



POLICY BRIEF 2024

Beyond Reconciliation

**Dialogues Among Indigenous and Immigrant
Communities for Solidarity**

Sayano Izu

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷəjəm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwxwú7mesh* (Squamish) & *səlilwətaʔ* (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

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COVER ILLUSTRATION

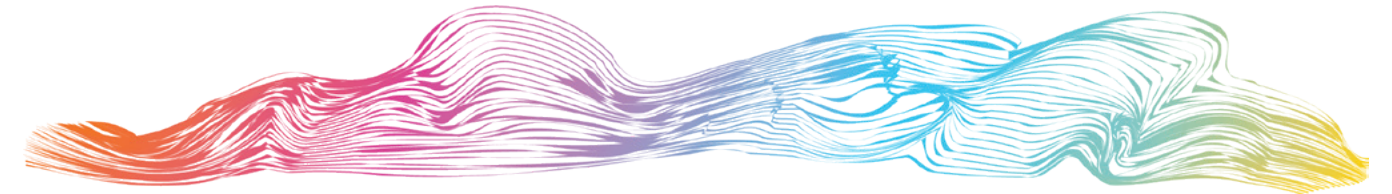
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About the LEVEL Initiative

LEVEL is a youth engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth populations in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL consists of three pillars of work to advance racial equity

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL BIPOC Granting

About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized newcomer youth are dispropor-

tionately impacted by certain public policies but are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the *hə́nq'ə́min* 'ə́m̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the *Halkomelem*-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the *sníchim*-speaking *Sḵwxwú7mesh* (Squamish) peoples.

1. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>



Biography

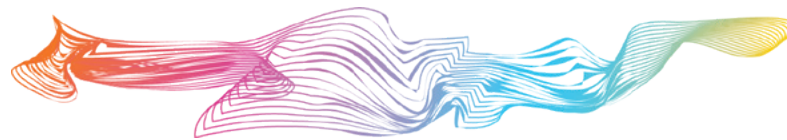
Sayano Izu



Sayano Izu is a first generation settler on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliłwətał Nations. She graduated from the University of British Columbia with a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on urban studies and human geography.

Through her experience of living in the so-called “Metro Vancouver” area as an international resident, she developed an interest in advancing formal and informal representations of young international students and workers. She is also passionate about providing just and accessible educational opportunities for new and temporary immigrants about the history and presence of colonialism in Canada.

Sayano currently works at a local municipality as a Public Engagement Practitioner and is keen on enhancing accessibility and equity in civic spaces, especially for BIPOC and disabled youth.



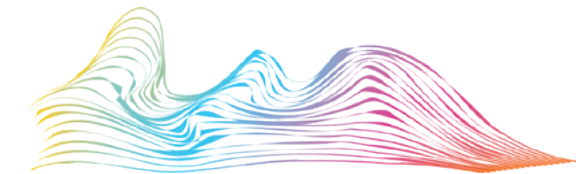
Executive Summary

The City of Vancouver is located on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliłwətał Nations, territories that have never been surrendered to the Crown through treaties or agreements.

Despite this, Vancouver is also a chosen home to a large number of immigrants.

The City of Vancouver has created and facilitated the Vancouver Dialogues Project in 2010 to host spaces for Indigenous and immigrant communities to come together, and published *First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers* in 2014 to inform Newcomers about Indigenous matters. However, there have been little to no efforts by the City to create spaces for Indigenous People and immigrants to engage with each other or updates on the Guide.

It has been nearly 15 years since the City facilitated the Vancouver Dialogues Project and 10 years since the publication of *First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers*, the City of Vancouver must reintroduce these efforts for its residents as a part of the City’s reconciliation and diversity journey. The City should curate an advisory committee to inform the process of updating the content and format of the new Vancouver Dialogues Project and *First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers*, as well as to follow the engagement best practices to make the opportunities as accessible as possible for the Indigenous and immigrant residents.



The City of Vancouver must commit to creating safe and welcoming spaces for its Indigenous and immigrant residents to come together and build trust amongst each other.

