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Episode 3: Let's chat about good policy that works for people: Youth Engagement & Policy Change

0:00

Sam Bird, narrating: Aanii Boozhoo! Welcome to Young People Know, a special five-part series that explores the best practices of effective youth engagement by turning to Indigenous young people. Young People Know is a co-production between Good Influence Films and the Mastercard Foundation.

I'm your host, Sam Bird. I'm a citizen of Peguis First Nation. I live in Thunder Bay on the north shore of Lake Superior on the traditional lands of the Fort William First Nation. I work with the EleV Program at the Mastercard Foundation. The goal of EleV is that education and employment systems are transformed so that Indigenous young people can realize their visions of mino-bimaadiziwin, the good life.

This system transformation must be led by Indigenous youth. Young people know what they need. My hope for this series is to help organizations working with young people become genuinely youth led.

At the EleV program, we partner with organizations across Canada that work directly with young people. These groups are creating new models to center the voices of youth in setting the strategy and direction of their work.

Young people are the drivers of change. But how can an organization effectively center Indigenous voices? How can young people be engaged in a way that is meaningful to them? To find out, I talked with a number of folks who have experience on councils, advisories, student unions and boards. I wanted to hear directly from First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth.

So if you work for an organization that engages or aspires to engage youth, like a university, a band council, a nonprofit, or a provincial or territorial government, or within the philanthropic sector like myself, these stories were gathered with you in mind.

You're listening to Young People Know, a special series by the Mastercard Foundation EleV program and Indigenous 150+.

In this episode, we're going to explore policy - good policy and bad policy.

When I spoke with young people about their experiences leading change in and through youth councils, three themes emerged. First, youth are leading much needed change to how youth

councils are run, and they are reforming how youth councils function. Second, they're leading much needed policy change that fundamentally improves the lives of both Indigenous people and Canadians more widely. Third, young people need the organizations they're working with to grant them decision making power. Youth are the experts in what they need.

They need actual voting power. Their voices must meaningfully shape the institutions they are a part of. Whether it is a government, a board or a university, youth must have formalized decision making power.

3:09
Our first story comes from my friend Riley. Many of you may know Riley Yesno, a queer Anishinaabe scholar, writer and advocate from Northwestern Ontario. She has been a contributor and commentator for some of the largest media outlets including the New York Times, BBC World News, The Globe and Mail and CBC National news. Riley has also traveled the globe speaking at internationally renowned institutions and events, including the UN climate negotiations, the Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality, TEDx stages, and many others.

Her love and gratitude for her communities, passion for radical ideas, and the calling she feels to challenge systems is what inspires her work. I had the chance to visit with her while she was home in Thunder Bay.

Riley Yesno: Hey, My name is Riley, I use she/her pronouns. I'm from Eabametoong First Nation and Treaty 9 Territory, but I grew up in Thunder Bay for the most part. Right now I'm a PhD student at the University of Toronto. I'm looking at Indigenous youth and social movements. When I was in high school in Thunder Bay, I was really involved with my school community. I was on Student Council, I joined the board of education and tried to get really involved.

Sam Bird, narrating: I asked Riley to share with me about her experiences advocating for policy change while she was in high school.

Riley Yesno: I was on the board of education for the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board was a student trustee. And part of that means that all of the student trustees in Ontario, every couple of months get together to talk about student issues all across the province. There's only like three people from Northern Ontario that go there. But obviously in northern Ontario, we have a very significant Indigenous population as opposed to a lot of these people in Toronto and the GTA area who were telling me that they had never met an Indigenous person their whole lives. So we, in this huge meeting, have a student body that's supposed to represent all of the high school students in all of Ontario.

Mitzi Hunter at the time was the Minister of Education and she was there and she was taking questions from us. And people were asking questions. I just didn't feel like they were pressing her enough. You have the Minister of Education in front of you come on like grill her. So I went up and this was before the Indigenous curriculum had been, you know, created, which would

then end up being peeled back by the Ford government when he got into power. But at the time, there was still talks about if we're going to create an Indigenous curriculum, what does that look like? And I had heard that there was a lot of advocacy to create an Indigenous history credit, or course, alongside Canadian history. Which I liked the energy, but I also thought that you were not teaching Canadian history, right, like I didn't think that there necessarily needed to be two different courses. And instead, if you just taught Canadian history correctly, then that would take care of it. And so I said that to Mitzi Hunter, pretty much just like that.

