

INTERSECTIONAL HEALING



**Findings from community-based research
with Chinese & Indigenous communities
in Alberta**

WELCOME

Volunteer Alberta is a diverse and inclusive member association. Our programming assists non-profit organizations with inclusive volunteer screening, youth mentorship on boards, provides funding for the celebration of volunteers, and exploring community-based research.

I am a researcher for the Intersectionality Project working in the Treaty 6 territory of **amiskwaciwâskahikan** (Edmonton)*.

*Volunteer Alberta's main office is situated on Treaty 6 Territory, specifically, amiskwaciwâskahikan. Our staff, board, and work reaches across Treaties 6, 7, and 8 and we affirm that the land we call Alberta is the traditional and ancestral territory, as well as present-day homes of many Nations, including the Blackfoot Confederacy - Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika - the Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Stoney Nakoda, the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and the Métis People of Alberta, which includes the Métis Settlements and the Six Regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Volunteering has always been meaningful to me. As a third-generation Canadian-born Chinese woman, I wasn't always sure of who I was. That changed after I began mentoring and advocating for BIPOC youth. The experiences, conversations, and moments I've collected are deeply embedded within my identity. I feel renewed by this sense of belonging in Alberta's volunteer community and have furthered my efforts to amplify marginalized voices as a law student at the University of Alberta.

The Intersectionality Project aims to determine how intersections of identity, privilege, and discrimination influence people's experiences with volunteerism and civic engagement. Using intersectionality, we hope to cultivate meaningful inclusivity through our work and the ways we connect with others.

My research spans from May to September 2022 and involves the collection of stories from Chinese and Indigenous community members residing in Edmonton and Calgary.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share my findings with you. Thanks for checking it out!

Céleste Kwok

THE RESEARCH

My research topic is inspired by the **Chinese & Indigenous Youth Anti-Racism Conference** led by the Chinese Benevolent Association Youth Council and Enoch Youth Advisory Council. It was the first event I attended led in partnership by Chinese and Indigenous communities, representing a growing allyship in Alberta that has not been formally documented before. The panel of community members discussed intergenerational trauma, racism, Chinatowns, reserves, housing issues, and other complex topics. We also had the opportunity to share personal stories, our struggles, and our hopes with the collective goal of healing from the harms that have silenced our ancestors for centuries.

I use the term intersectional healing to describe the coming together of individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in healing as a new form of civic engagement. Intersectional healing is an instrument of solidarity that comes with the understanding that despite having different lived experiences, we can heal from our traumas as a collective.

THE QUESTION:

how does Chinese and Indigenous volunteerism differ from westernized views on volunteerism?

TWO MAIN IDEAS:

I. VOLUNTEER TRENDS

I wanted to know if there were any common trends or perceptions within each community.

- I asked the questions *“Are there any volunteer trends you’ve been noticing?”* and *“How does volunteerism in your community differ from Westernized perceptions of volunteering?”*

II. INTERSECTIONAL HEALING

How do these groups or individuals define intersectional healing and what is its value?

- I asked, *“What value is there in sharing stories of intergenerational trauma and healing with other cultural groups or organizations?”*

THE RESEARCH METHODS

The recruitment process involved emailing panelists from the Anti-Racism Conference and asking interviewees for other contacts. We completed nine **semi-structured interviews** over Zoom through June and July. These included **focus groups** and **individual interviews** which were recorded on Zoom, transcribed, and analyzed.

The data was analyzed via **thematic analysis**, which involved highlighting anything in the transcripts that stood out. The concepts were assigned a code which is a word or phrase capturing the bigger idea in the quote. These codes were grouped into categories which form the themes in the Trends in Volunteerism and Intersectional Healing sections.

I used a **strengths-based approach** by highlighting the strengths and resiliencies of groups without denying the social disadvantages they face. This differs from the deficit discourse pervading Westernized ideas about volunteerism; discourses of deficit associate failure with communities while ignoring the larger systems in which they are embedded, with volunteers being presented as a solution. As is shown in the findings, the way the interviewed groups perceive themselves is far from despondent.

I continually revised my understandings of community-based research and ethics with the support of my team. **Reciprocity** and **relationality** were the guiding principles in building relationships with interviewees. Lastly, we provided **gifts** that both supported Asian and Indigenous businesses and were symbolic of the interviewed groups.

