

THE JOURNEY OF THE RIVER TOOLKIT

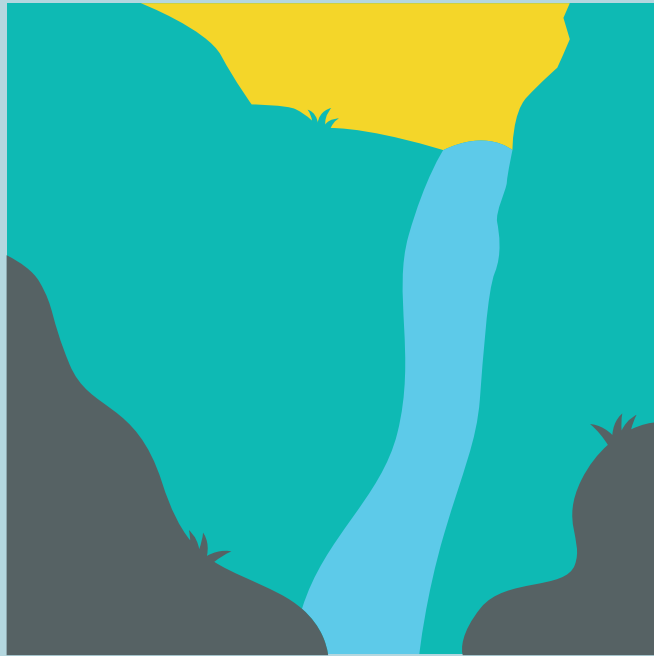
MOVING MOUNTAINS INITIATIVE REFLECTIONS AND
PROMISING PRACTICES

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RECIPROCAL
CONSULTING.

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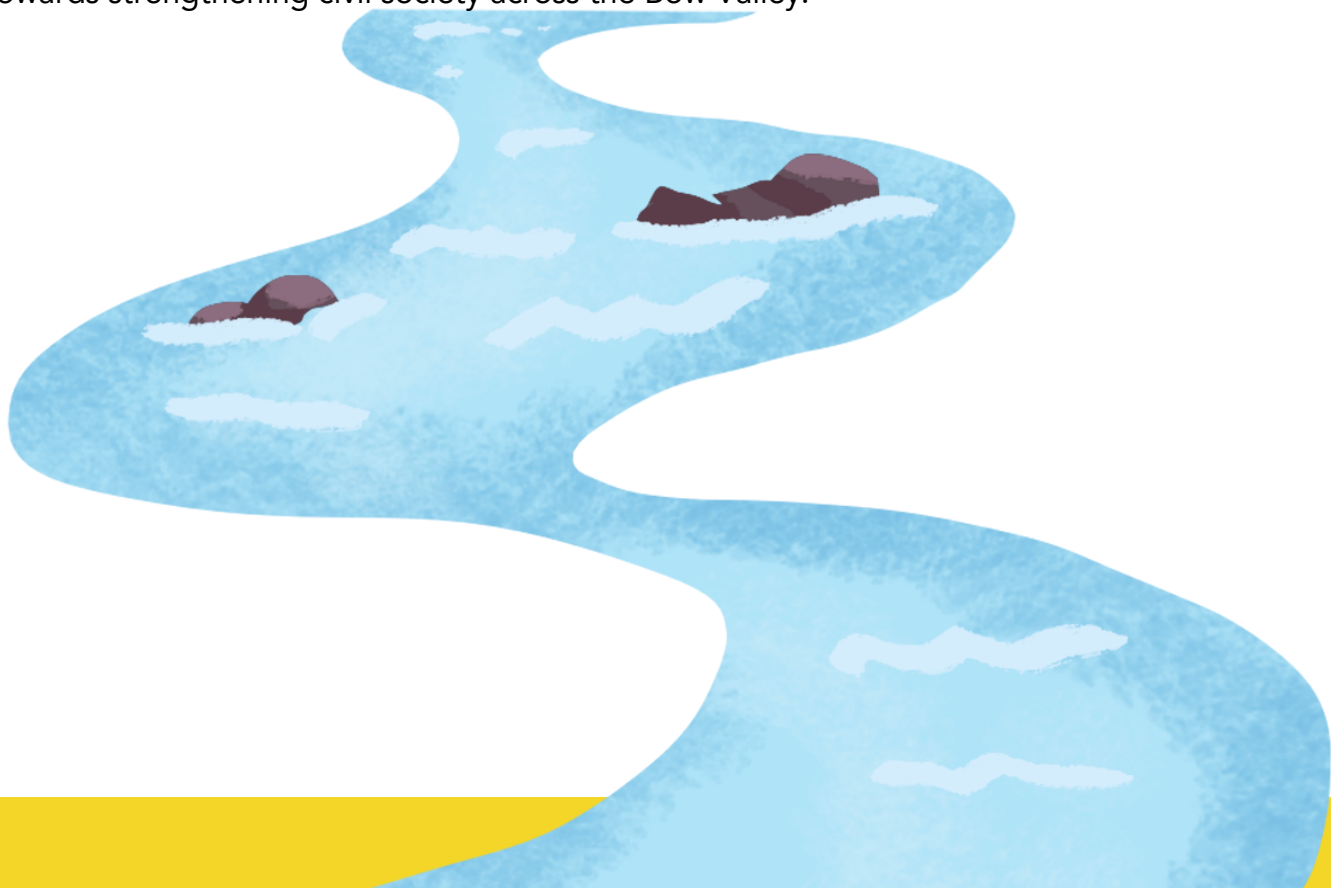