And all of a sudden, this entire room of young people, they got up and they started clapping and cheering. I was like, Whoa, and Mitzi Hunter, I think, felt the pressure. And she came down, and she was on a podium, and she came down. And she looked at me right in my face, and was like, we are very dedicated to reconciliation and all of these things. And I was like, wow, okay. I really, truly wasn't expecting an answer like that, or a reaction like that. But it was just so clear to me in that instance, like when you say something that is, you know, a little bit critical, or you're offering a really strong position as a young person that gets traction, and that gets a response. And that was a huge, huge place for me when I was thinking about advocating. I was like, yeah, like the curriculum changes around Northern Ontario, but also that lesson about leadership as well.

Sam Bird, narrating: Even though the curriculum changes that rally advocated for were stalled by the Ford government, there's a lot in the story for us to learn from. While the Minister of Education was able to recognize the need for Ontario to catch up in terms of adequate Indigenous history curriculum, she proposed a solution that did not receive enthusiastic endorsement from Indigenous students.

Throughout Ontario students need to learn about Canadian history in a way that properly includes Indigenous peoples. Continuing to teach Canadian history in its current form, where Indigenous history and stories are minimized, perpetuates myths of erasure. Creating a unique course for Indigenous history could also perpetuate the notion of otherness towards Indigenous peoples. Indigenous young people experience this sort of minimization and otherness every day. That’s how they know what sort of curriculum reform would be most effective.

Riley also noticed that there were only three students from Northern Ontario at this meeting with the Minister of Education. How can the province expect to understand the perspectives of Indigenous youth without substantial northern representation? Indigenous youth engagement must include participants from remote and northern communities.

When it came to posing questions to the Minister, Riley also felt that the other students in attendance did not exactly ‘press her enough.’ It makes me wonder what sort of implicit power dynamics dominated the room. Fruitful engagement requires youth to be empowered to speak freely and openly. Riley is a powerhouse and did not let those dynamics intimidate her. However, youth should not be required to push through unnecessary discomfort in order for their perspectives to be heard.

8:17
So how do we do this? How do we create more egalitarian spaces? I spoke with a Mohawk law student in Montreal who had some ideas.

Brandon Montour: My name is Brandon Montour. I'm Kanien'kehá:ka from the Mohawk Territory of Kahnawake. I'm in my second year at McGill University Faculty of Law. At Concordia University. I'm currently a member of the Young Alumni Council, which is working closely with the Alumni Association. And we're just really trying to build engagement with alumni from the University and increase engagement with students from different backgrounds such as Indigenous alumni, and Black alumni. Currently at the McGill University Faculty of Law, I'm on the Faculty Council, where I was elected by the student body of the law students. The goal there is really to be a voice for the students, and bring their concerns to the faculty level at the university and really be a voice for any concerns that students may have that are not otherwise heard at the table.

Sam Bird, narrating: I asked Brandon, if there are ways that councils can decolonize or Indigenize the way that they work. And while terms like “decolonize” and “Indigenize” come with a lot of baggage, what I'm really trying to get at is how do we do this work in a good way? And how can we reimagine the way meetings are run? Brandon started with some examples from the legal profession.

Brandon Montour: Yeah, thank you for that question, because that's something that I've been thinking about very recently. Many of these youth councils are very colonial in the way that they're structured and the way that decisions are taken into account and I think that one way we can decolonize or Indigenize these institutions are by incorporating Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous legal traditions and epistemologies into the structure of these councils.

In law school right now we're learning about legal ethics and the regulation of the legal profession. Currently, as it stands, the legal profession is internally regulated by lawyers who have a code of ethics and a code of conduct which are regulated by the common law and the civil law. I recently written a paper on the need to build off Indigenous legal traditions. And certain principles that we see in Cree or Anishinaabe Law, Kanien'kehá:ka Law and how we can build off some of those principles to inform lawyers’ day-to-day practices. And I think we could do the same for youth councils.

Sam Bird, narrating: Then Brandon shared some concrete examples from his own community.

Brandon Montour: We can look at incorporating some knowledge from my community, such as “the words before all else,” the Ohenten Kariwatekwen. Basically, when everyone comes into a meeting, the first thing you do is you give thanks for being here today and for why you're here. Little things like this can go a long way and incorporating this and acknowledging these, especially for Concordia University being on unceded Mohawk Territory, I think it's important that

we engage with the legal traditions that traditionally animated these spaces. So that's a long answer, just to say that, yes, there are ways to Indigenize and decolonize the way certain youth councils are run. It really should involve engaging with different ways to structure the program, or the institution.

Sam Bird, narrating: Brandon shared how power is embedded physically in a courtroom. He then contrasted this with practices used in his own community.