FEATURED ORGANIZATIONS



The Chinese Benevolent Association of Edmonton (CBA) is a non-political, non-religious community organization established in 1929. Initially, it was a meeting place for Chinese immigrants. Today, the primary objective of the CBA is to be an umbrella organization uniting Edmonton's Chinese residents to achieve projects beneficial for the Edmonton Chinese community. This organization is also home to the **CBA Youth Council** which cultivates youth leadership and programming.



Enoch Cree Nation (Maskêkosihk) is a proud First Nation situated in Treaty No. 6 Territory in central Alberta, Canada, bordering the city of Edmonton's west side. The **Enoch Youth Advisory Council (EYAC)** advises and advocates on behalf of the Enoch Cree Nation youth population. The EYAC works in collaboration with the Enoch Elder Advisory Council to advise Chief and Council on any community concerns or initiatives focused on the well-being of the nation. This collaboration allows for experienced leaders to mentor the leaders of the future.



Aiya 哎呀 Collective is a group of intergenerational and multi-disciplinary artists and cultural workers who are creating dialogue and understanding about the changes of Edmonton's Chinatown. Making a safe space, they come together to honour their ancestry and identity, to challenge perceptions and stereotypes, to heal, to acknowledge and work to understand their role as racialized settlers, and to collaborate for the purpose of conditioning space for the development of dialogue centered around Chinese Canadian / Asian diaspora concerns.



Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society has been serving Indigenous children, youth and families in Edmonton and area since 1994. They are committed to building up on the strengths of these groups to enable them to grow spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally so that they can walk proudly in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. They also support many partners in elevating their capacity to serve the Indigenous community in a culturally relevant, authentic and sincere way.



The **Action, Chinese Canadians Together (ACCT) Foundation** builds the capacity of Chinese Canadian leaders committed to creating a more equitable society in Canada. They facilitate capacity-building programs across the country, host leadership conferences, and provide a platform where work in academia can inform work in the community. They bring together established and emerging Chinese Canadian leaders to collaborate on identifying and breaking down systemic barriers to the full and equal participation of ethno-cultural leaders in Canadian society.

FEATURED PRESENTATIONS



The [Indigenous Cultural Safety Webinar for Volunteer Administrators](#) presented by [Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada \(VMPC\)](#) touched on Protocol and Territorial Acknowledgement, Cultural Safety and Anti-Indigenous Racisms, and concluded with insights in current national trends in volunteering (through an Indigenous lens). The presenter was Brodie Douglas, a researcher, writer, and public speaker serving the Métis Nation BC for over a decade.



The [Alberta Mentoring Partnership \(AMP\)](#) joined Volunteer Alberta's July Community of Practice. Their presentation, [Creating Space for Change](#) discussed mentoring as reconciliation, for personal & professional development, and community stewardship. Sarah Chan is the Community Engagement & Relationships Lead, and Tanya Tourangeau is the Indigenous Engagement Lead for Alberta Mentoring Partnership. The AMP is a network of community mentoring agencies, government and youth working together to raise the profile of mentoring in Alberta.



Photo by Jordon Hon.

TRENDS IN

VOLUNTEERISM

The histories of **Chinatowns** and **reserves** as spaces evolving from colonialism, racism, and segregation have shaped volunteerism in these communities. Cultural celebration, political activism and consultation with city officials, collective healing, and **place-making** are the major themes framing volunteer initiatives.

Volunteering as a two-way street

- Volunteerism is often viewed as a one-way transaction - volunteers provide services and clients use them. It is a “doing for” rather than a “doing with” narrative.
- Within these communities, however, volunteers are encouraged to experience Indigenous and Chinese culture. Learning and being part of the community is a core part of the volunteer experience.

“ Chinatown [is] a classroom. [...]There’s so many topics that aren’t taught in school that are taught here - whether that’s urban Indigenous issues, public health, [...] multiple crises that are being faced in our city, whether it’s around business and economics or urban planning, culture and heritage.”

“ When people volunteer with our organization, one of the things I’ll hear is ‘I feel like I got more than I gave.’ And it’s because of reciprocity. Relationship is also really held high in our communities. It’s about immersing yourself in our community’s culture when you’re part of the work that we do.”

Volunteering is relational

- In the West, volunteerism is viewed as an individualistic act of philanthropy, whereas in Chinese and Indigenous communities, volunteering is a way to be part of a community and connect with others.

