in periodic cycles:

### **Breaking the Dawn – The Reconciliation Framework (Cycle 1)**

Is positioned to ‘crack open the Sky and break dawn.’ It creates an opening for the entire Yukon University community to build a shared understanding of our role in advancing reconciliation as a post-secondary institution. It clarifies our intention and sets out reconciliation priorities across all areas of this institution. It is intentionally aspirational, challenging us to disrupt patterns of harm and make intuitive leaps into the unknown.

### **An Action Plan (Cycle 2)**

Will set out an implementation plan outlining the responsibilities of the Yukon University community to meet its priority goals and actions. The strategy will be co-created with Yukon University and Yukon First Nations to “encourage and protect the cultural distinctiveness and encourage social well-being” of Yukon First Nation people and their right to ‘participate fully in all aspects of social, economic and political fabric of the Yukon.’<sup>6</sup>

### **A Learning and Evaluation Framework (Cycle 3)**

Will be developed to evaluate and communicate on the progress Yukon University is making in meeting its goals in the 5 year Action Plan.

### **Annual review, reflection and reporting out (Cycle 4)**

To gather, reflect, revisit and revise our guidance documents will be an intentional period to bring together all the voices around the fire and identify the next step forward. The preceding documents (Cycles 1 thru 3) are intended to be ‘evergreen,’ and grow as the relationships evolve and better practices emerge. This cycle creates space for co-learning and co-creating the University with all partners.

Collectively, these guidance documents and cycles will position Yukon University to not only meet our commitments set out in the university’s strategic plan but more importantly, to uphold our legislated commitments to the rights of Yukon First Nations. It is our hope and intention that our journey to advance reconciliation can support the efforts of other post-secondary institutions across Canada and most importantly, work to advance full implementation of inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples. As an educational institution, we work to grow an informed citizenship of all Canadians on the pathways to reconciliation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication, Margaret Workman, October 31, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Paraphrased from Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow (1973), p. 5, para. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Justice Canada. (2023). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan.



## On storytelling and storywork

Storytelling for Yukon First Nations was, and remains, an essential source of instruction to learn the standards for living well on the land and for sustaining good relations with community, clans, family and more-than-human kin.<sup>8</sup> Beyond instruction, stories are also recognized as sources of Indigenous laws<sup>9</sup>, pedagogy<sup>1</sup>, ethical power<sup>11</sup>, wealth<sup>12</sup>, healing<sup>13</sup>, connection<sup>14</sup> and transformation.<sup>15</sup> Stories and storytelling are essential for opening us up to see the limits in our imagination and prepare us for a transformed world.

The story written in the preamble is an imagined dialogue that embodies one of many possible encounters between a grandfather and his grandchild, particularly a grandchild that has spent more time in classroom settings than learning on the land. In its brevity, it conveys one of the most critical instructions that Yukon First Nations Elders insisted was needed for learning – ‘just listen.’

In the story about *‘the Bear that did not want light,’* we learn the consequences of ignoring the voices of others. Importantly, we only begin to see a world of possibilities when we finally hear the many voices whispering to us in darkness.

*“We learn from Grandma and Grandpa, what they do, and they explain to us. I think everybody knows that, but I know what they say...Just like you're learning things. Just like you're going to school. They tell stories to make your mind strong.”*

Mrs. Annie Ned, southern-Tutchone Elder, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations<sup>16</sup>

## On language and intention

Yukon First Nations Elders, and storytellers in particular, emphasized the importance of “getting the words right.”<sup>17</sup> This was especially true when documenting stories for future audiences.<sup>18</sup> The words and language used in this document are one practice to honour the teachings of the Elders.

Eight Indigenous languages are spoken among the 14 Yukon First Nations – **Gwich'in, Hän, Dene Zāgé (Kaska), Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tagish, Tlingit, Upper Tanana.** Of these, several have multiple dialects. For each language, an orthography has been evolving over decades to capture, as accurately as possible, the sounds of the words and languages. Thus, the spelling of certain words or names may change both as our knowledge improves and as the diversity of language speakers declines.

In this document, we've adopted the language(s) and spelling conventions available to us. For instance, stories, songs and prayers shared here are presented in the original language and spelling known, permitted, and available to us. Oftentimes, there are only English language versions of particular stories which provide an imperfect and incomplete understanding. We acknowledge the limits and potential risks in presenting cultural knowledge in the dialects and/or languages available to us. We are working, and will continue to work, to engage Yukon First Nations across all levels of the university so we will be better positioned to reflect the diversity of voices representing the 14 Yukon First Nations and their lands. We present language to know, learn and use in Appendix A.

*“Once you speak it, you can't call it back.”*

Aan Gooshú Mark Wedge, Knowledge Keeper, Storyteller and Peacemaker, Carcross-Tagish First Nation

8 Refer to many works documented by Cruikshank in the reference section.

9 Refer to many resources on Indigenous Law in the reference section

10 Refer to many resources on Indigenous storywork in the reference section.

11 McClellan, C. (1975). My old people say. P. 375.

12 See storybook, "My stories are my wealth."

13 Champagne & Aishihik First Nations (2023). Restoring and re-storying wellness in Dän k'e. Unpublished report.

14 Children of Tomorrow. 2023. Reconnection Vision – A pathway for change from the children of tomorrow.

15 Champagne & Aishihik First Nations (2023). Restoring and re-storying wellness in Dän k'e. Unpublished report.

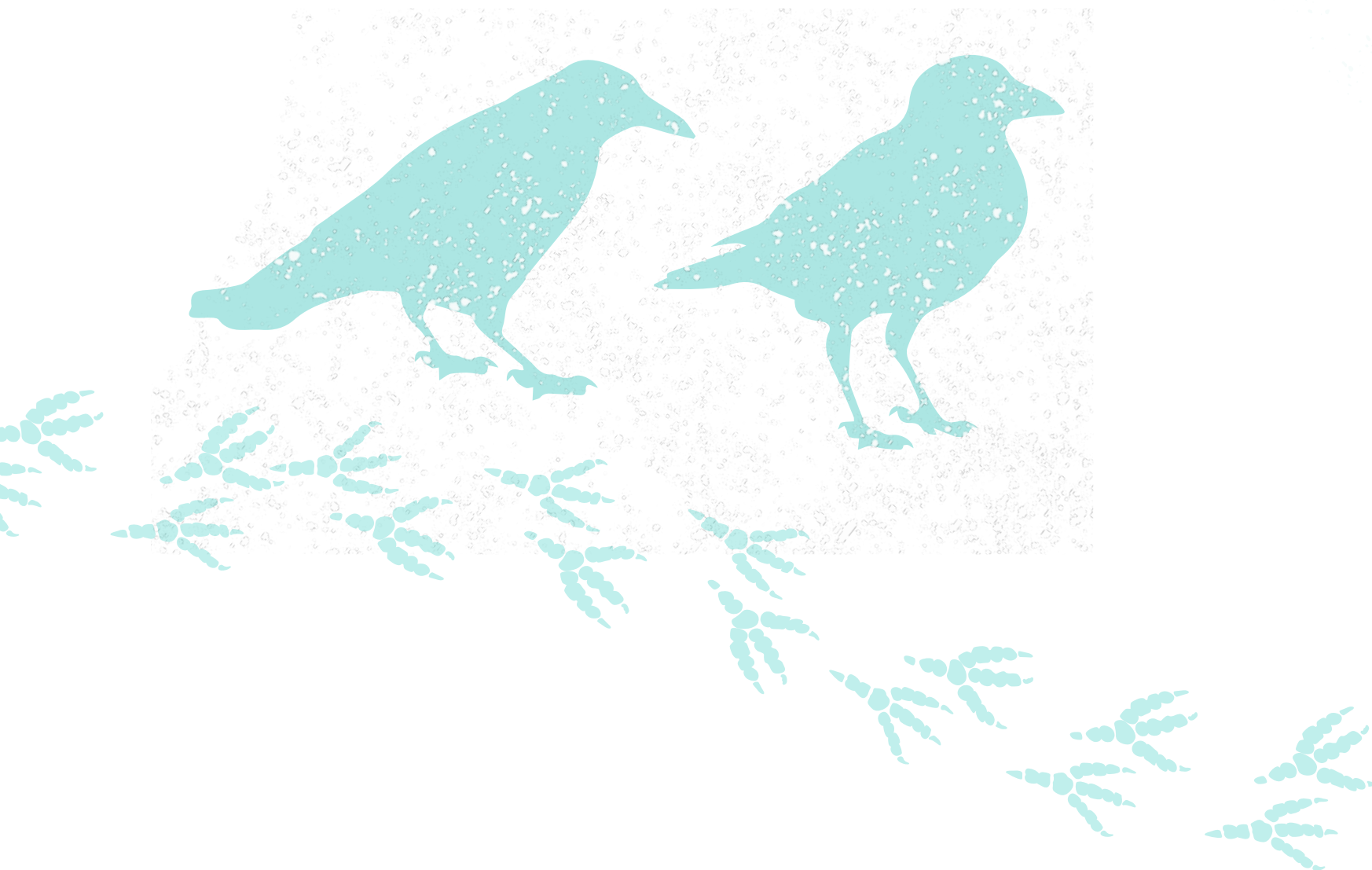
16 Cited in, Cruikshank, J. (1991)

17 Instructions from Mrs. Annie Ned to Julie Cruikshank, cited in many of Cruikshank's publications but notably Cruikshank, 1990, p. 328; p. 354.

