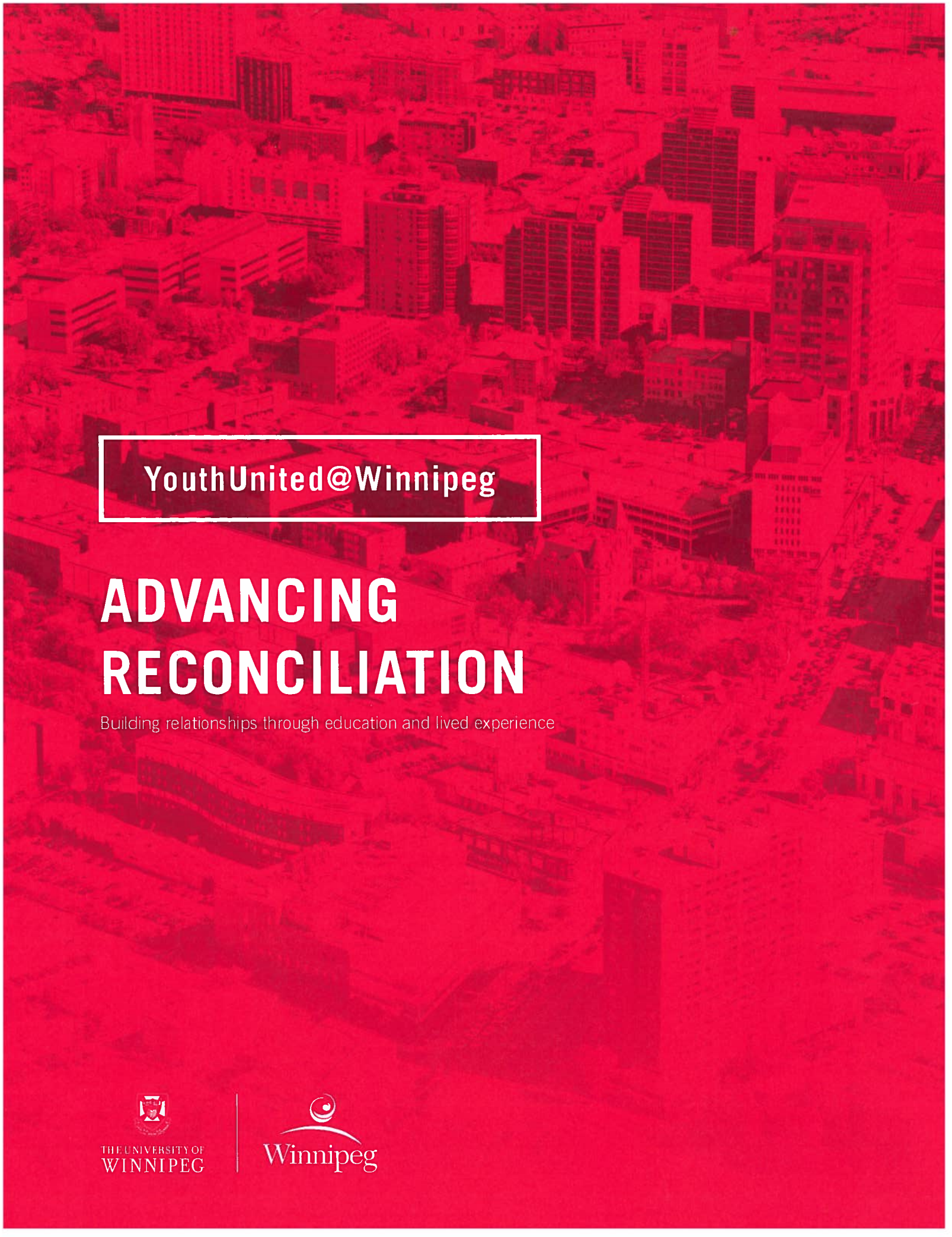


YouthUnited@Winnipeg

ADVANCING RECONCILIATION

Building relationships through education and lived experience

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

Winnipeg

"Reconciliation is not as complicated as we think. It boils down to this. I want to be your friend, and I want you to be my friend."

SENATOR MURRAY SINCLAIR
Former Chair Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

"In addition to learning about Canada's colonial history and its intergenerational effects, students are introduced to theories explaining intergenerational, geographically concentrated poverty as well as urban and neighbourhood development, community practice and advocacy theories that will equip them to be leaders of change in the community."