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Introducing connection to the River

The strong life-giving waters that move from the steep mountains in the Bow Valley into the Bow River have long been a source of wellbeing for those that live and build their life near this waterway. The Bow River is sacred for Indigenous peoples who have stewarded these waters and lands since time immemorial, and the river continues to provide resources and materials that support daily life for all the living beings connected to it. Beyond its own life-giving capacity, it is also a waterway that needs continued care, reciprocity and protection so that it can continue to be in relationship with the many living beings that it supports.

We invite you to consider the life-giving waters of the Bow River alongside our story of the Moving Mountains Initiative. Like the animating nature of the river itself, the Moving Mountains Initiative sought to be an ever evolving and living reflection of the needs and medicines of civil society in Bow Valley. The Moving Mountains Initiative ultimately sought to provide the needed supports to strengthen the wellbeing of civil society sectors and communities in the Bow Valley. To provide the resources and supports, the initiative moved with flexibility and adaptability to respond to the emerging insights that came out of the conversations of those involved in the initiative. Truth and Reconciliation was an area of focus of the initiative, whereby the initiative team prioritized Indigenous leadership and Indigenous sovereignty when cultivating shared spaces in order to braid together shared learning, story, knowledge, action, and design in the unique approach to the work. By holding the vastness of the Bow Valley River in mind, we hope this will serve as both imagery and metaphor to help describe Moving Mountains' two-year journey towards strengthening civil society across the Bow Valley.