18 Cruikshank, 1990. Getting the words right: Perspectives on Naming and Places in Athapaskan Oral History

## On permission

Cultural knowledge – including languages, songs, stories and prayers – often comes with instructions and protocols for appropriate use and sharing. We also acknowledge that many teachings of the ancestors are sacred and require both rigorous training and are to be learned through, and only through, the oral tradition (i.e., they should not be recorded or written down). We are committed to understanding how we observe and apply the cultural instructions and protocols for acquiring consent to use, share, and acknowledge the sources of cultural knowledge.<sup>19</sup>



*Time Outside*  
Artist: Louis Chassé, age 12

<sup>19</sup> Refer to principles of OCAP® that will guide and inform Yukon University's approach

## On terminology

Many of the terms adopted here have been introduced through academic discourse (i.e., these are largely not the language of the land or words that are used in community). Many of these terms take on different meanings in different contexts and are often used inter-changeably. In guiding our work, we offer some key distinctions among the terms and include multiple perspectives to shape our collective understandings. We encourage further dialogue to ensure we *'get the words right'*.<sup>20</sup>

### Anti-colonial

Describes the various resistance movements directed against colonial and imperial powers. Draws from intersectional principles of justice, equality, and self-determination.

### Decolonization

The practice of 'reclaiming our good mind'.<sup>21</sup> In academic spaces, the invitation towards decolonizing our systems is to fundamentally reorient knowledge production to a system based on different power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians. It involves a complete reimagining of our relationships to land and each other and is a necessary process to move towards reconciliation and "demonstrate a way toward a more just Canadian academy".<sup>22</sup>

### Final Agreements

The Final Agreements are constitutionally-protected modern treaties that define First Nations' rights on Settlement Land and within their Traditional Territory. They address heritage, resources, wildlife, water, taxation, compensation, forestry and economic development. Eleven of 14 Yukon First Nations have settled Final and Self-Government Agreements with the Government of Canada and Yukon Government.

### Indigenous Peoples

Are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. They have retained social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live and they belong to a recognized Indigenous Nation or community.

### Indigenization

The practice of 'reclaiming our good heart'.<sup>23</sup> In post-secondary contexts, it is often described as a process of naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts.<sup>24</sup> It involves not only "the process of creating a supportive and comfortable space inside our institutions within which Indigenous people can succeed"<sup>25</sup> but also a fundamental shift in the ways that institutions:

- Include Indigenous perspectives, values, and cultural understandings in policies and daily practices;
- Position Indigenous ways of knowing at the heart of the institution, which then informs all the work that we do; and
- Include cultural protocols and practices in the operations of our institutions.

### Journey towards Indigenization

From Yukon University's President's Advisory Committee on First Nations Initiatives: "The journey of Indigenization is grounded in the equal recognition, inclusion, integration of Indigenous values, cultures, languages and ways of knowing and doing, into the fabric of Yukon University's programs, services, governance, policies and spaces." PACFNI, 2017

### Reconciliation

"Reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relationships...it is an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships,"<sup>26</sup> and highlights that "[r]econciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share."<sup>27</sup>

### Self-Government Agreements

The Self-Government Agreements provide Yukon First Nations with the power to control their own affairs. This includes establishing their own laws for their citizens and on Settlement Land and delivering programs and services to their citizens.

### Storywork

The practice of ethically engaging with Indigenous knowledges, languages, laws, etc. through story as a means for learning, meaning-making and world-building.<sup>28</sup>

20 Mrs. Annie Ned, southern-Tutchone storyteller and knowledge keeper.

21 Attributed to teachings expressed by scholar Dr. Lee Brown as an adaptation from the teachings of the Good Red Road and the Great Law of Peace.

22 Munroe, I. (2021). Where truth and reconciliation stand at Canadian Universities.

23 Attributed to teachings expressed by scholar Dr. Lee Brown as an adaptation from the teachings of the Good Red Road and the Great Law of Peace.

24 Iain Cull, Robert L.A. Hancock, Stephanie McKeown, Michelle Pidgeon, and Adrienne Vedan, Pulling Together: A Guide for Front-Line Staff, Student Services, and Advisors.

25 Bopp, M., Brown, L., and Robb, J., 2017, p.2

26 Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, p. 16

27 TRC Final Report, p. 8.

28 Archibald, J. (2014). Indigenous Storywork: educating the mind, heart, body and spirit.

### **Umbrella Final Agreement**

The Umbrella Final Agreement was the framework for negotiating individual Yukon First Nation agreements. It defined the amount of land and financial compensation for each First Nation, and called for the creation of boards and committees to provide community input and recommendations to government.

### **Yukon First Nations**

Means one of the following<sup>29</sup>

- Carcross/Tagish First Nation
- Champagne and Aishihik First Nations
- Kluane First Nation
- Kwanlin Dun First Nation
- Liard First Nation
- Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation
- First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun
- Ross River Dena Council
- Selkirk First Nation
- Ta'an Kwach'an Council
- Teslin Tlingit Council
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
- Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation
- White River First Nation

### **Yukon First Nation Community**

Refers to the entirety of a Yukon First Nation necessary to represent a Nation's broad and diverse interests. It includes the elected leadership, government administration, youth, knowledge keepers and other citizens who may not have a formal role in the First Nation.

### **Yukon First Nation Government**

Refers to the elected leadership and public servants charged with delivering the programs and services of a Yukon First Nation.



*Embracing Freedom*  
Artist: James S. Miller, Jr.

<sup>29</sup> Yukon University Act, 2019.

# about our story

## ABOUT OUR STORY



### Dreamscape



“ We want our children to go to school in the Yukon... We feel that there should be a University in the Yukon.

Together Today for our Children Tomorrow, 1973, p. 21.

Artist: Yataya van Kampen

For Yukon First Nations, the practice of coming together and telling our stories was not only to preserve our memories but to dream our world into being. Yukon University was borne of one of these dreams.

In the early 1970s, the leaders of 14 Yukon First Nations in the Yukon came together to tell their stories: stories about loss, injustice and hope. It was from this collective storytelling that a key document, *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow*, emerged with a shared vision for Yukon First Nations. On Valentine's Day in 1973, a delegation of First Nations leaders traveled to Ottawa to present this vision to Prime Minister Trudeau. This document formed the basis for negotiating comprehensive land claims agreements and the establishment of Indigenous self-government in Canada. In the appendix of this visionary document, the leadership outlined a plan for the future of education and research in the Yukon.

We continue to be guided by this vision and the dreams of Yukon First Nations leaders.

### Landscape

“ Community is the ultimate solution to the climate change issue...we can give from an infinite place.

Dana Tizya-Tramm, Vuntut Gwichin leader<sup>30</sup>

#### Guidance from global conditions on Indigenous lands

For Indigenous Peoples, the impacts and effects of climate breakdown not only affect their rights<sup>31</sup> and interests in harvesting country foods, gathering traditional medicines, and collecting safe drinking water, but it also threatens the very nature of their relationships to land, community and cultural identity.<sup>32</sup> Yukon University understands that the journey towards reconciliation cannot occur on a planet in climate crisis and accepts the conclusions from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that colonialism is an historic driver and current accelerant to the climate crisis.<sup>33</sup> As a northern university, we are also aware that impacts and effects of climate breakdown disproportionately affect northern landscapes, habitats, and Indigenous Peoples<sup>34</sup> and we have a responsibility to learn, teach and respond with commensurate urgency.

We remain committed to learning from Yukon First Nations knowledges, stories, histories and memories that may renew our collective ways of living and being in relationship to the Earth and each other.

#### Guidance from international standards on Indigenous rights

Canada has endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Yukon University recognizes that all relations with Yukon First Nations and Indigenous Peoples are grounded in respect for the recognition and implementation of their right to self-determination:

*Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (Article 3).*

<sup>30</sup> Dana Tizya-Tramm, 2021. Keynote address – Climate Emergency Week. UBC. Direct quote used with permission (Pers. comms., November 23, 2023).

<sup>31</sup> Aboriginal rights are protected under the Constitution Act, 1982. Section 35;

<sup>32</sup> Whyte, K. (2020). Indigenous environmental injustice: anti-colonial action through kinship.