“ Everybody knows everybody and it’s [...] more of a personal approach.”



Amanda Morin, Dreydon Thomas, and Shane Morin with gifts from the Chinese Benevolent Association as honorary panelists hailing from Enoch Cree Nation. Photo by Jordon Hon.

When reflecting on the differences between Westernized ideals of volunteerism and the actual practice of volunteerism within communities of colour, many racial or cultural misconceptions surfaced. Engaging with the communities is viewed as an effective method of combating these misconceptions.

Lack of recognition may lead to cultural misconceptions

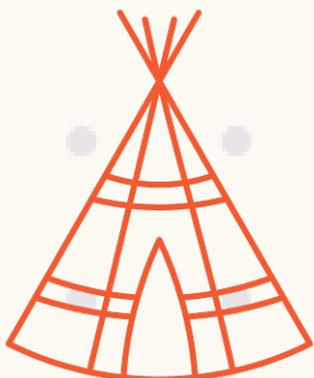
- Because minority groups focused on cultural preservation don't classify as the conventional non-profit organization, their events and volunteers are less likely to receive recognition in the volunteering community
- Lack of public recognition for the volunteering efforts of racial minorities hinders their ability to receive funding and perpetuates racial myths about volunteering
We spend public and private resources to recognize volunteers, but not all volunteer efforts are actually included [which] contributes to this misconception that some cultures don't volunteer."

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are encouraged to volunteer with Indigenous communities

- One of the most common misconceptions about volunteering is that only Indigenous people should advocate for Indigenous interests.
- Empowering folks to understand Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of being is an important outcome of reconciliatory initiatives.

Capacity-building and re-connecting diverse individuals with their culture are emphasized as goals

- Increased funding, a larger volunteer/staff base, and leadership succession are important goals for most organizations.
- Indigenous organizations are re-connecting urban Indigenous peoples with their culture and heritage.
- Asian organizations such as the Chinese Benevolent Association hope to diversify their volunteer sources. Most volunteers are gathered through Chinese bilingual education.
"[Indigenous people in the city may] feel like they don't belong to a certain group, they're just known as city natives. Right now I'm trying to bridge that gap because we're all Indigenous people."
"[We] talk about capacity building all the time because [the Asian] community has been left out of learning opportunities which impact our ability to access resources and support."



Another way of addressing racial misconceptions and shifting deficit-based ideologies towards those of strength and resilience is intersectional healing.



INTERSECTIONAL HEALING

Intersectional healing is an emerging form of civic engagement illustrating that intersections of gender, race, age, etc. mean there is no universal experience of trauma or discrimination, and that's okay! Sharing our experiences can renew our drive, passion, and belief in community support work.

Unlearning silence is a necessary challenge for people

- The deep-rooted harms affecting communities has made the healing process challenging, but intersectional healing offers a safe platform for transparency and reconciliation.
"The Chinese way is you don't talk about [trauma], you keep it to yourself and save face. It wasn't easy for us to get seniors to talk about [intergenerational trauma], but having youth lead the conversation helped and connected the two [Chinese and Indigenous] groups together."

Intersectional healing helps nurture the understanding of different perspectives

- Folks learned that Chinese and Indigenous communities share many similarities in how colonialism and racism have affected them
- Youth and their families shared a greater sense of empathy. Youth recounted their experiences of how their parents had hurt them growing up, and parents shared how they also experienced traumas and were trying to protect their children, albeit in harmful ways.
- Conversations between racialized communities were viewed as more accessible and meaningful than how colonialism is typically discussed.
"If we only talk about colonization and anti-Indigenous racism as primarily between European settlers and Indigenous people, Chinese-Canadians won't know how they've impacted Indigenous people or how [colonialism] has impacted them. But having that conversation [...] outside of that one-way paradigm makes it more applicable to our own lives."
- Many people viewed intersectional healing as a way to build bridges and encourage solidarity.
"We have to learn to live with each other and work things out. Maybe our struggles are connected. Maybe our hurt is bigger than each other."

Many people identify the need to address their dual roles as both victims and instigators of harm in the healing process

- Many folks believed that confronting their own complicity in intergenerational trauma and colonialism was an important part of healing.
- Gentrification has forced diverse groups closer together in the inner cities of Alberta which has led to some discrimination between ethnic populations. This suggests the need for anti-racism training and intersectional healing in BIPOC communities.