Brandon Montour: We look at the way courts are structured, and you have a judge who sits high up on a pedestal and then you have the lawyers just in front of him and then you have the audience and the onlookers in the back. And that really speaks to how the civil law and the common law traditions view decision making, ultimately by the judge in Kanien'kehá:ka, in my community, in our court system, we have an alternative dispute resolution process where it's not formalized and structured like this, but rather, it's consensus based and obviously, circular. So all the parties sit in a circle to look at each other, and to face each other and to come to a consensus. That'd be important for certain youth councils. And I brought this point up at Concordia, where we had a room designated, but it didn't really fit for the way I imagined it. I thought it was important as an Indigenous person that we reorganize and restructure the setting to be circular as we sit and come to a decision making, just to not only pay respect to the land we're on but also just to, like I said, incorporate these ways of knowing and acknowledging into the structure.

Sam Bird, narrating: Brandon's points here about restructuring meeting rooms so that individuals can sit in a circle stands in stark contrast to the setting that Riley described in the meeting with the students and the minister. In her story, the power imbalance between the minister and the students was physically mapped out in the room, with the minister standing above the students at a podium. Youth engagement can be an opportunity to disrupt hierarchies and create spaces that elicit greater participation.

13:18

Another young person working to unsettle current power dynamics is Autumn LaRose-Smith, who we met in the second episode.

Autumn LaRose-Smith: Yes, hi everyone. My name is Autumn LaRose-Smith. I am from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and use she/they pronouns.

Sam Bird, narrating: Autumn is the first elected president of the provincial Métis Youth Council with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, where she is also the Minister of Youth. Before that, they were the president of the University of Saskatchewan Students Union and also the former VP of Student Affairs. While President of the Student Union, Autumn led a simple, yet groundbreaking innovation.

Autumn LaRose-Smith: So one of the things that during my year that we started was, we started having regularly scheduled meetings with the University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association, which had never been done before, which seems to me such common sense, right? Students are interacting with faculty on a daily basis, of course, they would be meeting to share their concerns or ideas and how to support each other, in a way. But we never were meeting, we weren't even talking. So fighting to make sure that we were meeting with senior leadership or different sectors within the university, just on a regular basis so that we could share our concerns and it was effective.

And an example in one of our meetings, I had shared that students were emailing us saying that they were getting assignments scheduled for the break. And because I was having a meeting with the senior leadership of the university, they went and emailed that faculty person immediately, and it was fixed. And so just given those opportunities to just speak in that way and share in that way, I think is really important and wild that it wasn't necessarily being done before. Obviously, there were a lot of meetings going on, opportunities to meet. So yeah, creating more avenues for dialogue.

Sam Bird, narrating: The direct meetings between the Faculty Association and the Student Union, allowed for resolution of issues as they came about.

Autumn LaRose-Smith: I was hosting town halls with as many colleges and constituencies that I could to give students their respective constituencies an opportunity to just voice whatever the heck they wanted. I said I was there to just listen, take it all in, to share information if they ask for it, but really, it was just to listen. And then I wrote a huge report on every college and constituency that had shared with us; shared stats in it in regards to how students were impacted over COVID. But you know, when students have a lot of issues, especially regarding faculty, when the Faculty Association is there to represent and support faculty, there's that obvious conflict. And so that's why I mentioned figuring out how we can support each other.

One of the things during COVID that students were explaining is that when they had, especially with online classes, when they had questions or needed support in their learning, that they weren't able to reach faculty as much, and it was creating this huge barrier. And the issue on faculty side was that they were getting bombarded, you know, something that could have been a five seconds to deal with in person now took a lot longer in terms of emailing everyone. And so they were being overworked. You know, that's what was being shared on their end. And I mean being bombarded with all these emails and so imagine figuring out, okay, what's going to be a solution that's going to work for everyone? Because, obviously, we don't want to be, you know, creating unhealthy work environments for everyone. And so what do you need? How can that be beneficial and supportive to the students who were representing, and for the most part, it, I think, is generally positive, but there's obviously going to be time where, you know, there's going to be tension.

Sam Bird, narrating: Autumn also has plans for how they will implement structural change to

the youth council with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan.

Autumn LaRose-Smith: And I guess, if I can share a little bit about a change when I ran for my position with the Métis Nation, Saskatchewan, one of the overall issues that youth raised to me was that they felt completely disconnected from the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. For myself, I was appointed Minister of Youth. And that was, you know, something that the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan President and Métis Nation Legislative Assembly had the role in doing, the President appoints the Ministers. And so something that I plan to create with the youth council is creating youth ministerial positions, so that youth will have the opportunity to sit on a ministerial position and then also automatically be working with the Minister that is holding that position.