Identifying channels and patterns in the River

Identifying initial steps and frameworks for action

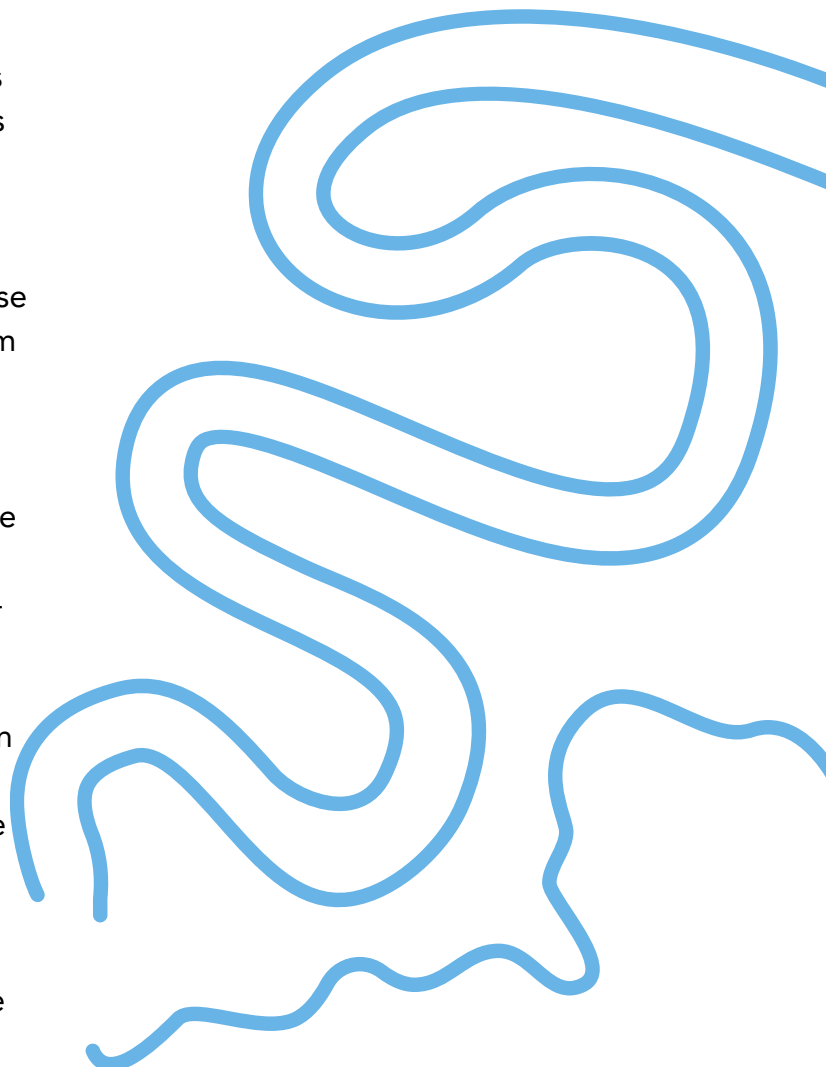
The Bow River is characterized by a variety of channels and patterns. These channels can run at great depths, along curved paths, slowly, or rapidly – moving with strength in different rhythms and merging with other water sources. Like the vitality and variation of the river's movement, at the outset of the Moving Mountains Initiative, it was important to recognize that every community involved in this initiative had their own established rhythms and their own creation story. Further, the initiative needed to move across sectors, merge with different approaches and hold space for a multiplicity of perspectives.

While there was an awareness of the different pathways, patterns, and good work that organizations and communities had already established within the Bow Valley, there was a need to identify and make clear some key channels that would serve, in particular, the Moving Mountains Initiative. Therefore, after the initial idea of the Moving Mountains Initiative emerged from discussions between Family and Community Support Services teams in the Town of Canmore and Town of Banff, the partners went on to identify four key channels in which they would carry out the work. These channels included: Truth and Reconciliation; Environment; Economy; and Health and Wellness.

Partners further recognized that collaboration across community organizations and broader civil society as well as financial stability and resilience would lend strength and momentum to the work carried out in these three channels.

Partners further noted that the movement along these channels and any emergent paths that stemmed from them would need to be characterized by certain qualities and commitments. Therefore, the Moving Mountains initiative committed to embedding supportive practices such as a focus on holding space for Indigenous voice and leadership, the creation of accountable spaces based on learning, and an open-door policy that invited all voices to be heard, especially in underserved communities.

As partners of the Moving Mountains Initiative began to map and understand the valleys and channels of this initiative and the ways in which they would move their energies along the flow of these four key pathways, the following guiding questions emerged: "What can we do more powerfully, together?" and "How can we connect meaningful resources to those doing impactful work?"



Witnessing and mapping the waters movement

Identifying key lines of action and thought

The movement of the Bow River derives its power and strength, in part from its surrounding environment. When the environment is healthy and the river is cared for, the water is able to move and adjust to its winding path. The river does not move in a linear line but rather, it collects in spaces, it swirls and meanders in its own rhythms -- but, most importantly, it never stops moving. Once four key channels of movement were identified by the Moving Mountains Initiative partners, it became clear that fostering a healthy environment to support the movement of the collective work would be needed. To begin, the Moving Mountains Initiative held community dialogues with the aim of listening, gathering ideas, envisioning and collaborating together in order to build a stronger civil society. Relatedly, early in the engagement process, the Moving Mountains Initiative also prioritized the initial dialogues with folks who had not been previously included in Bow Valley community change-making conversations. Through these dialogues, Moving Mountains specifically invited Indigenous leadership and Indigenous perspectives into the initiative.

