Sharing an experience with others is an opportunity to build relationships based on that sharing. Building an awareness of what constitutes as colonization allows for an understanding of what is right and wrong. The only way to fix something is to understand what is wrong in the first place. One of the benefits the Uncovering Common Ground project offers is an enhanced understanding of intercultural relationships through interaction with one another. This goes a long way to providing the basis for friendship. In essence, this project offers a foundation for decolonization; allowing oppression or ongoing colonization within the construct of friendship becomes unacceptable.

When we have an empathic relationship, caring for the wellbeing of those we have a relationship with, there is a reluctance to allow friends to suffer oppression. This fosters a desire for equitable treatment for all. Each group in this project has built a bridge between cultures. Many more bridges are needed as there are many people wishing to cross.

Uncovering Common Ground helps develop a much-needed community of Allies to continue the momentum of intercultural relationships that contribute to positive change in our society. Programs of this nature are essential to cultivate the mindset of today’s youth who will become the mentors of future generations. This follows a concept of some Indigenous philosophies which underscore the requirement for planning for the well-being of seven generations into the future.

**Cat Criger**
*Elder*

---

**Cat Criger** is an Indigenous Advisor at the University of Toronto Mississauga Campus and has been part of the Uncovering Common Ground project since its launch in 2019. JGI Canada is grateful for the support and teachings he has shared with the youth participants.
Table of Contents

PG 4  Introduction
PG 6  Most Significant Change
PG 7  Domain of Change: Personal Growth & Development
PG 11 Domain of Change: Knowledge & Learning
PG 14 Domain of Change: Relationship Building & Collaboration
PG 18 Community Partners
PG 19 Staff Testimonials
PG 20 Project Descriptions
PG 23 Acknowledgements
Introduction

The Jane Goodall Institute of Canada (JGI) is part of a global community conservation organization that advances the vision and work of Dr. Jane Goodall. Our organization engages communities in Africa as well as in Canada with a mission to create a better world for people, animals and our shared environment.

In Canada, our Roots & Shoots youth program is spreading Dr. Goodall’s inspirational message of hope: a reminder to young people that every individual is important and every individual can make a difference.

Using a unique four-step approach, JGI Canada engages young people to:

1. Get inspired to create positive change;
2. Learn how to map sustainability issues in their community;
3. Take action;
4. Celebrate the impact they have made.

Uncovering Common Ground

Launched in 2019, the Uncovering Common Ground (UCG) project is a new Roots & Shoots initiative that creates space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth to exchange perspectives and knowledge in order to break down barriers and stereotypes impeding true reconciliation. With guidance from Elders and JGI Canada staff, youth participants have worked together to develop solutions to issues faced by their communities, with the goals of making them more socially just, culturally aware and environmentally sustainable. Throughout this process, participants have learned from one another and from community partners, and are beginning to braid a path to reconciliation.
A key component of Uncovering Common Ground has been storytelling; an important part of Indigenous culture and a powerful way of capturing contrasting and meaningful perspectives. Throughout the 12-month project, UCG participants and partners used stories to illustrate their hopes and approaches for reconciliation. Storytelling has also enabled the JGI staff to monitor and evaluate the UCG initiative; focusing on the most significant changes experienced by each participant has been an important participatory tool for measuring qualitative project outcomes.

The 2019-2020 Uncovering Common Ground participants were asked the following question: *What was the most significant change you have experienced as a result of your participation in this initiative?* Their answers have been organized in this report under three domains of change: **Personal Growth & Development; Knowledge & Learning; Relationship Building & Collaboration.** Compiled here, these most significant change stories are a testament to the hard work and dedication of all participants working to uncover common ground.

A special thank you to Mike Graeme for taking photos of the participants who shared their stories.
Most Significant Change (MSC) is a participatory monitoring and evaluation tool originally developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart to measure the qualitative impact in the life of people involved in a project. MSC provides information to help assess the outcomes and performance of a social change initiative. It involves the collection of significant change stories gathered from the field, followed by the grouping of the common themes into domains of change.

In the case of the **Uncovering Common Ground** project, three domains of change were selected to measure some of the anticipated outcomes.

- **Personal Growth & Development**
  Youth develop and enhance personal and professional skills.

- **Knowledge & Learning**
  Youth have an improved understanding of Indigenous cultures, histories and contemporary issues facing Indigenous communities in Canada.