Where I'm elected to represent youth. What does that mean, right? Youth are everything youth are going to school or have kids or buying a home for the first time or starting a career. So that falls into all of these categories, not just siloed into whatever youth is. I never want to be the only point of interaction between youth and the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. Youth should be intertwined throughout all governing bodies throughout all staff.

Sam Bird, narrating: Autumn's examples, first getting the Faculty Association to meet directly with the Student Union and their plans to meaningfully integrate youth throughout the entirety of the Métis Nation Saskatchewan, demonstrate again, that young people are the experts in what they need.

Young people know. Youth can lead systems change that changes practices and changes power dynamics.

18:27

Another Métis leader bringing about change to the structure of youth councils is Tutchone Dunfield who we met in the first episode. At the time we chatted she was still on council.

Tutchone Dunfield: Tansi, hello. My name is Tutchone Dunfield. I am Cree Métis. And I currently sit on the provincial Youth Council for the Métis Nation of Alberta. I'm the Region Six Youth Representative, which is most of northern Alberta.

Sam Bird, narrating: Tutchone told me about some changes the council was considering for how youth get on council - appointments versus elections.

Tutchone Dunfield: For our council, the youth representative from each region is not elected, we are appointed. So whoever is our region president, they appoint a youth representative. And then that youth representative can accept or deny. And so we're trying to change that because of the Métis Nation of Alberta, we're writing our own constitution, and we're going to self govern. We want youth to be elected from each region, we want the youth in that region to elect their

representatives so that they're properly represented. And I feel like if you do it that way, you will get those youth who are go-getters, youth who really want to make that change. But it's kind of funny because I myself, never really used to be that type-a, go-getter person. But then I started getting more involved and I wanted to make these changes. I wanted to provide a better future for Métis youth. And it's kind of interesting, because my other friend who's on the council, she's very introverted, and very quiet. She doesn't speak very loudly. But she thinks the same that we do, if that makes sense. Like she's not a person to kind of call somebody out. She'll say something to myself or my friend, and then we'll call that person out. I feel like that's really interesting because she was appointed by her president.

Sam Bird, narrating: It was fascinating for me to hear Tutchone talk about the strengths and challenges of appointments. On the one hand appointments can leave you with a few members who are not as invested as others, but on the other hand, appointments can lead to a diverse Council in terms of personalities. Some youth may be appointed that might not have been interested in an election process. Tutchone shared about one way the youth council has corrected challenges they experienced with some members.

Tutchone Dunfield: It was a little difficult in the beginning, because of the appointment from your president, there's a lot of worries for nepotism, as well, and just kind of appointing youth who are just kind of there, just to kind of be there and don't really care a lot. We've added into our terms of reference that if a youth is not present for three consecutive meetings, then we will need a new youth basically, they'll be kicked out. It sounds bad to say kicked off the council, but they will be asked to leave the council and the President will have to provide a new youth. And same thing, we've also added that a youth representative cannot be directly related to the president. Because like while we are not paid, we do receive honorariums for attending meetings, and going to events. So I feel like there's just like, Oh, I'll put my son or my daughter as a youth rep, so that they can get a little extra money kind of thing. We've added that into our new terms and references.

Sam Bird, narrating: I think what's so interesting about this story is that it was the youth council members themselves who advocated for this change. They wanted to adopt changes to their own terms of reference, so that they could hold themselves accountable. They also wanted to adopt changes to restrict what they saw as unfair practices by the President of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Tutchone continued to talk about the relationship between the Métis Nation of Alberta's Provisional Council and their youth council.

Tutchone Dunfield: As a youth council, we have fought so hard to one, create a youth council have a youth council for Alberta. And two, just be more involved with the Métis nation and the Provincial Council. We don't have a voting position still, on the Provincial Council, there is one youth from our council that is allowed to sit in on the meetings and kind of give updates about

what we're doing. But like I said, we're not allowed to vote or anything. And a lot of the time, we're still struggling to kind of just say, we have a voice and we need to be listened to. I feel like a lot of the time, it's all over the place. But a lot of the times they're like “we need to listen to the youth, they're our future…” and they don't act like it. We're tired of kind of being just like a checked box. Like, oh, did you ask the youth? Okay, one youth. They're good with it. Let's run with it.

Sam Bird, narrating: I love Tutchone candor. If you have leaders like Tutchone on your youth council, be sure to support them so that they stick around.