The type of environment created in these dialogues was also carefully considered in order to ensure spaces of connection, community and care. With a variety of perspectives present at the dialogue, sessions

questions were asked such as:

What is your perspective?

What shared goals do we have?

What are our areas of difference?

What might be possible if we work together?

What do we need to get to co-operation?

What do we need to do to collaborate?

How can we generate new funding to empower collaborative, community-led action?

Bringing people together was one of the main focuses and I enjoyed that, hearing everyone's opinions on the topics we were discussing at meetings. Always tell people you've got to respect everyone's opinions; no opinion is ever 100% good or 100% bad.

Through this process conversations were held to explore ways to support the important work needed for strengthening the Bow Valley civil society. Dialogues were facilitated such as an Indigenous circle that considered how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples could better support Indigenous led community innovation alongside dialogue about "owning truth" where barriers could be identified that were preventing participants from living out active commitments to Truth and Reconciliation.

Like the sometimes meandering and gathering of water along the stream, the goal of these dialogues was not to rush ahead and get to an end solution, but rather was the act of gathering, bringing people together and drawing on a range of perspectives where areas of need and shared collective futures could be mapped out.

Cultivating and nurturing Gifts from the River

Identifying what nurtures the work

The nourishing Bow River not only provides resources through its waters to humans, animals, and plant relations but further, to other ecosystems. In this, the banks of the river traditionally provided many helpful materials to aid in making tools to support living life in a good way. It also brought new ideas and ways of thinking. For example, Bow River initially received its name because of the resources that grew near its banks. The Stoney Nakoda name for the Bow River is *Ijathibe Wapta* meaning “a place where people made bows out of Saskatoon saplings” and the Blackfoot name is *makhahn*, which means “river where the bow reeds grow.” Providing the resources that can be used for well-being and creating a safe and healthy place for life to grow is one of the many ways the river provides strength and vitality to those connected to it.

Not only is it important to consider the ways in which we nurture these resources from the river and use them in a good way, but similarly, the Moving Mountains Initiative provided a space that would ultimately be able to nourish new growth, connection, and strength amongst Bow Valley’s various communities and civil society. Through exchanging ideas, sharing learning, building skills, and creating the environment for sustained working groups, the Moving Mountain initiative was able to work towards ensuring their goals were carried out with good intentions and the tools and resources were provided to enable a flow of energy through key channels of action.

"People try, like communities trying to work differently together. In terms of trusting... its about trusting the wisdom of the group. And, especially the Indigenous circle, but also in the Allies group, resisting the desire to control the process has been beautiful."

As the Moving Mountains Initiative emerged and took on its own shape through the engagement of Bow Valley participants, the initial four key channels of action (Truth and Reconciliation; Environment; Economy; and Health and Wellness), deepened and widened into five streams that were in need of a high amount of collaboration. These streams and areas of learning were stewarded by the “Learn and Try” groups and focused on the following four subjects: Local and Indigenous Economy; Affordability and Livability; Environmental and Cultural Learning; Reconcili-ACTION; and Mental Health and Wellness. Ultimately, through the emergence of these four streams, the initiative was able to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in responding to the interests, needs and ideas of the initiative's participants. Additionally, core circles were developed to support these four streams such as Indigenous advising circles and ally circles.

So I think, just trusting that completely different way of like bringing together a group or an event to, you know, in depths of process has been really, really beautiful, and a promising practice. I think the other promising practices really around the governance, that the governance model that has enabled that to happen, and that has informed the initiative more broadly, there's been a core Indigenous circle that has not only advised...[but has also] influenced the entire work of Moving Mountains, and, building trust with that group and just observing that group, working together really has been incredible. Within that circle, there's also a circle of allies, that as trust develops, and relationship develops, they're asynchronous circles..."

One aspect of the process that the emergent streams of work required in order to be carried out in a good way, was the intentional focus on building trust amongst those who were connected to the initial planning, participating in the working groups or were involved in carrying out events that stemmed from the dialogues and conversations of the initiative. Capacity building activities ensued in order to deepen relationships, create trust and provide a space for network development. The intentional focus on building collective trust for those involved in the initiative and the creation of opportunities for collaboration allowed for a broadening of perspectives and possibilities which participants in the initiative shared they deeply appreciated.