<sup>33</sup> IPCC. 2021. Summary for policy makers. Sixth Report

<sup>34</sup> Hancock, B. et al. (2022). Northern Canada; Chapter 6 in Canada in a Changing Climate: Regional Perspectives Report, (eds) F.J. Warren, N. Lulham, D.L. Dupuis and D.S. Lemmen; Government of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

Yukon University also leans on key articles that help guide minimum standards for advancing Indigenous rights and pursuing pathways towards reconciliation. By example, articles 11, 12 and 25 of the Declaration address biocultural and spiritual rights by suggesting that preserving cultural identity means also working to preserve the physical elements inherently linked to that identity:

*Indigenous Peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs (Article 11).*

*Indigenous Peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions (Article 12).*

*Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources (Article 25).*

Article 32 addresses rights for free, prior and informed consent regarding lands, territories or resource use:

*Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories or other resources. States shall consult with Indigenous Peoples through their own representative institutions to obtain their free prior informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the use of mineral, water or other resources (Article 32).*

These inform the foundation of ethical practices for our teaching, research, governance, and operations.

### **Guidance from national commitments to reconciliation**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada<sup>35</sup> calls on post-secondary institutions to act in partnerships and respond to these calls for action:

16. *We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.*
57. *We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.*

62. *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.*
- *Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.*
- *Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.*
- *Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.*

63. *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.*
- *Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.*
- *Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.*
- *Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.*

64. *We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.*

65. *We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.*

35 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015).

### Guidance from Yukon First Nations legal authorities

Each of the First Nations in the Yukon reflects a unique understanding of and experiences with the land, their peoples, and their forms of governance.

Eleven (11) of 14 Yukon First Nations ratified Final and Self-Government Agreements based on the Umbrella Final Agreement. Key guidance on appropriate training and education needs for Yukon First Nations to "take full advantage of the Settlement Agreements to strengthen their communities" is set out in various chapters of the agreements including:

- *Chapter 28 (Umbrella Final Agreement) – the requirement to ensure that Yukon First Nations "receive training in order to participate effectively in opportunities arising from and associated with the implementation of Settlement Agreements."*<sup>36</sup>
- *Part 2 Board Training and Cross-cultural Orientation and Education (Umbrella Final Agreement Implementation Plan) – sets out expectations pertaining to the training and education necessary for all members of UFA Boards and Committees.*

These legislative mandates inform Yukon University's planning, approach and delivery of educational programming as well as the responsibility to work with the responsible parties<sup>37</sup>, as deemed appropriate.

Furthermore, it is the Yukon First Nations Final and Self-Government Agreements (SGA) which present a distinct legal environment in the Yukon Territory. Yukon First Nations with SGAs have the authority to pass laws and assume jurisdiction over training and education programs for each Nation's Citizens. Should a First Nation pass legislation and assume this jurisdiction, the Yukon Territory's laws around education – including, potentially, the *Yukon University Act* – will no longer apply to that Nation's citizens.

An update to Section 17.7 of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in SGA<sup>38</sup> creates the potential for "sharing of responsibility in the design, delivery and administration of educational programs delivered within the Traditional Territory of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in", including programs relating to:

- 17.7.1 student counselling;
- 17.7.2 cross cultural teacher/administrator orientation;
- 17.7.3 composition of teaching staff;
- 17.7.4 early childhood, special, and adult education curriculum;
- 17.7.5 kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum; or
- 17.7.6 the evaluation of teachers, administrators and other employees.

Such changes will guide and transform how Yukon University engages Yukon First Nations to ensure their Citizens' needs continue to be met but it does not insert that Nation directly in the governance of the institution nor undermine the structural autonomy built into the university's governing legislation. In other words, Yukon's legal landscape impels the university to lead and advance reconciliation while maintaining a commitment to academic excellence, integrity, freedom and institutional autonomy.

Finally, Yukon University is equally committed to the educational and training needs of our learners from all fourteen Nations spanning the Yukon and, as deemed appropriate by the responsible parties, Yukon University will collaborate with educational partners to identify and prioritize training needs of Yukon First Nations.

### Mandate from the Yukon University Act

Yukon University operates under the authority of the Yukon University Act (2019) and is governed by a Board of Governors and Senate.

In carrying out its purposes, Article 3, the University must do the following:

- (d) honour and support
  - i) reconciliation with Yukon First Nations,
  - ii) the jurisdiction of Yukon First Nations under final agreements and self-government agreements, and
  - iii) the implementation of those agreements by building capacity through education and research for and with Yukon First Nations;
- (e) include, respect and honour Yukon First Nations' knowledge, worldviews, cultural and traditional practices and educational priorities in the university's educational programming, training, research, services, governance, administration, policies and facilities.

One critical body to support University in realizing this mandate is the President's Advisory Committee on First Nations Initiatives, PACFNI. Originating in 2006 out of a recommendation made at the Yukon First Nations education summit, 'Two Trails – One Future,' PACFNI remains a key voice for Yukon First Nations in bringing forward concerns, interests and priorities for training and education at Yukon University. Comprised of educational representatives of all 14 YFN, they continue to provide strategic direction to the senior management team and assists Yukon University with meeting their mandate by increasing the effectiveness of programs and services for Indigenous learners, as well as helping to support Yukon First Nations build capacity and implement their final agreements.

<sup>36</sup> Umbrella Final Agreement (1993). Chapter 28, section 28.1.1.6.

<sup>37</sup> The UFA Implementation Plan (1993) sets out responsible parties for training and education and identifies Yukon College (now University) as a potential partner in working with these many partners – including the Training Policy Committee – "as deemed appropriate."

<sup>38</sup> Replaced – P.C. 2023 – 0270 – March 27, 2023

## Spiritscape

As we work to advance reconciliation, Yukon University must actively move towards repairing relationships through strengthening and renewing those relationships, re-establishing trust, and fostering respect for and protection of Yukon First Nations lands, peoples, cultures and rights.

Much like *Fox leaping into Sky and Breaking the Dawn*, we do not know what our world will look like with reconciliation. But we know, somehow, that our lives will be better with it. To help us prepare for this uncertainty, the following principles can support our actions and dialogue through engaging in principled struggle<sup>39</sup> – at a personal and institutional level. Because as we are dismantling the harmful fragments of one way of knowing and being in the world (i.e., the colonial way), we need to be intentional about what we build and set into place (ie. walking the trail in a good way).

### Guiding Principles

**All the animals gathered in one place and asked each other how they could change this world.**

*We transform our worlds by coming together in dialogue and in dreaming (emergent, safety to explore).*

We do not anticipate the path towards reconciliation to be straightforward, or even that the desired outcome will be completely understood at the beginning. Instead, we propose the need for insights and understandings to emerge, though dialogue in ethical space for listening and dreaming new worlds into being.

**The animals built a big fire and they all gathered around it to decide what they wanted to do.**

*We share the work and in sharing the work we grow, learn and make decisions together (shared responsibility, non-hierarchical, interdependent decision-making).*

We are blazing new paths on our journey to advance reconciliation and this comes with inherent uncertainty. We can anticipate few(er) experiences to draw from known and/or established sources or experts, like Bear. Moving successfully towards reconciliation will mean less learning from, and leaning on, the 'experts' and instead shifting towards systems of collaboration and interdependencies where we can lean on, and learn with, each other to make better decisions for our world. All the Animals' voices have a place to be heard around the fire.

**Finally, after a long time they started calling to [Bear] to show him the way towards the fire... They told him that they would take care of everything and make it light.**

*Unlike Bear, we learn more from listening to the many voices around us, reflecting together about new worlds, and then responding (we practice being reflexive then responsive).*

To intentionally disrupt the cycles of entrenched thinking and practices, we require a different approach to learning together and creating new possibilities. We need to be intentional in reflecting on how we show up to the Fire and the learning and unlearning we are willing to engage in prior to seeking solutions and responses.

**The Bear still insisted that he did not want daylight. Then a Crow flew down to them. The Fox jumped straight up into the sky after the Crow and jumped right through the Sky and broke daylight.**

*We watch for openings to intervene and disrupt patterns of harm, without replicating harm (we practice principled struggle).<sup>40</sup>*

The loudest voice around the fire isn't always representative, nor is it generative. In transforming our worlds, we see that it sometimes takes just one disruptor to create an opening for another to act and something new in the world to emerge. We understand that sometimes intuitive leaps into the unknown can spur the change we desire to create in our worlds.



Artist: Shadunjen van Kampen

<sup>39</sup> The ancestors had rules and protocols for engaging respectfully in struggles. For many Yukon First Nations, these were understood to be *adūlj/Dooli* (i.e., Customary Indigenous Laws) See McClellan (1975).