To avoid disruption of these efforts due to municipal budget and election cycles, the City should also work towards the establishment of the Vancouver Dialogues Institute a few years after the reintroduction of the Vancouver Dialogues Project. The City of Vancouver must commit to creating safe and welcoming spaces for its Indigenous and immigrant residents to come together and build trust amongst each other.

Background

SITUATING THE CITY OF VANCOUVER: HOME FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND IMMIGRANTS

The City of Vancouver is located on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəyəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliłwətał Nations. This means that these territories have never been surrendered to the Crown through treaties or agreements.

There are at least 15,000 Indigenous residents within the boundary of the City of Vancouver based on the 2021 Census (City of Vancouver, 2022, b). This number includes both the Urban Indigenous population and those who reside on the Musqueam reserve (City of Vancouver, 2022, b). The City of Vancouver's Indigenous population is the 13th largest among municipalities and Metro Vancouver's Indigenous population is the third largest amongst metro regions in Canada (City of Vancouver, 2022, b).

The City of Vancouver is also a *chosen* home to a lot of international immigrants. According to the Census data from 2021, 50 % of the residents in the City of Vancouver were born outside Canada (City of Vancouver, 2022, a). There are a few different types of statuses immigrants can hold in the City of Vancouver, as well as in Canada: temporary permit holders, permanent residents, refugees, and undocumented immigrants.¹ Each one of these immigrants ended up in the City of Vancouver for a wide range of reasons, however they are all residing on the unceded territories of the

xʷməθkʷəyəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliłwətał Nations, and their status was granted by the government of Canada, which is a colonial entity.

If the City of Vancouver is home to both Indigenous People and immigrants, how does the City support the immigrant communities in learning about Indigenous matters, and Indigenous communities welcoming immigrants?

VANCOUVER DIALOGUES: FIRST NATIONS, URBAN ABORIGINAL, AND IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Vancouver Dialogues: First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities ("Dialogues")

was designed and facilitated to create a co-learning space between Indigenous and immigrant communities in 2010 as a part of the Sport Hosting Grants from the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. This project hosted interactive opportunities for Indigenous and immigrant residents to learn from each other to bridge the gap that resulted in stereotypes and a lack of information about each other (Suleman, 2011). The types of activities included: dialogue circles, community-based research, cultural exchange visits, youth and



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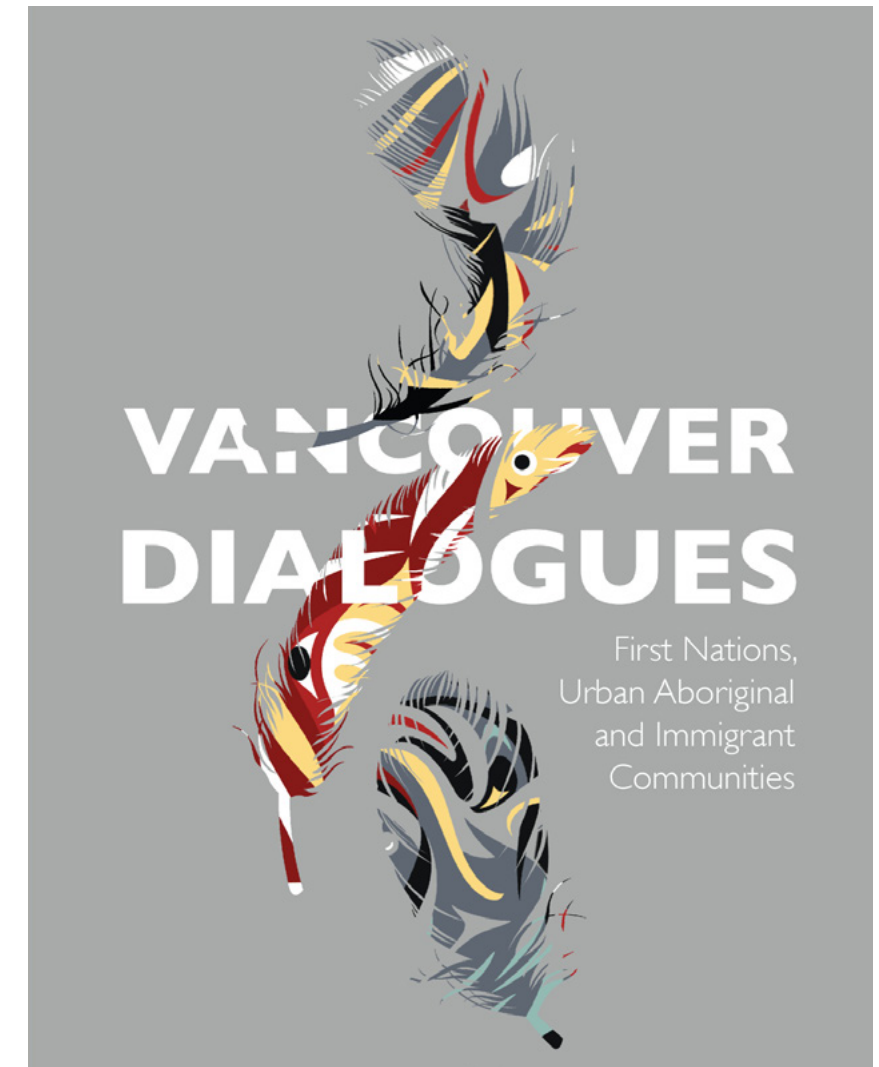
elders programs, neighbourhood storytelling projects, and book and video releases (City of Vancouver, 2014).