- **Relationships & Connection**
  Youth have an increased understanding of diversity, reconciliation and decolonization and have developed mutually-respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth.
Domain of Change: Personal Growth & Development

How youth feel more empowered, gained self-confidence and developed a positive view of their ability to affect change.
Antonia – Victoria, BC

My most significant change professionally was learning about not overcommitting myself and about leaving space within my life to take care of myself emotionally and personally so that I can show up and be the best that I can be in honouring my commitments. My most significant change personally was that I have grown so much in terms of being able to get over myself and indoctrinated stories and act from a place of deep humility. To create a spaciousness inside myself to look past my own historical trauma as a Jewish refugee to understand way more about the context of these lands, as well as my responsibility as a settler on these lands. So much about it is just about deeply listening, and being prepared to completely throw beliefs or previously-held understandings out the window without hesitation—being comfortable with a vast sense of groundlessness, appreciating that this is the work that needs to be done. It’s not about me, it’s about what is right.

Brittany – Winnipeg, MB

As a young Indigenous woman, it is sometimes hard to have a spot at a table where change can be made and where my voice is heard. I appreciated the flexibility and inclusivity of this project and the support we received individually and as a group. Before this project, I was worried about becoming another tokenized Indigenous individual put into a box or the issues I think are important to me being put on the backburner. I feel a positive emotion when I think about the group and how they supported me and the project. I am happy to have worked with non-Indigenous friends who were supportive of the issues I saw as important and who were so knowledgeable. I have a better understanding of taking on projects in the future that impact my community and my brothers and sisters. I am eager to move forward and contribute to the development of the community. This project let me see the ins and outs of working on a community-based initiative. Being an Indigenous woman, it is hard to navigate through assimilative and colonial systems. This frustration during the project that I felt when I hit roadblocks, racism or was ignored by the outside community only encouraged me to try harder to get things done and to complete the project with my all.
**Luisa - Winnipeg, MB**

One of the most significant changes is acknowledging myself as an empowered person, as an empowered woman. In the beginning, I was going through many circumstances that undermined me as a person and made me feel voiceless. I knew that if I could empower myself, then I could empower someone else. It is like a positive vicious cycle. The Uncovering Common Ground Project, as a process, helped me in a good way. Working in a group full of women with similar passions made me realize I was going to be able to be strong again. The significant change I have made is in my personality because of the empowerment I felt from my team. Making decisions, communicating and working with a team with different first languages and cultures seemed hard at first. However, despite our differences, our team made me see that I can be part of a group without feeling voiceless. Being here in the north, my heart and my mind is still in the south. This project made me realize I should appreciate my land and my knowledge.

**Marden - Winnipeg, MB**

I think that my most significant change as a result of this project was in my ability to communicate professionally with others. Prior to this project I was definitely uncomfortable communicating in a professional setting. I was often nervous about it. One day, after calling one of our contacts three times with no answer, I noticed two things: I hate making phone calls but I no longer felt nervous about making these phone calls. This is definitely something that was echoed in my interactions with my group. As the project moved along I became more involved with conversations.
Sentilla - Regina, SK

My biggest change has been personal. After starting this project not only did I feel that the community coming together had such a profound impact on me but that I had an impact on it. The positive impact of my project was cyclical in the sense of being able to give back in all forms whether that was providing Indigenous people with work or having Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants attend my workshops. What I have received in return was a wealth of knowledge in organizing events and workshops and dialogue and allyship with those that I met throughout this project which ultimately created a community for me. Through this project I was able to gain teachings from community members and offer my perspective which positively impacted my overall experience.

Tessa - Victoria, BC

I never really did community work, I didn't think it fit with my outlook on life, the big picture. I wasn't a ‘boots on the ground’ activist, instead more of a top-down change maker. This project has demonstrated the benefits of community work and that change can happen at all levels. I have noticed the benefits of grassroots/bottom-up community work and have realized and cherished developing interpersonal relationships. I’ve built a new understanding of the value of grassroots and community service work.
Domain of Change: Knowledge & Learning

How youth increased their knowledge of Indigenous communities in Canada, cross-cultural awareness and engaged with community partners.
Alicia - Barrie, ON

I’m not sure I can say I have had a significant change but there was certainly a most significant moment. That moment for me was during our rock-painting session with the Life Long Care Program at the Barrie Native Friendship Centre. I had the opportunity to find out more about Anishnaabemowin (Ojibwe) with some of the Elders who were there. That moment really reaffirmed my desire to continue learning the language and share it with others.