DR. SHAUNA MACKINNON
Chair, Urban and Inner-City Studies

IN THIS ERA OF RECONCILIATION,

IT IS TIME TO CREATE A NEW BRIDGE ACROSS THIS DIVIDE.

Like many Canadian urban centres, Winnipeg is complex and in many ways, divided. Youth who grow up in the inner city experience life quite differently than those growing up in suburban neighbourhoods.

YouthUnited@Winnipeg is a pilot project initiated by Winnipeg City Councillor Brian Mayes who, motivated by the urban peace corps movement, wants to inspire youth to serve their communities. It is funded by the City of Winnipeg, and developed and delivered by The University of Winnipeg's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies.

Twenty students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds spend four months in a unique university program, aimed at fully engaging in the process of reconciliation. They come together in a safe and open learning environment to discuss the complex issues of our city and country's history, and learn from each other.

As described by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, reconciliation requires "establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.... In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour."

YouthUnited@Winnipeg puts reconciliation into action by bringing 20 students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, together. It challenges students to reflect on their experiences so they may develop new skills, while questioning the attitudes and beliefs that can serve to perpetuate racial, geographic and class divides.



Elder Ivy Choske shares her insights with Youth United participants



2017 Youth United participants

Community-based organizations are essential to this new program. Students apply what they learn in the classroom through a paid work placement at different organizations in the inner city. Through this hands-on learning and doing, students gain a broader understanding of inner-city realities including resiliency, hope and strength. Once they return to their neighbourhoods, they are better prepared to challenge stereotypes they encounter. The hope is that students realize they have the power to participate in positive change through civic engagement.

Students, who come from both the suburbs and inner city, spend one day a week in the classroom, and four days a week working at inner-city community-based organizations, earning six university credits and a summer job salary.

The "roving-classroom" model means students can spend a day with Indigenous teachers and Elders, participating in Indigenous cultural practices such as sharing circles, sweat lodges, and other ceremonies. Students can then spend time learning from Muslim leaders, and from women at an inner-city women's centre, and move on to learn about the role that food and art play in local development, and capacity building.

"It is up to every Canadian to be an ally in the journey to achieving both truth and reconciliation."

KAILEY BRADCO
Youth United student participant

"Working in a non-profit organization related to my area of study is incredibly exciting. I also wanted to participate in this program for the intensive course dealing with issues related to reconciliation, decolonization and implementing the TRC Calls to Action tangibly in my city. My diverse ancestry consisting of Eastern European Mennonite and Anishinaabe, has fostered a unique lived understanding of cross cultural relationships and the need for building bridges."

RACHEL PETKAU
Youth United participant

"Onashowewin Justice Circle Inc., was very fortunate to have hosted two students from the Youth United@Winnipeg program. The students that came to us displayed a committed and dedicated work ethic that brought both strength and energy to the Onashowewin team. Thoroughness to the administration piece – and just as equally important – their ability to connect and work with our participants, reflected greatly in their empathetic and non-judgemental approach. They have exceeded beyond our expectations so much so, we are eagerly awaiting the next students to come our way."

JASON BURNSTICK
Supervising Community Justice Worker

"Many cities in the US have an "urban peace corps", but Youth United, with its focus on reconciliation, is truly a made-in-Canada program bringing together suburban and inner-city youth."

BRIAN MAYES
City Councillor

THE JOURNEY TOWARDS RECONCILIATION IS LONG AND COLLECTIVELY, WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO.

YOUTHUNITED@WINNIPEG, IN A SMALL AND HUMBLE WAY, AIMS TO FOLLOW THAT PATH.

Youth United partnering organizations in 2017 include: Community Economic Development Association, Ka Ni Kanichihk, Onashowewin, Spence Neighbourhood Association, Native Women's Transition Centre, North Point Douglas Women's Centre, Graffiti Art Gallery, The WRENCH, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Food Matters Manitoba, West Central Women's Resource Centre, and Workforce Staffing Solutions, a division of Manitoba Green Retrofit.

The most profound learning for instructors, students and participating organizations is that reconciliation is an ongoing process. It requires long-term commitment; a willingness to respectfully listen and learn from each other and to examine systemic injustices, including racism. We also know that the reconciliation we strive for will not be achieved in the classroom. Achieving reconciliation requires all of us to participate in a process of continued learning, reflection and action in all aspects of our lives.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

Winnipeg

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