Some of the themes emerging from the dialogue circles included seeking understanding, racism, Indigenous and non-Western ways of learning, identity, and language preservation and revitalization (Suleman, 2011). The City reflected that the dialogue format works well as long as the space is safe and respectful, and participants find a way to connect with one another through these dialogues (Suleman, 2011). The City also identified that a key to the success of the project was collaboration with communities and a collective effort among a variety of groups including, but not limited to, local First Nations, urban Aboriginal organizations, settlement organizations, neighbourhood houses, City departments, and the school board (Suleman, 2011). Another key reflection was that education provided the participants with the opportunities to un/relearn the pre-existing perceptions of each other and their own communities (Suleman, 2011).

The Dialogues wrapped up in 2013, and the continuous effort was to be carried on through other civic projects to continue fostering the relationship between Indigenous and immigrant communities (City of Vancouver, 2014).



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Cover of *Vancouver Dialogues: First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities*, City of Vancouver.

FIRST PEOPLES: GUIDE FOR NEWCOMERS

First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers (“Guide”) was developed to equip newcomers in Vancouver with the knowledge about:

- “who are Aboriginal people (or First Peoples) in Vancouver and Canada;
- a brief overview of the relationship between the Government of Canada and First Peoples; and
- current initiatives and ways for Newcomers to learn more about Aboriginal people in the community” (City of Vancouver, 2014, p. 3).

This Guide was created as a legacy project derived from the Dialogues as the need for educational materials about Indigenous matters was identified by the participants (City of Vancouver, 2014). This Guide was created so that the learners would be able to use it on their own or in classroom settings (City of Vancouver, 2014). This Guide is available on the City’s webpage, Moving to Vancouver, as well as on the Vancouver Public Library catalogue online. This Guide is still shared and used by many educational settings for newcomers including language classes across Metro Vancouver (“Resources For Newcomers,” *n.d.*), though some of the terminologies and information need to be updated 10 years after its creation (*i.e.* appropriate term uses, Aboriginal vs. Indigenous).



Cover of *First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers*, City of Vancouver.