So, there's a lot to unpack here. First, as professionals working with young people, we must devolve power if we truly believe their contributions matter. Enough with this participatory non-voting nonsense.

Second, we have to stop tokenizing young people, a youth representative to a larger board or council must be resourced to hear from a wide range of young people. That way they can represent those interests in the broadest way possible. We've got to stop the practice Tutchone describes of “okay, one youth, they're good with it. Let's run with it.”

24:05
This challenge that Tutchone describes that within the Métis nation of Alberta, the youth representative holds a participatory non-voting position is also felt in other parts of the country. Brian Pottle faces a similar dynamic in his role as the President of the National Inuit Youth Council.

Brian Pottle: I’m Brian Pottle. I am from the Nunatsiavut region of Canada, which is northern Labrador. I'm president of the National Inuit youth council, as well as executive director of a nonprofit, the Katinnganiq Makerspace network based out of Nunavut, and also singled out half the time with three kids.

Sam Bird, narrating: As the president of the National Inuit Youth Council, Brian also sat on the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC).

Brian Pottle: So ICC shorthand for Inuit circumpolar Council. They have, I believe, four different regions in the circumpolar region of the world. We have Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia, which represents the region of the circumpolar north where Inuit reside. And so ICC as a holistic perspective, it's intended to unify the interests of Inuit irrespective or perhaps especially considering the opposite of what I just said, the geographical location that Inuit find themselves in just through traversing the remote north and settling in different regions. And ultimately, it's to help to unify a somewhat disparate set of voices so that a more global perspective, the interests of Inuit are respected and advanced.

Sam Bird, narrating: It was interesting to hear Brian share the difference between voting and

non voting members of the ICC.

Brian Pottle: As President of the National Inuit Youth Council, my role with both ITK and ICC Canada, its participatory member on the board. Basically, there are voting members. And then there are kind of participatory members. And as President of the National Youth Council, I'm in the participatory group, we sit on the board, we have the right to say what we feel we need to to respect our respective organizations. But ultimately, the voting is comprised of the four main, Inuit land claim organizations across Canada.

Sam Bird, narrating: There are a few other participatory members of ICC Canada, such as the Inuit Women's Association. I asked Brian about the prospect of these positions becoming voting positions, I thought it would be a straightforward answer, I thought he would just say yes, absolutely give the youth a stronger voice! Give the woman a stronger voice! But instead, I learned that this prospect is a bit more complicated than I anticipated.

Brian Pottle: There are a lot of really kind of interesting legal, and logistical challenges that would come with that, for example, the role that I'm in now, it is at present, not a full time role. It's a more of a part time volunteer role. And I carve out time from my day job to do my best to advocate for Inuit youth on national and international levels. And one of the interesting things that could happen could be that maybe the role of President of the National Youth Council eventually becomes a full time job. And whereupon we could look at the more serious situation of whether or not the President can also vote at any kind of board meetings and board motions and what not.

Sam Bird, narrating: So I tried, again, to get him to speak to the importance of voting privileges. I asked if voting would give Inuit youth a greater voice at the ICC Canada.

Brian Pottle: So, of course, if a representative of Inuit youth does have a right to vote on matters that involve the interests of Inuit youth then of course, yes, naturally, I believe that that would straightforwardly advance the interests of Inuit youth and also help to encourage more participation and more interest from Inuit youth and governing on behalf of their fellow Inuit youth. So for sure, yes.

Sam Bird, narrating: But then Brian immediately followed this by returning to the legal challenges this would pose. It's not a simple yes or no issue.

Brian Pottle: There's a lot of interesting challenges that come with that, for example, the voting members of ITK and ICC Canada, are the land claim organizations, as I've already mentioned, and all of those leaders are elected to the duly democratic process, wherein they get nominated, and they campaign or whatnot, and they get elected, and then eventually, well not eventually they get elected as president of their respective organizations. You need to apply a similarly rigorous process for the President of the National Inuit Youth Council, in order for it to be a fair democratic platform.

In my case, the role of president of the National Youth Council, it is a democratic process. So you have to either be nominated or you can do like a self nomination and you need to get supportive signatures. And then you have do the form and whatnot, I know to be a democratically elected official within, for example, the Nunatsiavut government, which at present, and right now, it's early April 2022. They are currently in the process of people doing the voting process for what's called ordinary members, which kind of comprise the cabinet for the Nunatsiavut government. And that form was way more intense, for example, than the form that I had to fill out to, or self nominate for the President of the National Inuit Youth Council. And then there's a voting process where the council members of the National Inuit Youth Council will review the candidates and effectively vote for which candidate should be elected as president. And in my case, I was actually acclaimed which is too bad because ideally, you'd see way more interest from Inuit youth across Inuit Nunangat in Canada, applying and trying to take on the leadership role and and represent their fellow Inuit youth.