Further, drawing on the power of youth was also noted by participants as a key focus that allowed for greater leadership and strength of the work overall. The involvement of youth in leading projects, developing innovative approaches and bringing forward new perspectives was regularly described as a nourishing element that strengthened the vitality and progress of the initiative.

"Yes, one of the areas of creative tension was really around the definition of civil society, the core team and the broader Bow Valley, the definition was more around registered non-profits, whether that was known or unknown bias, with the intention of broadening that definition from the get go. It did in a disruptive way, included more voices and perspectives than even I had hoped, community groups organizations social enterprise, academia, it did cross those sectors, centering youth voice is something that came out as a key desire and pathway. There were a lot of youth voices that were involved in the leadership."

"I think the Indigenous community, centering youth voices was one of the early themes that came out as something that's like, like a key, objective, and desire and like motivating pathway for Indigenous community. So there were a lot of youth voices that were involved in, in sort of leadership of the Indigenous circle. And also in the environment, I think in the environment and environment and culture, those are kinds of areas where we did really, really have, yeah, youth involvement there. I think it's also opened the opportunity for youth to be involved."


Another element that supported the process of the Moving Mountains Initiative was the commitment of participants to developing deeper knowledge and understanding of colonial violence and its impacts. For example, participants of the initiative noted that by engaging with Moving Mountains they were able to learn more about residential schools and the need for reconciliation.

Participants shared that dialogue around this topic was a helpful step, particularly with sectors of the community such as Parks Canada workers.

While many of those involved in the Moving Mountains Initiative were already knowledgeable or had their own lived experience connected to residential schools and the need for reconciliation, participants of the initiative noted that they saw a desire from Bow Valley residents to become involved in the initiative and that a number of people were committed to learning and engaging in action with regards to Truth and Reconciliation.

In addition to developing opportunities, tools and capacity to discuss and deepen understanding on the actions needed for reconciliation, the initiative was additionally nurtured by participants having space to generate innovative and creative approaches to challenges. For example, local hotel managers and local Indigenous community members had the opportunity to discuss in a community dialogue space about how best to sell souvenirs at local hotels. During this dialogue, it was shared that souvenirs sold at local hotels did not represent Indigenous communities and therefore, it was identified that strengthening connections and asking local businesses to reach out to local Indigenous artists would contribute to the overall wellbeing of the environment and economy.

"[It] brought out our opinions and gave exposure to residential schools and reconciliation."



Solutions were mapped out in order to support local producers and help with environmental concerns alongside working for Truth and Reconciliation. These innovative economic models then held the possibility of enhancing the financial health of Bow Valley civil society groups.