<sup>40</sup> The term 'principled struggle' reminds us to engage in struggle ethically, without replicating practices of harm. See adrienne maree brown (2021).



### On weaving: preparing for holding tension

Instruction from generations of Master Raven's Tail Weavers teach that the warp and weft threads are held together through applying just the right amount of tension. Too much tension and the weaving will warp, too little tension and the weaving will unravel.

As we draw in the knowledge of many voices on our journey of reconciliation, we recognize that tensions are a welcome and necessary part of both our personal and institutional transformations. We will practice leaning into, holding space for, and wayfinding through tensions to create 'patterns of strength and beauty,' patterns of transition and transformation. We also recognize that not all tensions are healthy and we will learn how to distinguish the tensions that need to be released for stronger and healthier patterns to emerge.

“*The loom of the self stands empty  
without the knowledge of others.*

*The hands lay idle without insight  
to guide the threads into place.*

*Through learning, one spins the volumes  
of yarn into uniform threads.*

*With wisdom, the hands weave  
patterns of strength and beauty.*

BLEau 6 September 1991



Raven's Tail Weaving  
Artist: Niketko Mary Jane Joe & Gàgala-łìłatko Nadia Joe

# 14 Yukon First Nations

## CARCROSS/TAGISH

*(Tagish references 'spring ice is breaking up')*

**Governing council:** Kaa Shaadé Hení (Chief) and General Council comprising six Clans; Dak`laweidí and Yanýeidí (from the Wolf moiety) and Kookhittaán, Gaanaxteidí, Ishkahittaán and Deisheetaan (from the Crow moiety).

**Languages:** Tagish and inland-Tlingit

**Primary residential community:** Carcross, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Carcross

## SHADHĀLA YÈ ĀSHĒYI KWĀDĀN

*(People of Champagne and Aishihik)*

**Governing council:** Dän nātthe dāth'I (Chief and Council) comprising: Dän nātthe āda (Chief), four Dän nātthe dāth'i (Councillors); one Āshāw Dän nātthe āda (Elder Councillor); and one Shāna Dän nātthe āda (Youth Councillor).

**Languages:** Dàkwānjè (Our language/Southern-Tutchone); Tlingit

**Primary residential community:** Haines Junction, Takhini, Champagne, Whitehorse, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Dakwākāda Dän Kenādän Yū Haines Junction

## KWÍYAJAL LHÙ'ÀAN MÂN KEYI

*(Kluane First Nation)*

**Governing council:** Chief and Council comprising: one Chief, two Councillors-at-Large, one Youth Councillor and one Elders' Councillor.

**Language:** Southern-Tutchone

**Primary residential community:** Burwash Landing, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** N/A

## KWÄNLIN DÄN GHA EECH'

*(We are Kwanlin Dun)*

**Governing council:** Chief and Council comprising: one Chief, six Councillors

**Languages:** Southern Tutchone, Tagish, Tlingit

**Primary residential community:** Whitehorse, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Ayamdigut Whitehorse

## LIARD FIRST NATION

**Governing council:** Dene K'éh GÚs'an (people's way) comprising one Chief and four Councillors (Yukon residents) and one deputy Chief and two Councillors (BC residents)

**Language:** Dene Zágé' (Kaska)

**Primary residential community:** Watson Lake, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Watson Lake

## LITTLE SALMON CARMACKS

*(ancestral area of 'my grandfather's lands')*

**Governing council:** Dän yatthi detth'I (Chief and Council) comprising: two Wolf Clan Councillors, two Crow Clan Councillors, one Elder Councillor, one Youth Councillor, the Deputy Chief and the Chief

**Language:** Dan Yoonji (Our language, Northern Tutchone)

**Primary residential community:** Carmacks, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Dän Hänádän K'enjik Carmacks

## NA-CHO NYÄK DUN

*(People of the Big River)*

**Governing council:** Chief and Council comprising: Chief, Deputy Chief, four Councillors, Youth Councillor, Elder Councillor

**Language:** Northern Tutchone

**Primary residential community:** Mayo, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Mayo and Faro

## ROSS RIVER DENA COUNCIL

**Governing council:** Chief and Council comprising: one Chief, one Deputy Chief, three Councillors

**Languages:** Kaska

**Primary residential community:** Ross River, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Dena Cho Kê'endj Ross River

## SELKIRK FIRST NATION

**Governing council:** Chief and Council, Elders' Council Family Heads

**Languages:** Northern Tutchone

**Primary residential community:** Pelly Crossing, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Hets'edän Kú Pelly Crossing

## TA'AN KWÄCH'ÄN

*(People of Lake Laberge)*

**Governing council:** Chief and Council, Elder's Council, Youth Council

**Language:** Southern Tutchone

**Primary residential community:** Whitehorse, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Ayamdigut (Whitehorse)

## TESLIN TLINGIT

*(tás ten references "long sewing sinew")*

**Governing council:** Naa Shàade Háni (Chief) and nine member Executive Council

**Language:** Tlingit

**Primary residential community:** Teslin, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Teslin

## TR'ONDĒK HWĒCH'IN

*(People of the River)*

**Governing council:** Hähkè (Chief) and Council with Deputy Chief and three Councillors

**Language:** Hän

**Primary residential community:** Dawson City, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Tr'ondèk Hätr'unohtän Zho Dawson City