Sam Bird, narrating: For there to be a feasible pathway for the youth council president to one day have voting rights within ICC Canada, Brian suggests that the President should be elected by a more rigorously democratic process. And why? In Brian's case he ran unopposed. So what's keeping this process from being more rigorous and democratic?

Brian Pottle: And that level of rigor, that level of seriousness may be challenging to sell to Inuit youth, depending on their familiarity or comfort with these more systematic processes that are that a lot of people in the Western world kind of grew up accustomed to, but for when I was growing up, for example, in remote Inuit communities, any kind of paperwork like even filling out the forms to apply for funding for schools, it's like super stressful and super, like the phrasing and the way the seriousness of it all. And like all the deadlines, it was all very hard to swallow going from just like a living like a relatively stress-free kind of lifestyle, as a teenager, and then having to like navigate this more serious part of the world, like the adulting aspect, that actually could potentially even backfire and create more barriers for participation, at least initially. But eventually, as people become used to and with the concept of “oh, I can run to be president of the National Youth Council,” which, again, probably need to be more vigorous of an election process potentially, just to make it fair, if that role were to ever have a voting privileges, but as over time, as more people are accustomed to the concept that this is something that they can do as you have family members, friends who've done it or you hear people you met them, then in a number of years time potentially could be something that actually generates greater interest from Inuit youth in the governance of Inuit and therefore Inuit youth.

Sam Bird, narrating: At first glance, the youth representative to the ICC, Canada lacks significant power. It’s participatory and non-voting. However, by digging deeper, we learned that the youth representative is selected by a small handful of young people, those who already sit on the council. Ideally, to ensure true representation, the President would be selected by as many Inuit youth as possible from across the four land claim organizations.

The insights Brian shared really helped me to understand the administrative barriers that youth from across the region face in participating in these processes.

While Brian shared a specific example with the ICC, it's a common phenomenon across the country for youth representatives to hold a non voting position on a larger governing body.

Looking at how prevalent this is, makes me wonder about a few things. First, I wonder if it would attract more youth to apply for youth leadership positions if those positions were granted voting power on the larger governing bodies they sit on. If youth understood the position came with significant decision making power, would that increase their interest in running for president of the council? Perhaps it would make the task of completing all the administrative requirements worthwhile.

I also wonder how it could impact the direction of the governing bodies if they had to account for the youth vote, a vote that could be the difference between a motion passing or failing. What if the youth vote had to be lobbied for? I sense this would lead to decisions that keep the welfare of the next generation front and center.

In the stories from Brian, Tutchone, Autumn and Brandon, we've heard how they are creating change or can see the potential for change within their council. For example, voting positions versus participatory positions, elected versus appointed. Innovations that allow for faculty and student representatives to meet directly with each other, Mohawk protocols that promote an egalitarian dynamic.

Now we're going to hear from youth who, like Riley Yesno, are advocating for policy changes that have real world impact.

34:13
Here's Autumn LaRose-Smith, speaking about some significant changes, they led, as USask Student Union president.

Autumn LaRose-Smith: Probably the most proudest thing is that I was able to, after approximately seven months of negotiating, able to create an anti racism MOU with the University of Saskatchewan and the Students Union that secured funding for students on any initiatives that students wanted to do in regards to anti racism work. And also for the university to report on all the work that they're doing. And what took the longest in terms of negotiating was, we wanted to have it written that senior leadership, and although I think this should be all staff, and faculty, but senior leadership was a good starting place would have to take anti racism training. And so this was something that the university on their end was saying, Well, of course, we're going to do this, we already plan on it. And on my end, like I said, getting it in writing, I said, Well, that's awesome. If you're going to do it, just put it in writing then. And for some reason, they were so hesitant to do that. But so you know, a lot of negotiating back and forth, making sure that this MOU had weight to it that it wasn't just like showy.