Carol - Hamilton, ON

This project has brought community members from all walks of life together to learn from one another and discuss land and community without borders. The beading workshops were attended by Indigenous and non-Indigenous professors, students, local artists and seniors. It was incredible to watch all of these individuals gathering to teach one another or to learn a new skill. Participants who shared their beadwork also responded to two questions: What does this land mean to you? What does “community without borders” look like to you? The most significant change has been witnessing the difference in attitudes from community members before and after the beading workshops. Many responses from non-Indigenous participants include what they feel is their responsibility to this land as settlers. The workshops have been a great opportunity to engage in important conversations about belonging and community.

Danny - Scia’new First Nation, BC

I made some amazing friends. I learned a lot about new plant friends! I learned how to remove invasive plants properly. I also had the opportunity to teach them new things, too, and smudge everyone before we tore down anything.
Eunice - Toronto, ON

The moment that I think really stood out to me was during the first rock-painting session held at the Barrie Native Friendship Centre (BNFC) with the Elders. As a non-Indigenous person, it is embarrassing to admit that my knowledge of Indigenous culture and history was extremely limited. As I began talking with the people painting and hearing stories, there was a gradual realization that not only was the educational bias in public schools glaringly obvious but it was a strange moment to put faces, individual experiences and personal connections to what was otherwise simply facts and statements. By talking with the older generation about their experiences, hearing the creation stories they were taught, it changed the way I viewed Indigenous issues, making it seem much more prevalent and personal. It is easy to live in ignorance but seeing how our project begins to mend the divide and bring light to such issues gives me hope for the future. I am optimistic about its success and I hope for others to learn as I have.

Nolan - Barrie, ON

My most significant change was learning more about my local community but also learning more about Indigenous cultures across Canada. I was also inspired by the motivation of the other participants in this project. I hope to see more of that engagement in my community in the near future.

Ronna - Victoria, BC

Understanding that people learn differently and that age and culturally-appropriate lesson plans are necessary for both children and adults alike. If there is a lack of understanding and/or effort from the learner, it’s important to acknowledge that these things take time and it is my responsibility to encourage without judgement and with patience. My roommate (who is a trained teacher) helped give me perspective that not all knowledge comes from the same place and that people learn differently. I took this back to my work with the youth but I, myself, am still learning. Overall, never under-value a good teacher.
Domain of Change: Relationship & Connection

How youth were able to build new or improve relationships with their peers, networks and Indigenous communities.
In a way, the change that has occurred is affirmation. It has been affirmed for me personally that I have a significant role to play in this world. I have been challenged and pushed outside of my comfort zone throughout this project. This project has changed my perspective, reorienting my mind to see that there is healing that needs to be done on both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous points of view. Despite our different stories, we have the potential to work together in harmony. Even the small things that we do, collectively or individually, can make an impact, creating a ripple effect in our communities. Affirmation that it is important and significant to steward the relationships that I have and will continue to form in a good and respectful way. Affirmation that colonization is real but so is connection and empathy, understanding and truth. Affirmation that we are doing something because we need to if we want to see change. Affirmation that we are all relational human beings.

Every week at my work we have thematic professional development (PD) sessions. I decided that I will devote my PD session to the Uncovering Common Ground project. I shared with my colleagues about the idea of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth coming together to make change in their local community. I talked about learning more about the Indigenous cultures, just being present in your community where you are. Later on, this lady approached me and said, “For so many years I had an idea in my mind that there is us and them. But your project shows how it is wrong to think that it is us and them.” She had tears in her eyes. For me, it was a really emotional moment because I hadn’t expected to have this impact by just sharing one story. We need more people to hear and spread positive stories. Story sharing is powerful, it can inspire and empower others. If you can impact even one person, it is worth it.
Hallie - Victoria, BC

My internal change as a result of the project has been my relationship with Elder Hank as I didn’t know him prior to the project. This project encouraged me to make more connections in the community I’m working for. When the BC cohort first met to talk about reaching out to Chief and Council, one of our fellow participants mentioned the colonial legacy of those institutions and suggested we reach out to Elders as well. This opened my eyes to more youth-Elder activities like the two archaeological surveys with Hank and the youth. My most significant change has been the relationship with Elder Hank and translating that relationship to the youth engaged in programs to focus more on building youth-Elder partnerships.