## VUNTUT GWICH'IN FIRST NATION

*(People who live among the lakes)*

**Governing council:** Chief and Council

**Languages:** Loucheux, Kutchin and Tukudh

**Primary residential community:** Old Crow, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** Alice Frost Old Crow

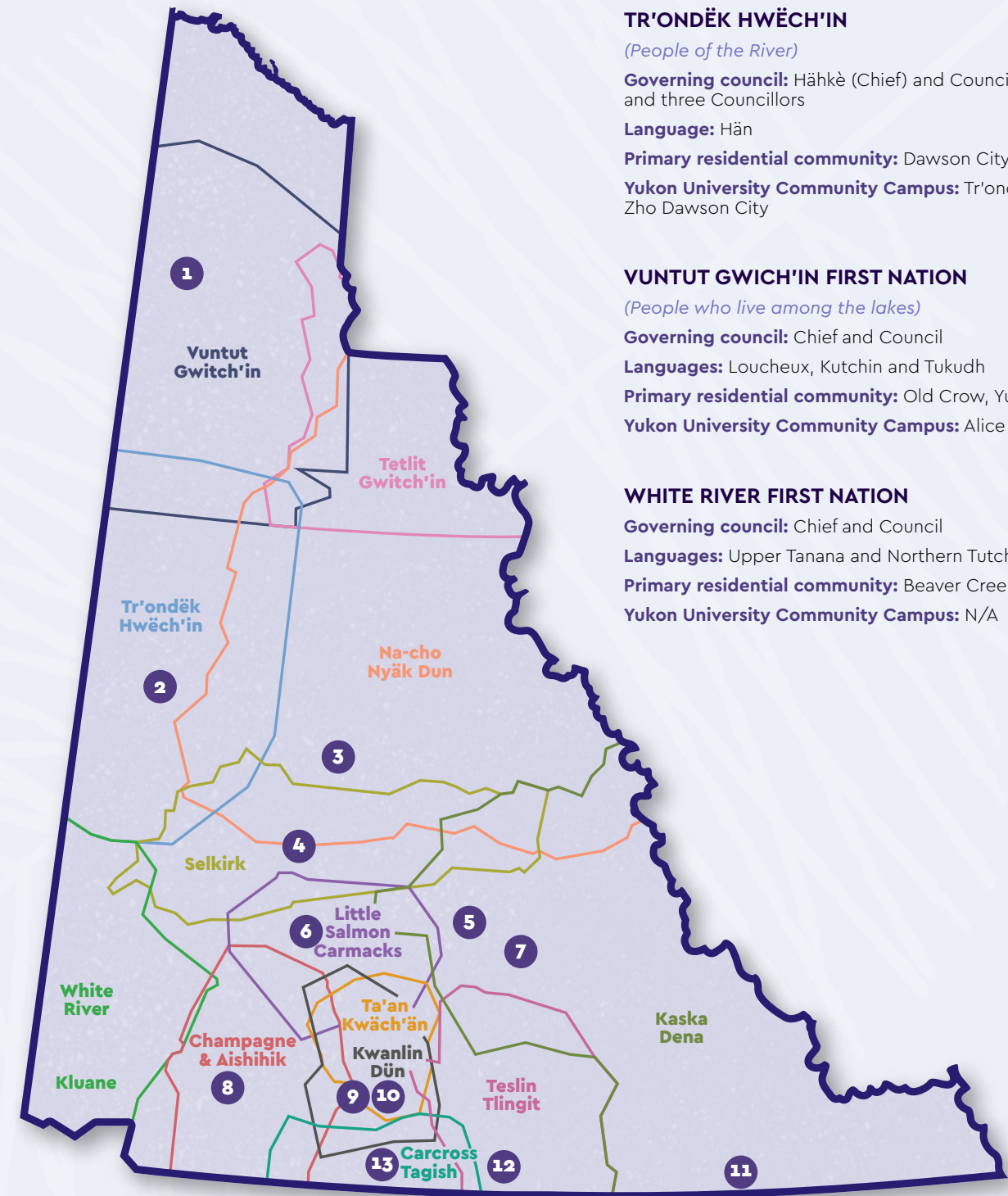
## WHITE RIVER FIRST NATION

**Governing council:** Chief and Council

**Languages:** Upper Tanana and Northern Tutchone

**Primary residential community:** Beaver Creek, Yukon

**Yukon University Community Campus:** N/A



- |                              |                                    |                 |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Alice Frost               | 6. Dän Hänádän K'enjik             | 11. Watson Lake |
| 2. Tr'ondèk Hätr'unohtän Zho | 7. Dena Cho Kê'endj                | 12. Teslin      |
| 3. Mayo                      | 8. Dakwākāda Dän Kenādän Yū        | 13. Carcross    |
| 4. Hets'edän Kú              | 9. Ayamdigut                       |                 |
| 5. Faro                      | 10. Whitehorse Correctional Centre |                 |

# ABOUT OUR JOURNEY FORWARD

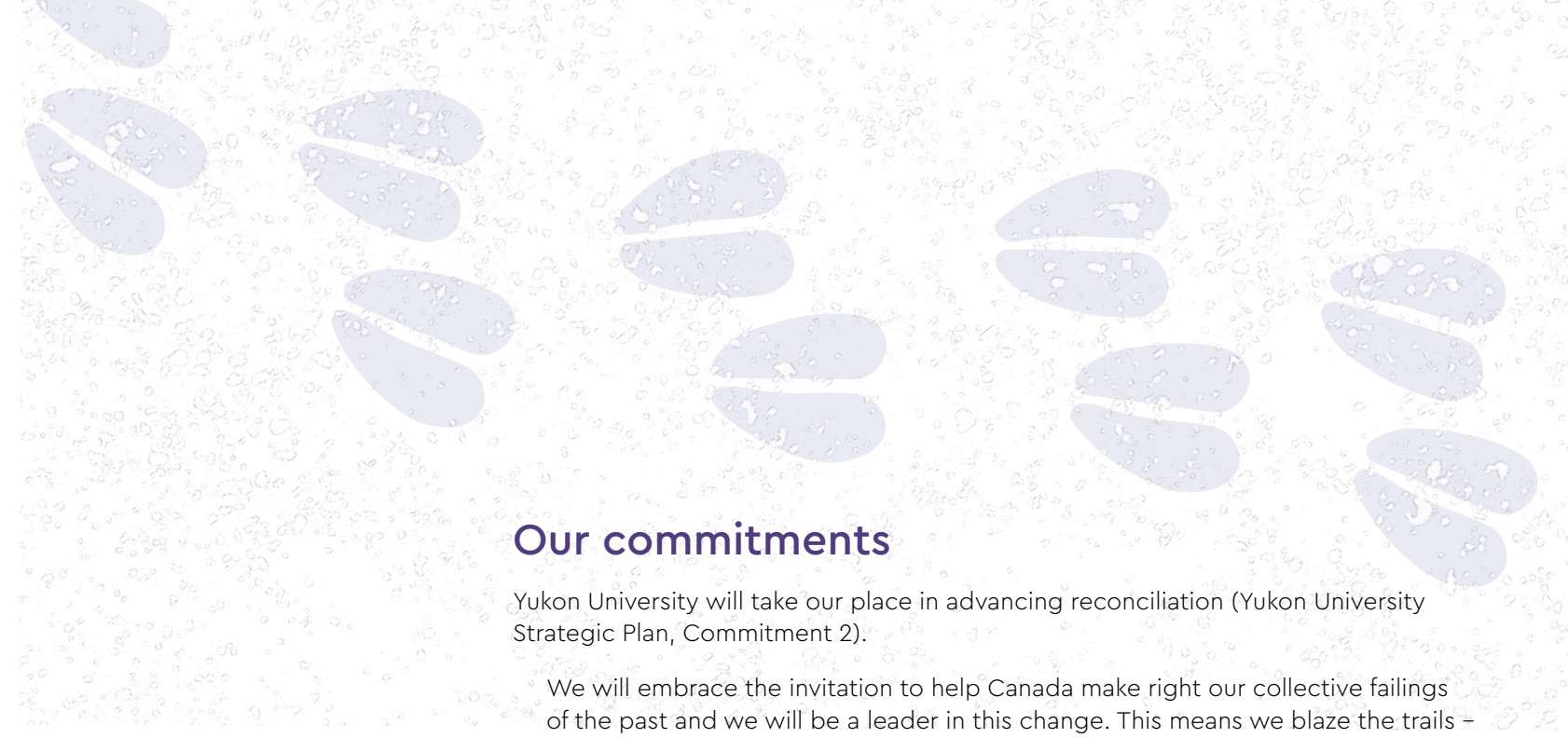
As we journey towards reconciliation, Yukon University will be guided by:

**A vision for** a thriving learning and research community leading Canada's North for the benefit of northern lands, peoples and more-than-human kin.

**A mission to** restore and re-story the knowledge and memories of the lands and ancestors in educating the minds, hearts and spirits of all our learners.

**“...an enormous obstacle to the task of implementing these [Self-government] agreements is the training of the next generation. I believe well educated Yukon First Nations citizens will be the foundation of a successful First Nation Government.**

Andy Carville, Grand Chief, Council of Yukon First Nations, 2006



## Our commitments

Yukon University will take our place in advancing reconciliation (Yukon University Strategic Plan, Commitment 2).

We will embrace the invitation to help Canada make right our collective failings of the past and we will be a leader in this change. This means we blaze the trails – and share our progress – for decolonizing education and indigenizing scholarship in Canada. We will strengthen our collaboration with Yukon First Nations to meet their goals in education while working to heal the devastating effects of colonization, in general, and residential schools, in particular. We honour and respect the cultures, languages and heritage of Yukon First Nations, their traditional knowledge and world views by proudly walking alongside them on their paths to self-determination. In doing so, we will make space for Yukon First Nations ways of knowing, doing and being in all that we do.

## On humility: acknowledging limitations

At Yukon University, we aspire to travel with integrity on our journey of reconciliation. In our commitment to transform our teaching, learning, research, governance, and operational practices, we understand and acknowledge, with humility, that the university as an institution is founded on colonial ideas, desires and infrastructures.<sup>41</sup> Reconciliation through re-education will involve a commitment to learning, unlearning and re-learning how to be in the world differently together.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Stein, S. (2022). Unsettling the University.

<sup>42</sup> Stein, S. (2017). So you want to decolonize higher education? Necessary conversations for non-Indigenous people

## Expression of accountabilities

There will be no prescription for reconciliation. For now, as a guide, we offer our expression of accountabilities. These include our legislated commitments and agreements that are enforced by other colonial institutions. But we also include the expressions of accountabilities drawn from the wisdom of the ancestors, for it is the remembering of these pathways of accountability that will be necessary for creating a future for all the Animals around the Fire to be in the world together.



Tribute to my Yukon  
Artist: James S. Miller, Jr.

## LEGAL COMMITMENTS

- We are accountable to the safety, learning and well-being of our students
- We are accountable to the safety, health and well-being of our staff
- We are accountable to the emergent vision of the Yukon University Strategic Plan, Academic Plan and the community of leaders overseeing these
- We are accountable to our partners in reconciliation
- We are accountable to Yukon First Nations governments in their work towards self-determination and preparing our students to step ethically into this landscape
- We are accountable to the original dreamers – the Yukon First Nations elders and leaders – who shared their dream of a university in the Yukon, for the Yukon

## INDIGENOUS LEGAL ORDERS

- We are accountable to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to advance reconciliation in post-secondary institutions
- We are accountable to the International Standards protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and answering the calls to teach, learn and uphold these rights
- We are accountable to the Survivors of Indian Residential Schools and to the ones that never returned and calls for learning and teaching their truth
- We are accountable to a planet now in crisis and calls from Indigenous Leaders for transforming our practices to sustain our mother earth
- We are accountable to the Creator

# about our priorities

## ABOUT OUR PRIORITIES

This section sets out the priorities, goals and proposed actions for meeting our commitments in advancing reconciliation, respecting the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to enrich our teaching, learning and research efforts.