So ensuring that there was going to be specific reporting happening in terms of what the population of the students looked like, what the retention of Indigenous students looked like, what they were doing to support them or recruit them and what they're doing to support their staff. We didn't focus on staff, we had a couple things that focused on staff But we ended up taking this out because we realized that we could still advocate on them. But it was our main scope and focus was on those students. But also securing that funding specifically to give students, I guess, youth in a lot of ways that opportunity to do the initiatives and programs that they wanted to do on their own end. And so just getting that institution to essentially fund that. So that was probably the biggest thing. I know that MOU was the first of its kind amongst universities in Canada, which is, you know, really wild to see. And I really hope that other universities took note and, and recognize that they should be reporting to the students and also giving the students an opportunity, with funding not without, on doing the work that they want to see as well.

Sam Bird, narrating: In a perfect world post secondary institutions would be exclusively focused on meeting the needs of students. But the reality is that post-secondaries must contend with various stakeholders, including faculty, all manner of unions, the province, donors and their own administrations. It's easy for the concerns of students to become obscured.

In such a context, how can a post secondary formalize its commitments to its students? How can they hold themselves accountable to young people? In the case of Autumn at U Sask through an MOU - a memorandum of understanding.

Here are some excerpts from the MOU that Autumn described:

The University of Saskatchewan Students Union and the University of Saskatchewan will work together in a coordinated way to dismantle institutional structures, policies and processes that contribute to inequalities faced by marginalized groups. This involves challenging oppressive and systemic racism at all levels across USask campuses as it affects our greater community.

So in that MOU, the university agreed to make anti-racism anti-oppression training mandatory for senior university leadership, provide funding and support to student led anti racism initiatives, and create space for an undergrad student on the Anti-Racism Anti-Oppression Committee, which is led by the Office of the Vice Provost for Indigenous engagement.

This is a great example of significant policy change and accountability. If you're interested in the full MOU, see the link in the episode show notes.

So, what else is possible? For example, maybe in the future student unions will not have to fight tooth and nail to have an administration agree to anti-racism training. Maybe in the future, universities will voluntarily hold themselves accountable to students in this way by initiating their own MOUs with student unions.

Anyways, Autumn is not the only Métis young person leading systemic change.

38:30
In the first episode, we met Tutchone Dunfield. At the time we spoke she was serving on the provisional Youth Council for the Métis Nation of Alberta. She shared with me how the youth council advocated for new staff positions in each region of Alberta to properly support youth initiatives.

Tutchone Dunfield: So through the MNA, there's the youth programs and services, and they're the ones that host those events, each region has their youth representative, and then their youth staff. And then those people work together to see what the Métis youth in that region needs. The reason we had put forward a motion to have hired staff because it was a lot of work. And for us being only a volunteer position, it was almost asking too much of us. We needed that help, and they were able to provide it and now there's a whole youth programs and services session for the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Sam Bird, narrating: Tutchone story illustrates once again that young people are the experts in what they need. Young people know. Métis young people in Alberta recognize their need for greater human resources. By establishing new youth coordinator positions, they were able to better serve Métis young people throughout the province.

39:47
Policy shifts often begin by recognizing the need for good data collection. Brandon advocated for data collection as part of Concordia's Young Alumni Council. The Pathway to Employment doesn't end when students graduate. Alumni Services help students transition into the workforce. However, few Indigenous students are engaged with the work of alumni associations.

Brandon Montour: Yeah, so if I could think more recently to the Young Alumni Council, I believe I was the first Indigenous person to be a part of it. What I wanted to see really was increased engagement with you know, Indigenous alumni and following up for this particular role. When you're in the university system, and you're enrolled and registered in courses, you're sort of under their wing and you're expecting you know them to have that eye over you and in respect of job prospects after university but when you graduate and you leave, you're out of their purview and out of this system. I want to see more engagement with Indigenous peoples after and following up to ensure you know that the success that they were lined up to have actually comes to fruition. And we're starting to see a change in that conversation and planning for sessions and advising sessions with, you know, Indigenous graduates to follow up and to look at opportunities that may arise in their field. And I think that, you know, I don't like to say that, you know, that happened because of me, but it happened, certainly, because these conversations were brought up at the table. And it makes me really concerned. And it worries me that if these concerns weren't brought up, what that would look like, would have taken 15-20 years, five years for the next person like me to bring this concern. And I think that just to see

that subtle change. And you know, it takes very minimal effort with such a large institution with a large budget to implement such things. And I think that goes a long way and we could see positive changes from that. And that was certainly one of the better things that I thought that came out of my experiences on councils.

Sam Bird, narrating: Brandon's story illustrates how important it is to have Indigenous leadership involved with any form of engagement activity, including Alumni Services.

I've often heard from institutions that they are lacking data on Indigenous students. It's not as if we don't have the technology to capture that sort of thing. So we have to ask the questions. How many Indigenous alumni use Alumni Services? What challenges and opportunities do they face? How can they best be supported for employment in their chosen field? The more data we have, the better our policies and programs can be.