WHY VANCOUVER NEEDS MORE ROBUST INDIGENOUS-IMMIGRANT CULTURAL PLATFORMS

The City of Vancouver has progressed in its journey towards reconciliation over time, especially since the Year of Reconciliation in 2013.² The UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) Task Force—consisting of the City’s council members and staff, as well as local Nations’ council members, their appointees, and their staff—has published the City of Vancouver’s UNDRIP Strategy in 2022 (City of Vancouver, 2022, c). The City also currently funds and operates many facilities for Indigenous residents, however, the City’s work related to learning opportunities about Indigenous matters for immigrants remains underfunded, and there has been little effort by the City in this area since the Dialogue and the Guide.³

In September 2023, Mayor Sim issued a proclamation on behalf of the City of Vancouver to declare the City’s commitment to working towards genuine reconciliation (City of Vancouver, *n.d.*). The themes the City identified in aligning its work with the Calls to Action, especially the areas of “Healthy communities and wellness” and “Advancing awareness, knowledge, and capacity” can be closely connected to immigrant education on Indigenous matters. The details commitments in these areas include:

- “We support early learning and care, including child care, related grants, and support programs [...]
- We launched *First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers*, which covers the history of Indigenous peoples, a local First Nation overview, and contemporary urban issues” (City of Vancouver, *n.d.*).

While there is an explicit mention of the Guide and the intention to support programs for learning, there have not been specific programs geared toward immigrants. As the listed commitment argues, the City is responsible for the “early learning” of any residents, and this case should be made for immigrants as well.

In addition, compared to the 2006 Census data used for the Dialogues, the Indigenous population in Vancouver has grown by nearly 4,000 people as of the 2021 Census (City of Vancouver, 2022, b; Suleman, 2011). The number of immigrants, especially through immigration routes that are not permanent,

has also tended towards continuous growth in the City of Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2022, a). It has been nearly 15 years since the Dialogues. The topic of Truth and Reconciliation has become something that is talked about in many contexts, and the public’s awareness and desire to learn has increased. As the City furthers its work towards reconciliation and sees more Indigenous and immigrant residents, the need to facilitate platforms for them to interact with each other and to create communities beyond the ethnic and cultural boundaries is greater than ever before.



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Proposal

The City of Vancouver must reintroduce the Vancouver Dialogues Project on an annual basis starting in 2025, and update *First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers* as a part of its reconciliation effort. This recommendation can be broken down into smaller areas of focus:

1 Secure funding for the new Vancouver Dialogues Project and the updated *First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers* through various channels, especially through Vancouver Sport Hosting Grants as Vancouver will be hosting the FIFA World Cup games in 2026

It has been 15 years since Vancouver hosted the 2010 Olympics, and the FIFA games will be the first major international event since then. This is a great opportunity for the City of Vancouver to secure financial resources and to pick up the legacy of the 2010 Dialogues from where it was left off. As these games will take place on the unceded territories and will invite a large number of visitors and Newcomers, the City of Vancouver must spend the revenue back to the Indigenous and immigrant communities.

2 Recreate an advisory committee consisting of Indigenous and Newcomer individuals, as well as experts on Indigenous and immigrant rights, as well as engagement specialists, to update the format and content of the Dialogues and Guide to better align with the current state of the city, country, and the world.

The City needs support from the experts, and those who hold Indigenous and immigrant identities, to get a comprehensive sense of what should be included or excluded in the Dialogues and the Guide. This committee will regularly meet to advise the City throughout the planning phase and will be involved in the evaluation phase to support updating the content as well as the format of the Dialogues and the Guide after each cycle.

3 Enhance partnerships with local Indigenous and settlement organizations to involve a wider range of audiences who are Indigenous- or immigrant-identifying.

One of the reasons the 2010 Dialogues were successful was because of the partnership with local community groups. The City must commit to further its relationship building with a wide range of Indigenous and immigrant/Newcomer groups who are active in the City of Vancouver and the Metro Vancouver region. In doing so, the City needs to be mindful of the burden it might put on these organizations and work to minimize it.

4 Plan engagement strategies to make the project as accessible as possible. Consider and adopt trauma-informed approaches, multimedia learning, event accessibility, etc.

People have their own way of learning, and each person has unique lived experiences. As individuals from an extremely wide range of backgrounds are expected to participate and use the Dialogues and the Guide, the City needs to consider various ways to make these opportunities and resources as accessible as possible. The effort should not be limited to using plain language and multimedia learning materials (*i.e.* text, film, visual art, hands-on workshops, etc.), but also to consider and adopt trauma-informed approaches, physical and mental accessibility, beliefs, and so on.