The priorities set out in this framework have emerged from several years of listening to and engagement with Yukon First Nations leadership and communities by the Yukon College (now Yukon University) community. These have also been informed by emergent best practices of post-secondary institutions. Specifically, these include the following:

### **Two trails, one future (2006)**

An education summit hosted by Yukon College inviting all Yukon First Nations to collaboratively explore the educational and training needs within the context of the Self-government agreements.

### **Sunrise Report (2008)**

a summary report based on community consultations to renew the relationship between Yukon College and Yukon First Nations. The report identified a number of training opportunities and recommendations to address educational priorities for Yukon First Nations.

### **Indigenizing University Governance: Considerations for Yukon University (2018)**

a summary report from workshop convening 30 representatives from 15 post-secondary institutions across Canada and multiple Yukon First Nations to identify pathways for bridging university governance and indigenization.

### **Vision 2030: Foundations for the Future (2020)**

A summary report describing major trends and changes anticipated over the next decade. It was prepared to inform the development of Yukon University's academic, research and strategic plans. Engagement included discussions with Yukon College's Board of Governors, staff, faculty and students; governments, including Yukon First Nations governments; and various stakeholder groups across the territory.

### **PACFNI (2006 – present)**

On-going feedback and direction shared by the President's Advisory Committee on First Nations Initiatives (PACFNI) during quarterly gatherings from May 2007 - present;

### **Direct engagement (2022 – 2023)**

Multiple community engagement sessions in the winter and spring of 2022 with Yukon First Nations and review of priority goals and actions with 10 of 14 Yukon First Nations led by the FNI team and AVP Indigenous Engagement and Relationships (March – April 2023).

### **Indigenous Advisory Circle (2023)**

Review and revisions on the priority goals and actions with the Indigenous Advisory Circle led by the AVP Reconciliation (Sept 2023)

### **Reconciliation Cafés (2023)**

Five (5) in-person and three (3) virtual Reconciliation Cafes invited the Yukon University community (including staff, students and faculty across all campuses) into the practice of 'meaning-making through storywork' to explore "The Bear that did not want light," led by the AVP Reconciliation (November 2023).

### **Dreaming Charettes (2024)**

Six (6) in-person and three (3) virtual Dreaming Charettes welcomed the Yukon University community (including staff, students and faculty across all campuses) to engage in ethical space for developing a shared understanding, prioritizing institutional commitments to reconciliation, and fostering the dialogue, connections and community necessary to uphold the University's commitments to advance reconciliation. Sessions were led by AVP Reconciliation (January – March 2024).

### **Online surveys (2024)**

An online survey was also created to invite feedback from the broader University community on the Reconciliation Framework (open from January – March 2024).

## We belong: supporting Indigenous students and ensuring success on their terms

...all the animals gathered in one place and asked each other how they could change this world...

We learn from the story that all the Animals find a place to belong around the fire and have a role in shaping the future they want. As such we strive to provide access to learning opportunities that provide connection, belonging and healing for Indigenous students by serving to elevate culture and language whenever possible.

Yukon University proudly supports Indigenous students from all 14 Yukon First Nations and many communities and nations from the Northwest Territories, Northern British Columbia, Nunavut, as well as many other provinces across Canada. Our goal is for Indigenous students to find their success through education, such that success is not just about students completing courses, but also about "reframing knowledge production and transmission within the academy from an Indigenous perspective".



### GOALS

- 1.1 For the next five years, YukonU demonstrates a year over year increase in the number of Indigenous students participating in, completing, and graduating from all programs of study
- 1.2 All YukonU students are aware of their responsibilities to advance reconciliation and are prepared to engage ethically with Indigenous Peoples, knowledges and communities
- 1.3 YukonU cultivates and is known as a warm, welcoming, and respectful learning environment where Indigenous learners feel a sense of belonging
- 1.4 All Indigenous learners at YukonU can envision their pathway(s) to educational success

### ACTIONS

- a. Meet learners where they're at in their educational journey and provide comprehensive and culturally-appropriate support and services for Indigenous students across all points of contact, including recruitment, admissions, and time spent at YukonU –whether in-person at a campus or through on-line access
- b. Collaborate with the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Yukon First Nation School Board and Yukon First Nations to develop transition programming between secondary and post-secondary systems
- c. Seek insight and guidance from these entities, and other educational partners, to help YukonU address gaps and improve support services for Indigenous students
- d. Identify and respond to structural and systemic barriers hindering Indigenous students' access to education
- e. Expand the presence of the Samay Thia lounge as a place of gathering for inter-generational connection and inter-cultural learning and practice at Ayamdigut Campus
- f. Ensure Campus Housing provides inclusive, culturally safe and welcoming living spaces for Indigenous students
- g. Foster a sense of community across YukonU, particularly at community campuses, by embracing diversity and amplifying Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing
- h. Consistently and continuously provide opportunities that recognize and celebrate Indigenous students' identity
- i. Introduce support and mentorship programs connecting current and future Indigenous students with other Indigenous students, faculty, and staff across all campuses
- j. Develop and maintain promotional material communicating supports for Indigenous students available at YukonU
- k. Further develop processes and practices that enhance cultural safety and eliminate racism and discrimination across the university
- l. Develop and enhance pre-university supports, including bridging and outreach programs for Indigenous youth (ie. STEAM initiatives, trades, preparation programs) across all campuses
- m. Leverage fundraising commitments to increase financial supports available to Indigenous students through bursaries, scholarships and awards
- n. Enhance the role of Elders on Campus, including community campuses, as a means to strengthen access to cultural knowledge, practices and relevant programs and services



## We see each other: supporting employees on the path of reconciliation

**They told him now maybe he could see why they wanted it to be daylight, so that they could see when they are out hunting for food. They told him that they would take care of everything and make it light.**

At Yukon University, we view the journey of reconciliation as a shared responsibility among all employees and will support our faculty and staff to be leaders on this journey. To do this we need to be able to see the diversity of all our employees and the efforts of our employees in finding a way to illuminate these future worlds.

As reconciliation must never be a side-of-the-desk activity, Yukon University will provide supports to learn the Truth about the enduring and devastating impacts of colonization and ways to become accomplices in advancing reconciliation. The legacy of residential schools has left a soul wound on generations of survivors, their families, communities and children yet to come. Systemic and historic trauma underlies every aspect of Yukon First Nations lands and lives. Yukon University commits to taking an active role to learn with and from Indigenous Peoples on pathways for healing. In parallel, we must learn to see the emotional and relational labour imposed upon Indigenous employees in continually teaching us to learn how to show up and carry out this work in a good way. Yukon University commits to redressing the colonized approaches to post-secondary education that have imposed and perpetuates inequities upon Indigenous Peoples.

### GOALS

- 2.1 YukonU staff and faculty work to advance reconciliation through their offerings
- 2.2 YukonU is a place of welcome and belonging for Indigenous staff, faculty, Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- 2.3 YukonU recognizes the affective and relational labour of Indigenous Peoples in supporting the learning journey of non-Indigenous employees and takes responsibility for respectful practices of reciprocity

### ACTIONS

- a. Provide opportunities for all YukonU faculty and staff to deepen their understanding of Yukon First Nations culture, history and Self-government agreements
- b. Support the First Nations Initiatives unit in enriching the content of the Yukon First Nations 101 course, in enhancing its delivery, and in making it accessible for all YukonU faculty and staff
- c. Encourage faculty and staff to access a breadth of professional development opportunities to increase their understanding of Indigenous culture and history as well as their responsibilities in advancing reconciliation and the implementation of Yukon First Nations Final Agreements
- d. Recognize, understand, value and work to minimize the affective and relational labour of Indigenous Peoples in reconciliation efforts
- e. Recognize the significance of the contributions of Indigenous staff and faculty, when and as appropriate
- f. Acknowledge and value the contributions towards advancing reconciliation that are uniquely placed on Indigenous faculty and staff employed at YukonU's community campuses
- g. Ensure availability of culturally-relevant supports for mental and spiritual health and healing as may be required
- h. Prioritize the recruitment, retention, and success of Indigenous faculty and staff across the university
- i. Ensure policies and processes related to equity hiring are implemented, including the opportunity for Indigenous self-identification and, when appropriate, preferential hiring
- j. Establish trauma-informed practices to protect Indigenous Peoples and identities and prevent Indigenous identity fraud
- k. Offer mentoring grounded in Yukon First Nations cultural and leadership practices to Indigenous faculty and staff
- l. Encourage Faculties, Divisions and Schools to examine how reappointment and promotion can encourage and recognize the work of faculty involved in Indigenous teaching, curriculum development and leadership
- m. Promote opportunities for Faculties, Divisions and Schools to develop criteria to ensure that Indigenous faculty are recognized and valued for their unique contributions to community-engaged and community-based service and research

# 3

## We are all learning: teaching, learning and un-learning

Then they heard the Bear hollering in the dark for someone to come and show him the way back into the fire. He had lost his way in the dark. No one wanted to help him so they left him alone to find his way back by himself. The Moose told the others, "Leave him alone. He thinks he's so smart just because he is bigger than most animals. Let him find his own way back." So all the animals left him alone. They kept hearing him hollering for a long time and all the animals were laughing at him for getting lost. Finally, after a long time they started calling to him to show him the way towards the fire.

