**Roadmap to Reconciliation – WRJ YES (Youth, Education & Special Projects) grant description:**

Our tradition teaches that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel used to say: “on three things does the world stand: On justice, on truth and on peace, as it is said: ‘execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates’ (Zechariah 8:16).

For the past decade, Canada’s Reform Jewish congregations have demonstrated a strong commitment to these three pillars, justice, truth, and peace by advancing the work of reconciliation with Indigenous communities across Canada.

We are called to this commitment when we reflect on the experiences of many of us or our forebears who came to Canada as immigrants or refugees seeking a better life and the freedom to be able to live as Jews. We acknowledge that, as settlers on this land, we have a responsibility to take action to address the ongoing legacy of colonialism and the injustices faced by Indigenous peoples who are the traditional stewards of this land. Sadly, through the Shoah, we know too well the trauma of unmarked graves, of generations lost to genocide.

As defined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “... Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.”

Furthermore, to truly move towards just, respectful and reciprocal relationships, we must endeavour to deepen our understanding of all the aspects of the rich history, traditions and worldviews of Indigenous communities from before the arrival of European settlers and the signing of Treaty Agreements.  Just as our own cultural inheritance extends beyond lessons of antisemitism and the Shoah, achieving reconciliation will require a commitment to learning that includes, and extends before and after the histories of Indian Residential Schools, the 60s scoop and intergenerational traumas.

While this important work has been ongoing across the country, such work has progressed unevenly and without the benefit of support across communities and regions. There have been multiple requests from members and leaders of Reform communities across the country for guidance as to how to engage in the work of reconciliation, for resources as to how to do so Jewishly, and for a roadmap to move forward in a way that can be somewhat consistent with fellow communities across the country. The strongest calls for action have come from our youth, who are demanding that our communities “walk the talk” of reconciliation.  The work of reconciliation must be built on a sustained commitment to relationships.  Also, it is important that our relationships are not founded solely on a damage-centered narrative about Indigenous people.  We have an obligation to learn about language, culture, history, conflict and aspirations.

For example, since its inaugural summer in 1999, URJ Camp George has made it a priority to strengthen our relationship with the people of the Wasauksing First Nation of neighbouring Parry Island. Campers and staff have met with community leaders, participated in the preparation for community celebrations, and have supported community initiatives like tending the garden at the local senior’s residence. The camp leadership has worked to learn the history of the land on which our community gathers each summer and to support reciprocal and respectful relationships with the people of the Wasauksing First Nation.

In the summer of 2021 at URJ Camp George, teens came together out of a desire to meaningfully engage, both at camp and at home, in the work of truth and reconciliation, of *emet* and *teshuvah*, regarding the harmful legacy of the Indian Residential school system and other forms of systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples in Canada, while also learning about local Indigenous culture and building relationships with nearby communities, such as Wasauksing First Nation. Together we assembled the initial pieces of a future roadmap that URJ Camp George can embark on to continue to integrate education and programming regarding reconciliation at all ages and stages of camp life, to acknowledge and honour the land that camp is on, to express solidarity with children sent to Indian Residential schools and their families, particularly given the recent discoveries of unmarked graves at such schools, and, hopefully post-COVID, to engage in peer to peer programming with local indigenous youth.

Building on what we started at URJ Camp George, there is a need to share and teach best practices and build relationships at the local, regional and national levels. We are creating a Roadmap to Reconciliation for our Reform communities to help us all better learn from the past history of colonialism and systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples in Canada, to change behaviours for the better, and to deepen the work of relationship building with local Indigenous communities and organizations.

We believe this to be a fundamental part of our responsibility as Canadians to engage in meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada, and as part of our fundamental responsibility as Reform Jews to co-create a better world together, worthy of the understanding that we are all created in the Divine image, *b'tzelem Elohim*. *Our vision is of a world overflowing with wholeness, justice, and compassion.* To realize this vision, we are dedicated to working across lines of difference to organize and advocate for social change that alienates systemic injustices, especially those that primarily impact marginalized communities. The words of the prophet Micah inspire us to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God” (6:8).

Programs will seek to engage our communities in diving deeper into the work of reconciliation from a Jewish perspective, at the local and regional levels, while also enabling the development and sharing of best practices by the RJCC (at the national level). The programs would feature Shabbat services focused on themes of allyship as spiritual practice and reconciliation, Shabbat afternoon learning sessions about being an effective ally, local and national Indigenous history, culture, and practices, and finally a day of action to identify how local communities have contributed to the systemic challenges facing Indigenous peoples, opportunities for atonement (recognizing harms done and seeking repair), getting to and beyond land acknowledgments, work that has been done already, and ways to be constructive allies in reconciliation with local Indigenous individuals, leaders and groups. The structure of the program recognizes that there are times when it is appropriate for our community to do our own research and learning, and times when we need to consult with Indigenous leaders for guidance and partnership.

Indeed, it is important to us to avoid the trap of seeking justice for Indigenous people, and instead ensure that we are working in solidarity with Indigenous communities.  This is why we are anchoring our vision within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action.  By following that guidance, we ensure that we will be working in the right direction.