5 Inform the public about opportunities related to the Dialogues and the Guide on multiple platforms including, but not limited to, City newsletters, social media, and posters at community hubs, as well as through the City's community partners.

Targeted outreach is a key. Individuals from Indigenous and immigrant communities may have a higher level of distrust in governments due to their backgrounds. Making sure that the information about the Dialogue and the Guide is not easily dismissed and is well-communicated to the audience can be achieved by providing the information on as many platforms as possible and by collaborating with community partners. The audience will likely have a higher sense of trust in the communities they belong to, so the City, especially the communications team, needs to double its efforts with its partners to work on outreach to inform the audience in ways that are accessible to the specific communities.

6 Certify the organizations and programs that are qualified to incorporate the topics of Truth and Reconciliation and partner with the Vancouver Dialogues Project.

We have the right to know which organizations and programs in our city are equipped to support Indigenous and immigrant communities coming together. The City should work with the Dialogues' new Advisory Committee and other groups that provide the partner organizations and programs as part of the Vancouver Dialogues Project with education on Indigenous matters (*i.e.* the Centre for First Nations Governance, 4Rs Youth Movement, Indigenous Youth Roots, and Reconciliation Canada) and on welcoming immigrants (*i.e.* settlement organizations like MOSAIC and Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC)). Those partners who are considered equipped to incorporate topics of Truth and Reconciliation (including those listed above who partake in education) will receive a certificate to signify their readiness to engage with Indigenous and immigrant communities,



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similar to the Living Wage Employer certification. To continue the certification, these organizations, programs, and their staff are required to attend and prove their readiness to regularly engage with Indigenous and immigrant communities.

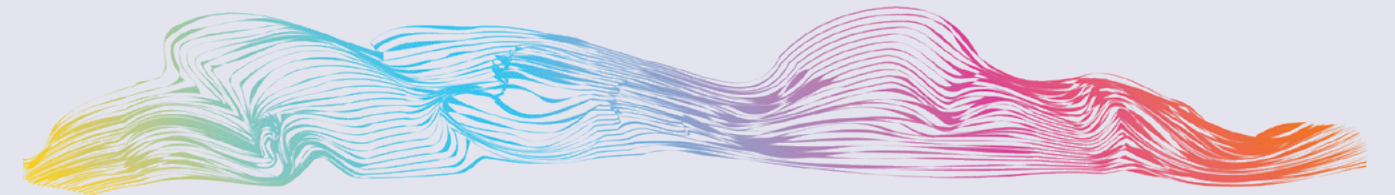
7 Evaluate the Dialogues and the use of the Guide, and report back to the public regularly by using plain language to increase information accessibility.

The information shared in the Dialogues and the Guide will need to adapt to the changes as our society evolves. The City needs to listen to the feedback received from the participants of the Dialogues, the users of the Guide (both Newcomers/immigrants and those who teach the communities about the subject matter), and the committee to understand the updates that need to be made, and implement those changes. What the City hears from these groups should be readily available in plain language for the public to further information accessibility.

8 Work towards a longer-term goal for Vancouver as a community to continue with the work of Truth and Reconciliation, as well as migrant justice through the establishment of the Vancouver Dialogues Institute.

The work on Truth and Reconciliation and migrant justice cannot stop after an election term or a budget cycle, but needs to continue beyond these municipal cycles. Vancouver will remain a community built on unceded territories and will always have Newcomers. The City should embark on this updated Dialogues and Guide projects as the beginning of something larger than what we have imagined in Vancouver before. The City will support this work, financially and operationally, for the first few years, but should also work towards the establishment of the Vancouver Dialogues Institute. This means that the effort towards Truth and Reconciliation and migrant justice will not be interrupted by the municipal election and budget cycles, and the Institute will have its own program and budget cycles. However, even after the establishment of the Institute as a separate entity, the City should continue supporting the work of the Institute as a part of its continued commitment towards Truth and Reconciliation.