42:25
Next, we turn back to Darian who we met in the second episode. He's passionate about good policy and shared with me the role he got to play in a substantial policy shift in Ontario.

Darian Baskatawang: My name is Darian Baskatawang. I am a Two Spirit member from Whitesand First Nation in Northern Ontario located along the northern shores of Lake Nipigon. I also sat on the Premier's Council for Youth Opportunities, which was an advisory body created by the premier directed at policy advocacy and policy change for any of the youth facing ministries across the government of Ontario.

Sam Bird, narrating: I asked Darian to share about the changes brought about while he was on the Premier's Council.

Darian Baskatawang: I will always take the time to chat about good policy that works for people. One thing I'm really excited about that Indigenous youth have like really helped advocate for and brought home was the revamping of the child welfare system in Ontario. And I think in 2017 2018 2016 ish, around that time because the act first came and then the regulations followed. Beforehand, the child welfare system for First Nations and First Nations youth was quite bare bones. But under Kathleen Wynne's government under the liberals, and after consulting with youth and taking their voices into consideration, they rebound the child welfare system and made it more friendly to First Nations and to youth.

More protections were made available for Indigenous youth. Extension of time and care was also made available. So the day you turned 18, you weren't just kicked out onto the streets. There was more supports there. Wrap-around supports, free tuition that went with that, because once you turn 18 life doesn't just end from there. There's school, there's University, high school, if you're not done, college, so on and so forth. So free tuition mattered. Even though tuition should be covered under our treaties, not going there. The province stepped up and said, you know, free tuition? Done. If you're child welfare? Done. But also it gave First Nations an

opportunity to directly participate in child welfare. Because beforehand, it was the parents and the aid society or the Children's Aid Society or Family Services directly. And the first nation had no way of intervening to say hey, this is our kid, this is our child, this is a member of our nation, keep them here. Or let's work on something together as all three parties. And so the revamped child welfare system gave First Nations an opportunity to jump in, say this is our kid we have a say in how this works. And the government or not the government, the Children's Aid Society had to respond to that. They have to, they are now an added equal party. And that I think has the opportunity for First Nations to go in and say, these are our kids, bring them home, maintain the cultural ties. And while in policy that seems small, but in effect, keeping a child in community goes such a long way with people they know. Making sure their space for Customary Care agreements in the law - also important. You know, this is all stuff that Indigenous youth have really advocated for, but it wasn't just them. It was decades of advocacy from everyone because we knew that when the government said, when the crown said it knew how to handle our kids better than us, we knew that was wrong, so that advocacy was a long line. But when the Liberals changed and updated things, it was youth-focused and youth got a say on everything.

Sam Bird, narrating: Youth aging out of care going to post secondary tuition-free, and First Nations involvement in child welfare are two massive shifts in public policy that came from the advocacy of Indigenous young people. These shifts have literally changed lives. That is why the work of youth engagement is so important. By listening to young people, we can facilitate the policy changes that best serve them.

46:18

Throughout this episode, we've heard from young leaders across the country that are leading meaningful change in and through youth councils. We've heard how important it is that young people have meaningful decision making power. We've also heard how time and time again, youth are the experts in what they need. They know what sort of policy shifts will best serve them.

For those of us working with young people. It is our job to support youth directed change, and we need to ensure the financial resources are there to effectively support them. That also means we must compensate young people for their time and expertise.

In the next episode, we'll hear from young people on the importance of fair and generous compensation.

I'm Sam bird. Join us next week on EleV: Taking Flight Together for the next episode of Young People Know. Thanks again for listening. Baamaapii.

This episode is a co-production between Good Influence Films and the Mastercard Foundation’s EleV Program.

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If you enjoyed this episode, I'd love for you to share it with others and give it a five star rating.

Join us next week for the next episode of YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW.

For more episodes of YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW as well as more episodes featuring the voices of Indigenous changemakers, subscribe to Indigenous 150+ wherever you listen to your podcasts. To learn more about the Indigenous 150+ media training program sign up for our newsletter at the link in our show notes.

Miigwech for Listening.

Special Note:
Here is a link to our show notes for Ep 3 noted above:
https://indigenous150plus.libsyn.com/lets-chat-about-good-policy-that-works-for-people-youth-engagement-policy-change

A copy of the MOU between U of Saskatchewan and the U of Sask Student Union discussed in the podcast can be found here.

Additional links:

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