INTERSECTIONAL HEALING

"I think we need to do our own work as racialized settlers. I've heard really hurtful philosophies [...] I don't think we should come together when people are thinking those things [...] they're not ready to share space [for collective healing] until that has been addressed."

Youth leadership is a positive influence on intersectional healing.

- There is a trend for youth to have a voice in community-based anti-racism initiatives with support from older and more experienced leaders.

"We've had upwards of 10 meetings with city council, the mayor, the province, [etc.]. We've been invited by more senior members in the community to be at that table, to show that [youth] really care about the Chinatown community."

"Leadership has been open on having the [Enoch Youth Advisory Council] involved in these events and talking about policy, our laws and having us be advocates."

Intersectional healing inspires feelings of collective strength/resistance, optimism, and safety for most community members.

- The idea of intersectional healing and inter-cultural communication resonated well.

"You can come here from any country and still be that person you were when you get here But Indigenous people are still fighting for that right. [...] It has been through collaboration with other cultural organizations that has elevated [awareness of] this issue."

"I draw strength when I'm involved and learning about Indigenous issues. If we want to see more Chinese-Canadians and Indigenous peoples in civic leadership roles, part of that is understanding the commitment to Truth and Reconciliation."

Intersectional healing and inter-cultural dialogue is the beginning of a lasting relationship between Chinese and Indigenous communities.

- Dedicated efforts are being made to strengthen the new allyship.

"[Our friendship] has flourished more this year, we're developing strong ties. [The CBA Youth Council] did a lion dance at our pow wow in July. We're trying to invite them to as many events as possible and we're trying to go to as many of their events as possible."

There's a lot of work, I think. That and a lot of fun to be had in this intersectional space. There's so many experiences we share as young Canadians."

KEY

TAKEAWAYS

Chinese and Indigenous volunteerism differs from Westernized ideals of volunteerism in many ways, including:

- Supports the community's strengths instead of focusing on deficits.
- Organizations ensured that volunteers gained meaningful experience and cultural immersion.
- Emphasis on cultural preservation and celebration, shaped by a history of colonial oppression.
- Relationships and reciprocity are the cornerstones of volunteerism in these communities.

Some goals of Chinese and Indigenous volunteer organizations in Alberta:

- Capacity-building (more funding, more staff/volunteers, etc.).
- Greater youth involvement in advocacy, civic engagement, and anti-racism events.
- Increased volunteer recognition by external organizations

Intersectional healing is the coming together of diverse individuals to discuss their unique perspectives of racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma, and experience collective healing. :

- Intersectional healing also addresses past and present harms that had occurred between Chinese and Indigenous communities.
- Folks identified intersectional healing as a tool to renew their passion in community-based volunteering.
- Cultivating empathy between individuals is a primary outcome of intersectional healing, which is the first step in addressing racial discrimination.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As said by Adrienne Maree Brown in Murmurations: Returning to the Whole, *"We live (and die) inside of systems that were imagined centuries ago by those ambitious and narrow minds of colonists and patriarchs. We live inside the lineage of relatively ignorant imaginations, which were obsessed with protection and domination. But we know so much more now. We know each other's pain and complexity now; we know we are one interconnected ecosystem"*. Intersectional healing is *"an embodied state that is cultivated with ongoing practice"*, a *"victory that moves us beyond oppression"*.

Youth have the power to be visionaries, creatives, and leaders as demonstrated by the 2022 Chinese & Indigenous Youth Anti-Racism

Conference. Providing opportunities for youth to share their perspectives and shape volunteerism is something organizations should continue striving for.

In terms of future research, we should explore how communities of colour and external organizations such as Volunteer Alberta can nourish the conditions for civic engagement through intersectional healing. How can we utilize intersectional healing as an instrument of anti-colonial resistance and collective well-being?

Thanks for checking out my research and I wish you well in your personal journey of healing. I would also like to thank the research participants for sharing their perspectives and advocating for their communities!



Hosts and guests at the the 2022 Chinese & Indigenous Youth Anti-Racism Conference at the Edmonton Chinatown Multi-Cultural Centre. Photo by Jordon Hon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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**WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR
CONTINUED SUPPORT
OF OUR PROGRAMS**



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