Lizeth – Winnipeg, MB

After graduating from an International Development program, it was really exciting and thrilling to find the chance to participate in a hands-on project where I could plan and develop a project that could contribute to sustainable change! My academic training has told me that development isn’t easy and linear but something that they don’t teach you is that it is less about saying and doing, it is more about listening, sitting back and showing up when the community needs you. It’s about supporting and encouraging each other through the thick and thin. This program gave me four incredible friends and teammates who are hard-working women that care and encourage each other. I’ve met incredible knowledge keepers and Elders that have graciously shared their wisdom with us. I’ve met people from other provinces doing incredible work in their communities. The Uncovering Common Ground project has truly been an amazing life experience.
Nicola – New Market, ON

Before UCG, I had never confronted my history or the history of my ancestors and that of the Indigenous communities. I was very removed and separate from the issues, struggles and lives of Indigenous Canadian people. UCG put all of that on the map for me and in a way that the standard secondary school curriculum never could. Through UCG, I was brought face-to-face with the people who had seemed like part of old stories and to whom I had been disconnected from. I heard these amazing people tell me stories of the way life was for their grandparents and the butterfly effect that those tragic experiences had on their lives and the lives of their descendants. UCG provided me with a platform to begin to engage in those difficult and uncomfortable conversations, to foster understanding and genuine connections and to learn from Indigenous communities, their beliefs and ways of life. It is the people I have met who have changed my life in the most significant way.

Mandolin – Victoria, BC

My greatest change was between working alone and working in a group. When alone, sometimes I get stuck in my own head, caught up in personal thoughts and worries. To be welcomed into a group is humbling. In this project, I was not central, not vital and not alone. Everyone brought their own hopes and will but the project was shaped and led by the passion of the youth. As a small piece of a whole, I had the opportunity to feel the energy that each person brought flowing through the group, encouraging and building me up. Instead of holding energy inside, being able to contribute and receive that energy in equal measure.

Steve – Victoria, BC

The Uncovering Common Ground project enabled us to better organize and match our volunteers with our clients at Metis Neighbourly. I developed a deeper understanding of the connectedness and the blurred boundaries of different communities.
Community Partners

Our partners, who were chosen by the Uncovering Common Ground youth, were asked to share how these projects have contributed to decolonization and in turn what the youth have contributed to their communities.

I was so inspired and impressed with the creativity and passion of all the young people. It makes me think about how the next generation will be working together and there will be much more understanding. I believe that once people know the history they are so much more open to making things right.

Ernestine Baldwin, Elder
Barrie, ON

In terms of the Scia’new community it seems like there was grassroots community-based decision-making with the youth that are part of the Scia’new Nation but also getting involved with the Chief and Council. Linking those two things together and talking to the youth about how to navigate those processes to incorporate their values, what’s important to them and bringing that into the forefront of Chief and Council. It also helped to give a reminder to Chief and Council that the youth are passionate about these things. That empowerment piece was enhanced through the project, it gave them a sense that they had a voice in the community. For the Greater Victoria Area, I liked that there was integration with local artists, like Sarah Jim of the WSÁNEĆ, and getting the word out on what this project was about.

Paige Erikson-McGee
Habitat Acquisition Trust, BC

I think the project must have had a great impact because the parents in the community really appreciated their kids doing a lot of the activities. Otherwise they would be at home playing video games or something. The activities that the young people were doing were fantastic. It kept them busy in the summertime.

Hank Charles, Elder
Scia’new First Nation, BC

Barrie Native Friendship Centre
McMaster University - Indigenous Studies Program
Circle of Life ThunderBird House
YWCA Regina
Metis Nation of Greater Victoria
Habitat Acquisition Trust

PEPÁKEN HÁUTW
Staff Testimonials

Uncovering Common Ground has had a dedicated Roots & Shoots team comprised of a Project Coordinator and two Cohort Coordinators. Together, they formed the backbone of the UCG initiative by providing program management and logistical support, as well as encouragement to participants and community partners alike. Being youth themselves, they added another level of authenticity and ensured the project remained grounded in youth perspectives.

