

Inspirit Foundation Change Up Conference

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“It’s important for us to share our stories.”

A powerful moment that left the room silent

When one person gathered the courage to speak publicly

Sharing her personal story to a room full of strangers

A beautiful and brave example of reciprocity, learning and understanding a valuable perspective

There is power when we step out and share our stories

Allowing light to enter our journeys of truth, discomfort, uncertainty, healing and reconciliation.

The Inspirit Foundation vision of an inclusive and pluralist Canada started three years ago

When they wanted to give young people the opportunity to make change on issues of prejudice and discrimination

Bridging divides between diverse people, groups and communities.

71 young people from across the country came together to connect, share and learn

At the inaugural Change Up Conference on Mississauga-New Credit territory.

Passionate delegates with unique gifts and perspectives

Listening, asking questions and having conversations

On tough social and cultural issues in our country for understanding and transformation

These spaces make you realize you’re not the only one fighting for a better Canada

Out of many, one people.

But no one said this would be easy, asking ourselves:

What is my truth?

Where do I fit?

What do I have to offer and learn?

How can we bridge the divides fracturing our people and country?

How can we connect, work together and bring change to Canada?

We learned from many incredible activists, writers, teachers, artists and change-makers

Exploring reconciliation, racism, storytelling, leadership and dealing with conflict

Digging into our past and thinking about space, inclusion and displacement

Whose voices are heard?

Who’s taking up space?

Why was there only one person of colour on a panel discussing racism?

We explored these spaces, like reconciliation

But what happens when half the truth is missing?

Reconciliation involves both parties

It’s an on-going, individual and collective process

Respectful relationships grounded in equitable institutions sharing power

But what does it take for people to actually listen?

People bleeding on the floor, a toddler washed ashore?

Why do we have to see and hear these heartbreaking stories to actually care?

These issues aren’t new, like racism and carding

It’s controversial, upsets people and makes them go to places they don’t want to go –

Like white privilege.

And it's not just overt, but subtle and all around us
We don't like to acknowledge these systemic forms of racism.
Understand your power, offer allyship
Use your influence in places where you can make a difference
Show unity on a variety of issues and listen
It's always in your interest to listen
Like the delegates who chatted with Desmond Cole for two hours after his talk
And some stayed up until 2am exploring race, sexuality and other intersectionalities
We need to make a lot more space for many groups and bridge divides with different communities.

And have we built this country on a cracked foundation?
Let's contemplate whose voices have built and are building this nation
Who has power? Who's going to run this country after the next election?
Another white heterosexual man? How surprising.
But what about our diverse and pluralist country?
Look around this room – a rich tapestry of gifts, voices and experiences
Let's name them, share them, value them and learn from them
We need better representation.

We've only touched the tip of the iceberg
Stories, gifts and experiences that have yet to reach the surface of ways we can connect and work together
There is power when we meet one another with open hearts and vulnerability
Moments of reflection and cleansing to live in the heart and spirit than simply the head.
This is really hard work
And sometimes, you have to take a step back, cry or watch Judge Judy
Knowing when to say yes and realize, you can't take everything on and build a movement by yourself
Self-care and collective care are crucial
Surround yourself with people who support you and help you take care of yourself
You and your well-being matter.

And as we move forward, let's recognize, embrace and value our diversity
Each one of us has something powerful to bring to the table
A unique piece of the puzzle
And you don't have to be standing in front of a crowd to make a difference
There's so much expertise and respect in our midst.
What role can you play?
How can you unveil the clouds of secrecy, the unspoken stories within and around you?
Fighting against systems of oppression that leave individuals hidden and forgotten
We're all teachers and have something to share
Find these stories and tell them
Dig deep within yourself and allow the transformation to happen
Even if it's messy, uncomfortable and painful
And do not allow another voice to be silenced – especially your own.