Conclusion



Truth and Reconciliation work, or accommodation for immigrants, cannot end at a “tick in a box.” While the City of Vancouver has been showing its commitment to reconciliation and diversity, there is still a large gap in the capacity for immigrants to learn about Indigenous matters, and for both Indigenous and immigrant community members to safely engage with each other. As an international City, located on the unceded territories, the City of Vancouver must advance its work in more intersectional ways.

The reintroduction of the Vancouver Dialogues Project and the update of *First Peoples: Guide for Newcomers*, will be a crucial step to creating a safe and open space for Indigenous and immigrant community members to learn about each other and create the trust that we need and deserve. This trust is much-needed to build solidarity among these community members, and to stand against the colonial systems we live in in the context of Vancouver and Canada.

There is no true safety and liberation of Indigenous and other racialized communities, including immigrants, in Vancouver until there is decolonization from the current governance systems.

With this in mind, we must not solely resort to the idea of reconciliation and be satisfied with it. Reconciliation will still be structured within the current colonial governance systems. There is no true safety and liberation of Indigenous and other racialized communities, including immigrants, in Vancouver until there is decolonization from the current governance systems. This solidarity and trust we create among Indigenous and immigrant residents in Vancouver will be the first step forward beyond reconciliation.

ENDNOTES

1. **Temporary permit holders:** these immigrants reside in Canada based on their temporary permits, such as study permit, work permit, and working holiday visas. Their permits typically allow six months to a few years of stay depending on the circumstances. The permit holders are required to apply for extensions within reason when the expiry date approaches.

Permanent residents: permanent residents are granted residency within Canada permanently. Applicants may qualify on the bases of their labour experience within or outside Canada (Express Entry), their marital and family status with Canadian citizens and permanent residents (family sponsorship), job offers by Canadian employees, etc. (CIBC, 2023) Permanent residents are required to stay in Canada for 2 years out of 5 years at all times in order to maintain their status.

Refugees: refugees are those people who reside in Canada because “of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion” and unable to return to their countries of origin (Federal laws of Canada, 2024). The status can be revoked if/when it is considered that the person no longer needs the protection by the government.

Undocumented immigrants: These immigrants reside in the county without formal permits or visas for a variety of reasons. While there is no accurate number of undocumented immigrants, 20,000 and 500,000 immigrants are estimated to be in Canada (Government of Canada, 2024).

2. See Vancouver’s journey towards Reconciliation for more information. <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/vancover-journey-towards-reconciliation.aspx>
3. See Resources for non-Indigenous people for more information. <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/resources-for-non-indigenous-people.aspx>

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I’d like to acknowledge that this work took place in the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətał Nations which is colonially known as “Vancouver.” I’d also like to acknowledge that the knowledge shared on the territories of the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations shaped my work immensely.


As I express my gratitude towards the Indigenous and First Nations communities for allowing me to call this place my chosen home, I’d like to also express my commitment to continue the dialogue on and tangible work towards the decolonization of the land, our current systems of the world, and our mindset. I am committed to continue my efforts to bring decolonial lenses to my inherited home, Japan, which has colonized and continues to colonize much of the Asia and Pacific regions, including the Ainu and Ryukyu Peoples and their territories.

I thank the LEVEL Youth Policy Program team of Vancouver Foundation for supporting me in this

learning process, especially Amora Takawira, Alex Tse, and Elder Deb. Your dedication and love have allowed me to grow as an activist and as a human.

I also thank Dr. Ayaka Yoshimizu and Tadafumi Tamura for modelling how first-generation Japanese immigrants can further the decolonial work in educational and community settings here in so-called “Vancouver,” while also accommodating immigrants in our city. I’d love to continue learning from you and become a model to the younger generations of immigrants from our background.

Lastly, I’d like to thank all my family, friends, and teachers in my life for supporting me in learning and growing up. I remember being a kid wanting to make positive changes in the world, and I am now an adult wanting to do the same. I hope you know each one of your presence in my life allowed me to continue chasing this dream.



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Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.

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