“It’s important to make time to get to know the people you are working with. Either through team building activities, casual meetings, horizontally-led activities or sharing meals. This creates the space for more authentic, open and honest communication and stronger relationships.”

**Meagan Lortie, Project Coordinator**

“During this project so many amazing things happened and changed my life for the better. I’ve learned how to connect with people on a different level. Being able to travel and experience new journeys with the group brought me closer to people on a level I have never experienced.”

**Brianna Laws, Cohort Coordinator, Ontario**

“I know there is a growing doubt about reconciliation projects. I have heard it in my conversations with some of my Indigenous friends, in the news and in my discussions with the B.C. cohort. But it doesn’t mean there isn’t a path forward and I think that the UCG project is one of those viable paths forward.”

**Mike Graeme, Cohort Coordinator, British Columbia**
Metis Neighbourly is a volunteer initiative that focused on developing strong independent Indigenous youth through skill development and giving back to the community. Volunteer activities included: wood chopping, transportation support, paperwork and tax support, home improvement, animal care, healthy eating, active lifestyles and more. Any skill that a volunteer has and is willing to share is offered to the public as a free service. Through the Uncovering Common Ground project, Metis Neighbourly has been able to further develop its organizational infrastructure and increase visibility through signage and uniforms worn by volunteers. Young people have also built new skills through peer-to-peer job shadowing opportunities.

In collaboration with the Scia’new Youth Field Team, Uncovering Common Ground participants worked on restoring Reserve No. 2. Formerly a village, the site had become overgrown with invasive species and used infrequently as it was inconvenient to access. The state of Reserve No. 2 left many Scia’new youth feeling disconnected from their territory. With a desire to reclaim the land for future use, this project made the space accessible again, reconnecting the youth with the land, engaging the Elders in the community and successfully restoring this site to its original glory.
This project focused on reclamation efforts for traditional Indigenous Land to be recognized in the City of Barrie, with the aim of fostering the decolonization of formerly colonized places and change people’s views of them. Using a mapping software, the UCG group created a map which includes the original names and uses of shorelines, beaches, lakes and parks. Using photographs, the group was able to show what some of these places in Barrie used to look like during the pre-contact period. Youth from the Barrie Native Friendship Centre also contributed by painting the original names of these landmarks on rocks to be installed around the City of Barrie.

Based in Hamilton, this project promoted dialogue about collective histories and community without borders through the use of art. Working collaboratively, community members came together for beading workshops to create an art installation featuring a lattice-mounted collection of floral beadwork pieces. Inspired by the way clematis flowers grow in vines which are guided by their surroundings, the piece symbolizes how people are also shaped and connected by the land - initiating discussions about belonging, community and the importance of taking up space.
The Circle of Life Thunderbird House in Winnipeg is “the Spiritual Heart of all Elders, Healers, Teachers, and Helpers in the Indigenous community”. Unfortunately, the Thunderbird House has experienced gradual decay and decreasing community significance. This project focused on restoring and revitalizing what was once the beacon of the community. Through neighbourhood events, UCG participants worked together with local Indigenous artists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members and other local organizations to repair, paint and bring the building back to life. Through this project, the Thunderbird House can continue to be a meeting place for all people to heal, celebrate and gather, surrounded by love and beauty.

This community-based project brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the North Central and Downtown Regina area for a series of cultural exchange workshops. Each session incorporated a variety of activities, including traditional beading, moccasin making and traditional dot painting. These workshops provided the chance to engage local Indigenous experts to teach both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, bringing participants together for a common activity and shared artwork styles, stories and laughter. The project created opportunities to come together in reconciliation and decolonization.
Acknowledgements

The Jane Goodall Institute of Canada acknowledges that the land upon which our office operates has been the site of human activity for 15,000 years and is the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the New Credit. It is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are honoured to have the opportunity to work in this territory.

We also acknowledge that the Uncovering Common Ground project was made possible with support from the Government of Canada under the Canada Service Corps. The Jane Goodall Institute of Canada would like to thank all the youth, Elders and project partners for generously sharing their time, their wisdom and their stories for this report.

We acknowledge and lift up these diverse voices that share a common ground; their stories shine a light on how we can build stronger relationships with all those who call Turtle Island home.