Indigenization means more than just adopting culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy that reflects and respects Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. It is about ensuring that we create the space for non-Indigenous learners to acquire the knowledge and develop the skills needed to work, live, and learn respectfully on Indigenous lands and alongside Indigenous Peoples. But perhaps more importantly, it is about reclaiming our *good heart*<sup>43</sup> and being prepared to *call in*<sup>44</sup> those that may have lost their way.

We are committed to ensuring that the learning experiences for students at Yukon University do not perpetuate harm through racism, denialism, or the imposition of colonial perspectives, and we recognize that all opportunities for learning that uphold these commitments will create value in the journey of reconciliation. Our offerings, whether credit or non-credit, are guided by the aspiration to amplify Indigenous ways of knowing, *being and doing*<sup>45</sup> and reclaiming our good minds, good hearts and good voices.

### GOALS

- 3.1 Teaching and learning opportunities at YukonU are meeting the needs of Yukon First Nations' students, communities and governments and supporting their efforts to realize Indigenous self-government and self-determination
- 3.2 All YukonU students have access to Indigenous ways of teaching and learning
- 3.3 Indigenous knowledge systems and teaching practices are recognized and valued as valid approaches for learners at YukonU
- 3.4 YukonU hosts Indigenous-led credit and non-credit credentials
- 3.5 Ensure academic supports are accessible and relevant to Indigenous students

### ACTIONS

- a. Create supports for the Teaching and Learning unit in identifying and implementing approaches to support indigenization and decolonization of curriculum and pedagogy
- a. Provide faculty with professional development opportunities regarding approaches to indigenize and decolonize instruction and curricula
- a. Develop clear and ethical guidelines to support the delivery of Indigenous content when taught by settlers and non-Indigenous scholars
- a. Review and revise program reviews and program development policies to include Indigenous knowledge systems, experiences and perspectives across all programs, including continuing education programs
- a. Expand and enhance land-based learning opportunities, when appropriate, building on the strengths of our community campuses as destinations to organize and host land-based and experiential learning
- a. Provide opportunities for students to learn about the history of Yukon First Nations and the enduring impacts of colonization on individuals, families, communities, and our planet
- a. Continue to require all YukonU students registered in programs to complete Yukon First Nations 101, or its equivalent, as a requirement for graduation
- a. Ensure YukonU's Quality Assurance and Program Development policies engage Yukon First Nations and grow from Yukon First Nations' perspectives, values and contributions
- a. Enhance institutional partnerships and relationships with Indigenous organizations, governments and communities in support of Yukon First Nations resurgence and language revitalization, as a practice of Indigenous sovereignty
- a. Develop approaches to recognize and formalize the role and contributions of Indigenous Knowledge Keepers in creating and enhancing program content and delivery
- a. Build greater capacity for culturally appropriate teaching and learning by enhancing the reach and role of Elders and Knowledge Keepers across all campuses

<sup>43</sup> Attributed to scholar, Dr. Lee Brown.

<sup>44</sup> Part of the anti-colonial movement that turns away from shame and "calling out" or cancel culture, "calling in" is an opportunity to come together to learn and unlearn. See adrienne marie brown (2021). We will not cancel us.

<sup>45</sup> Yukon University (2022). Academic Plan



# 4

## We change minds, hearts and worlds: ethical research and innovation

**They had never seen any light, it was always dark. "What can we do to make it be daylight during the day and dark only at night?"**

Like the Animals, we are curious about the way our world could be. The questions we ask and research we perform at Yukon University must strive to align with the original dream Yukon First Nations first articulated in *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow*.

We have a responsibility to grow symmetrical relations as way to address priority research needs of Yukon First Nations and to create generative interactions between Indigenous scholarship and research with Euro-centric research. We engage in ethical spaces for encounters between worlds: kin-centric and Euro-centric knowledge systems. We seek to learn from and with Yukon First Nations' respectful practices for engaging Knowledge Keepers and creating opportunities to learn from and on the land.

### GOALS

- 4.1 The research needs of Yukon First Nations, particularly those that support the implementation of Self-Government Agreements, are prioritized and supported at YukonU
- 4.2 At YukonU, research involving Indigenous communities and on Indigenous lands meets ethical standards of engagement
- 4.3 At YukonU, Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous Knowledge(s) in research approaches are accepted as equivalent to Euro-centric research methodologies and knowledge.
- 4.4 Indigenous-led research at YukonU is flourishing



*We need research to show us the best way to take advantage of the good parts of the Whiteman Way, while at the same time keeping the best parts of our Indian Way.*

*Together Today for our Children Tomorrow, p. 23.*

### ACTIONS

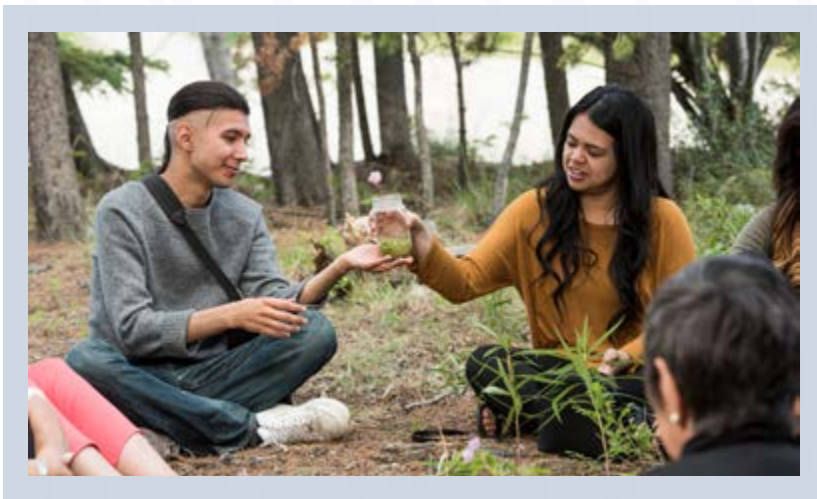
- a. Prioritize the support, recognition and celebration of Indigenous research initiatives (as defined by the Indigenous Advisory Council of SSHRC).
- b. Identify and promote opportunities for students to be involved in Indigenous research initiatives
- c. Prioritize the co-creation of research projects with Yukon First Nation partners as relationships allow and opportunities arise
- d. Develop an Indigenous-led research ethics framework for research involving Indigenous Peoples, the lands and the waters
- e. Create opportunities for Yukon First Nations peoples to lead research and evaluate research outcomes at YukonU
- f. Create guidelines for the ethical, respectful handling of knowledge shared during, or generated through, research activities that align with the principles of OCAP® (including data ownership, co-authorship, and intellectual property rights) and respects the genesis of that knowledge and the conditions under which it was shared
- g. Create guidelines to support the fair and ethical compensation of Knowledge Keepers involved in research with the university
- h. Adopt a data sovereignty framework to ensure Indigenous knowledges, data and information is owned, accessible to, and controlled by Indigenous groups
- i. Promote internal and external sources of funding that support Indigenous research
- j. As part of performance review and evaluations for promotion, recognize research contributions by YukonU faculty members that ethically apply Indigenous research methodologies and/or draw on Indigenous Knowledge(s)
- k. Foster ethical space (ie. willingness to listen, learn and unlearn) at the university for generative and emergent research collaborations with Yukon First Nations

# 5

## We gather to make good decisions together: making decisions about our university

**The animals built a big fire and they all gathered around it to decide what they wanted to do... They told him that they would take care of everything and make it light.**

At Yukon University we have a responsibility to shape our policies to reflect our commitments to reconciliation. We explore ways to transform our existing governing structures and processes such that they align with Indigenous governance practices. We understand the status quo, as representative of Canadian higher education, "in many ways operates with values and practices that are contrary to Indigenous governance models and cultural protocols".<sup>46</sup>



### GOALS

- 5.1 The virtual, digital and physical environments at YukonU provide ethical space for Indigenous Peoples
- 5.2 YukonU's operational policies support the respectful and meaningful inclusion of Indigenous Peoples
- 5.3 YukonU's structures and practices for decision-making – including legislated governing bodies and advisory councils – evolve to better represent and reflect the diversity of Yukon First Nations voices, visions, values
- 5.4 Yukon First Nations Elders and Knowledge Keepers are engaged to meaningfully contribute to the administration of university governance and operations

### ACTIONS

- a. Expand the purview of the Associate Vice-President, Reconciliation to enable the implementation of this Framework.
- b. Ensure YukonU is accountable for the implementation of this Framework, including the development of an Action Plan and Accountability Framework, for oversight and guidance from the Indigenous Advisory Circle of YukonU's Board of Governors
- c. Engage the broader YukonU communities (faculty, staff and students) and expand the university's circle of advisors to inform the development and implementation of the Action Plan and Accountability Framework to ensure accountability to the Indigenous Advisory Circle of the Board of Governors
- d. Mandate the recognition and acknowledgement of Yukon First Nations culture and relationship to the land in bylaws for university governance (Senate and Board) operations
- e. Update the university's suite of operational policies to reflect and respect alignment with Yukon First Nations governing practices
- f. Develop ethical guidelines and compensation practices for engaging Elders and Knowledge Keepers in YukonU's governance and operations
- g. Review and revise Honorary Degree processes to respect, honour and encourage nominations from Yukon First Nations
- h. Cultivate ethical space for the YukonU communities (staff, faculty and students) to express ideas and concerns that can advance reconciliation efforts

<sup>46</sup> Pidgeon, M. (2016). More than a checklist: Meaningful Indigenous inclusion in higher education. *Social Inclusion*, 4(1), 77. <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/socialinclusion/article/view/436>

# 6

## We reach for each other: relationships with Yukon First Nations communities and governments

Finally, after a long time they started calling to [Bear] to show him the way towards the fire.