Reciprocity between the River and the Community

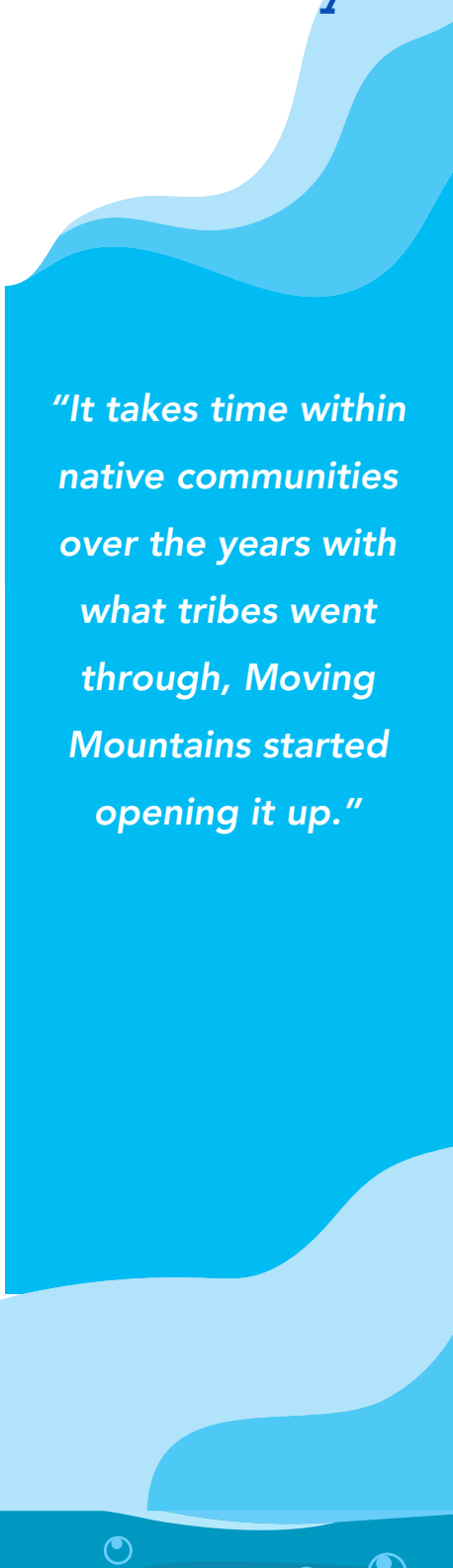
Community needs and promising practices

It is well known that in many Indigenous teachings water is described as the first medicine. Waters that come through our rivers and many other waterways are described as holding great power and as offering healing, cleansing, and awakening powers to those who honour it, respect it and acknowledge its spirit. Not only is the water of the Bow Valley River alive and life-giving, but like all flowing waters, it has medicine to offer.

Taking into consideration how water offers medicine and brings wellbeing in many forms, we can also similarly reflect on the ways in which the Moving Mountains Initiative could support the offering of needed medicines across the civil society of Bow Valley.

Sharing one's truth and being heard was an important need and medicine in terms of building strength across civil society in Bow Valley.

Participants in the initiative shared that Truth and Reconciliation is about being heard as an Indigenous person and heard regarding what it takes to be part of the community. It was shared that the wider community needs to hear the stories and lived experience of Indigenous peoples in the Bow Valley and further, that action needs to be taken when it comes to Truth and Reconciliation if healing is to occur. Many participants in the Moving Mountains Initiative shared that genuine sustained action that involves the grassroots community is needed when it comes to Truth and Reconciliation rather than action that is performative, inconsistent, or of a top-down approach. Understanding that Truth and Reconciliation is about repair, finding pathways forward, and admitting wrongdoings was also shared as good and needed medicine for communities in the Bow Valley. Participants further noted that the media has a role to play in sharing the stories of Indigenous communities in a good way and that healing in Bow Valley can only begin as people own the truth of the current and past systems and actions that have caused harm.



"It takes time within native communities over the years with what tribes went through, Moving Mountains started opening it up."



Some participants in the Moving Mountains Initiative noted that more support is needed in order to make changes and improvements as a community. Participants described that at times there can be stipulations on receiving support. Additionally, more moral support is needed. It was also described that attention and intention to understand more fully the realities of what is happening on reserves was shared as a need. In relation to understanding realities and experiences, mutual agreement on how to address obstacles and cultivating leadership that is heart-centered were also noted as good medicine for communities. Maintaining momentum for revitalization, healing and change, holding space for grief and moving at the speed of trust were also identified as needs and good medicines that would help to collectively build a strong Bow Valley.

Celebrating and learning about culture was also noted as good medicine for the Bow Valley community. Participants noted that celebrating and supporting one's own culture while taking the time to learn about the culture of others in Bow Valley would be helpful in order to build strength across civil society. It was described that having gatherings to learn about different cultures, supporting artists or having events outside of the reserve to share Indigenous cultures (while also being mindful of what cannot be shared with the wider community) would be one way of supporting and celebrating culture that leads to wellbeing across Bow Valley.

Strong emphasis was also placed on the importance of youth and the next generations in carrying forward culture and cultural practices; and further, youth being proud of their identity and being a place of hope for the future of the community brought good medicine to the work of the initiative and was described as a continued need. Supporting youth on the reserve, having a place for youth to come together and fostering inter-generational relationships amongst youth and Elders were noted as actions of great importance that served to support the wellness of the community in general.