We actively move towards repairing relationships and call each other back towards the warmth and light of the Fire. In our journey to advance reconciliation, Yukon University promotes and participates in healing and ceremony to address historic harms. The relationships with Yukon First Nations must be grounded in trust and mutual respect for, and protection of, Yukon First Nations land, people, and culture, and in honouring the Spirit and Intent of First Nations Final Agreements and Indigenous Rights.

But at the foundation of our relationship: we need each other. We can only travel together on the path of reconciliation. And so, we will continue reaching out for each other, especially when we are wandering in darkness, and seeking our way back towards the light.



### GOALS

- 6.1 The relationships between Yukon First Nations and YukonU are strong and are grounded in mutual respect and trust
- 6.2 Yukon First Nations priorities for self-determination are supported and advanced by YukonU through appropriate pathways
- 6.3 YukonU integrates outcomes and practices from Yukon education ecosystem learnings and knowledge

### ACTIONS

- a. Enhance and maintain respectful relationships – through iterative practices, consistent communications and ethical engagements – with Yukon First Nations
- b. Collaborate with the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Yukon First Nation School Board and Yukon First Nations to develop transition programming between secondary and post-secondary systems
- c. Collaborate with Yukon First Nations to identify, define, develop and deliver an Indigenous-led credential
- d. Work with responsible parties (ie. Training Policy Committee) in identifying education and training needs for UFA Boards and Committees and collaborate on program delivery
- e. Review existing programs and curricula to ensure they are meeting Indigenous community needs
- f. Celebrate the stories, knowledges, and voices of Yukon First Nations leaders and Indigenous alumni
- g. Maintain systematic and consistent communications with Yukon First Nations governments, communities and education departments to ensure regularized updates on progress on Reconciliation Framework, Action Plan, and Accountability Framework
- h. Remain a partner of priority to Yukon First Nations in the governance and operations of the Institute of Indigenous Self-Determination
- i. Regularly seek input on the research priorities of Yukon First Nations
- j. Ensure that space remains open for the University to play a role when a Yukon First Nation exercises law making power regarding post-secondary education as contemplated in Self-Government Agreements

# ON DREAMING

on dreaming

*'...grandchil'. Grandchil! Wake up, now.'*

*'...hmmm. Sorry, grandpa. I must've drifted off.'*

I slowly open my eyes and squint. The sun is still shining brightly but has moved across the Sky. I look across the firepit to see Atsia watching me. There is just a small pile of smoldering embers left in the pit.

*'Hm, I think I was dreaming,'* I tell him and rub my eyes.

He grins at me, *'In our old people's way, dreaming was one of our most powerful ways to bring healing and medicine into our world. If you were dreaming, then you don't need to tell me you're sorry. But you have to be careful to hold the right kind of dream.'*

*'What do you mean, the right kind of dream?'* I ask. *'How will I know if it's the right kind of dream?'*

*'You'll know because it'll be a dream big enough to fit the whole universe.'*

*'You mean the whole universe?'*

We both smile and I catch a sparkle in his eyes. He stands up and moves towards the firepit. He picks up a stick and uses it to spread out the embers.

He keeps his eyes on the flickering pile of embers.

*'You'll know it's the right kind, grandchil', when you hear the voices of our ancestors speaking to you in dreams.'*

# GRATITUDE

gratitude

A Sitka Elder and language teacher shared with me recently that the Tlingit word *gunalchèesh* – usually translated as “thank you” in English – conveys a much more reciprocal relationship in its original language. *Gunalchèesh*, she teaches me, means: you make it possible.

There have been countless voices that have contributed to this work and so we raise our hands to each of you and say “*Gunalchèesh*, you make it possible.”

...to all the ancestors of this land who laboured to make sure your dreams would be re-told, *gunalchèesh*.

...to the original dreamers who laboured to create a vision for Yukon First Nations to stand together today so the children of tomorrow could attend a university in the Yukon where they would be welcomed, *gunalchèesh*.

...to all the leaders – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – who laboured to bring forward the truth of Canada's failings in its educational approaches to systematically erase the languages, stories, and knowledges of Indigenous Peoples, *gunalchèesh*.

...to the Indigenous educators who laboured to re-educate the academy and bring forward renewed educational practices for relating to the lands and each other, *gunalchèesh*.

...to all of the beautiful minds, both inside and outside, of Yukon University's walls who laboured to shape this work and keep it alive through your care, energy, and passion, *gunalchèesh*.

Nina Bolton  
Sarah Lennie  
Liz Moses  
Doris Allen  
*Shaan Tlein* Carol Geddes  
Judy Gingell  
*Jamena* James Allen  
*Aan Gooshú* Mark Wedge  
*TutLatseen* Victoria Fred  
Brenda Butterworth-Carr  
Kathy van Bibber  
*Gàndatêch* Pearl Callaghan  
Elizabeth Bosley  
John Reid

Tosh Southwick  
Davida Wood  
Robin Bradasch  
Rhiannon Klein  
Haley Mitander  
Teresa Waugh  
Jenni-Lee Cook  
Amanda Cardwell  
Cass Ivany  
Bobbie-Lee Melancon  
Debra-Leigh Reti  
Lindsay Moore  
Our previous and current  
members of PACFNI

**To the artists and designers  
who laboured to animate  
this particular story of  
reconciliation, *gunalchèesh*.**

Mark Rutledge, CDP RGD  
James S. Miller, Jr.  
Chanelle Firth-Ward  
Blake, Robert and Louis Chassé  
Shadunjen van Kampen  
Yataya van Kampen  
Cyrielle Laurent  
Nicole Meier

**YOU MAKE  
IT POSSIBLE!**

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# APPENDIX A

## LANGUAGE TO KNOW, LEARN AND USE



Shiin tah, Nootuut tah, x aiy tah, Saaniq'tah (4 Seasons)  
Artist: Blake Chassé, age 14

<b>Gwich'in</b>	Gwaandäk		Mähsí'	Shitsii	Zhòh	Deetrù'	Yahkee	Yiinjihkìchì Dhoo'èh
<b>Hän</b>	Hwëdëk			Shëtsey	Zhùr	Tätträ'		
<b>Dene Zāgé (Kaska)</b>	Tätträ'		Sō'gá Sínahlā'				Nawudigā	Dene Yedā'nehdí!
<b>Northern Tutchone</b>	Hùnàỳ	Níkhti		Utsí	Egay	Ts'ek'í	Yedeken	Nìjtra
<b>English</b>	Story	Dream	Thanks	Grandfather	Wolf	Raven	Dawn	Respect (For All Things)
<b>Däkwanjé (Southern Tutchone)</b>	Kwändür		Shāw Nìthan	Atsia	Āgay	Ts'ü'rk'í	K'amba K'ānch'äl	Nāts'ent'är
<b>Tāgish</b>	Tlaagú			Eshchié	Egey	Chesk'iye		Dene Nāt'Aht'as
<b>Łingit (Tlingit)</b>	Ʒutlaagú	Jùn	Gunal- chéesh	Léelk'w	Ghùch	Yéil	Ʒei	At Yá Awùné
<b>Dineh K'èh (Upper Tanana)</b>			Tsin'jj	Stsáy	Tthiikq̄q̄	Taatsàan'		Diichq̄q̄ Ts'á' Diik'analta'





Wolf and Raven  
Artist: Chanelle Firth-Ward

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500 University Drive,  
PO Box 2799

Whitehorse, Yukon  
Y1A 5K4

867 668 8800  
1 800 661 0504