There are things we can share in our culture. There are some things that are not meant to be shared, but I try to focus on the things we can share.

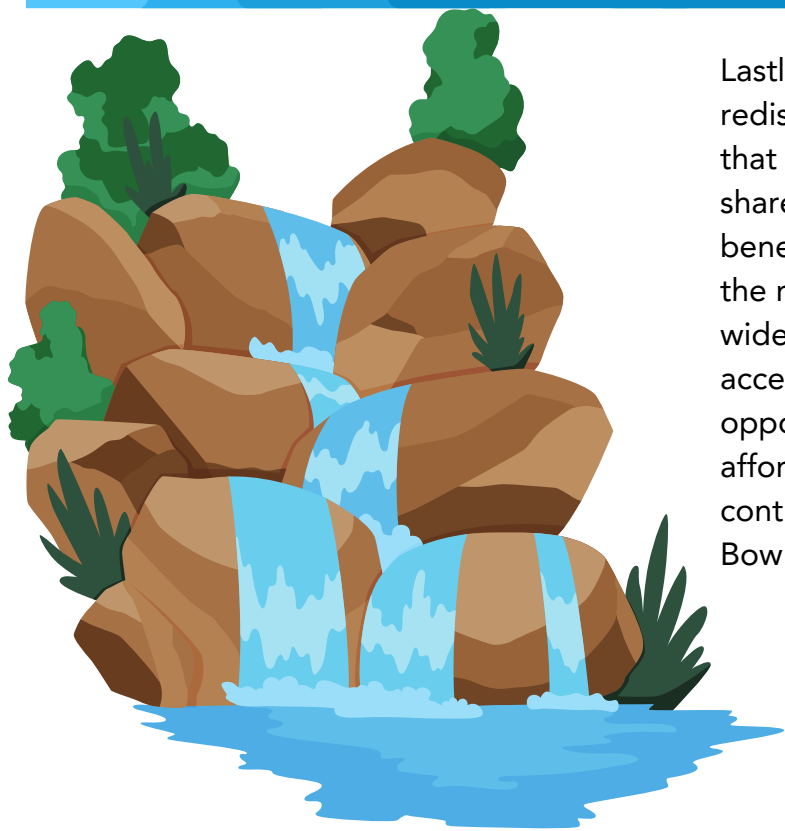


In addition, learning about the unjust systems that are rooted in colonial harm alongside working towards bringing about change and transformation in these systems were described as required medicine. It was shared that rights need to be fully acknowledged, residential school claims need to be processed and treaties need to be seen as a living document.

Some logistical supports were further described as a needed medicine in order to sustain and build community across the Bow Valley. Examples of logistical supports included a need for increased transportation options; increased programming; increased funding in order to support younger generations to engage in programs such as Spirit North; space for large public gatherings; and support for greater engagement of grassroots and allies in meeting the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action.

Increased communication and free flowing communication from administrative levels to grassroots communities was also noted as a helpful step and medicine for the needs of the community. It was shared that not only communication is needed, but removing language barriers, having accurate translations and further pathways to communicate in one's own language would be useful. Language revitalization was similarly described as a need in order to contribute to the wellbeing of Bow Valley communities.

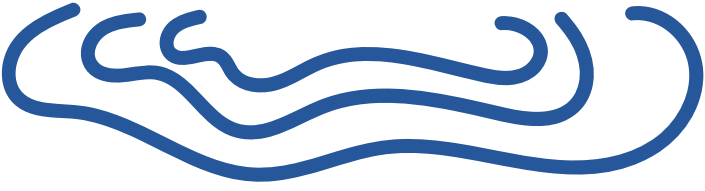
"...It opened doors for certain individuals in my tribe and with non-Indigenous too. In most cases, there is a lack of communication and it kind of bridged the gap."



Lastly, developing Indigenous economies and redistribution of wealth was another good medicine that was identified as a need in Bow Valley. It was shared that there is a need for programs that are beneficial to long term economic sustainability on the reserve and to long term economic benefit for wider communities in general. Further, increasing accessibility of resources, housing and employment opportunities, while addressing the overall affordability crisis, were also noted as ways to contribute to the strength and wellbeing across Bow Valley.

Efforts that led to Ripples

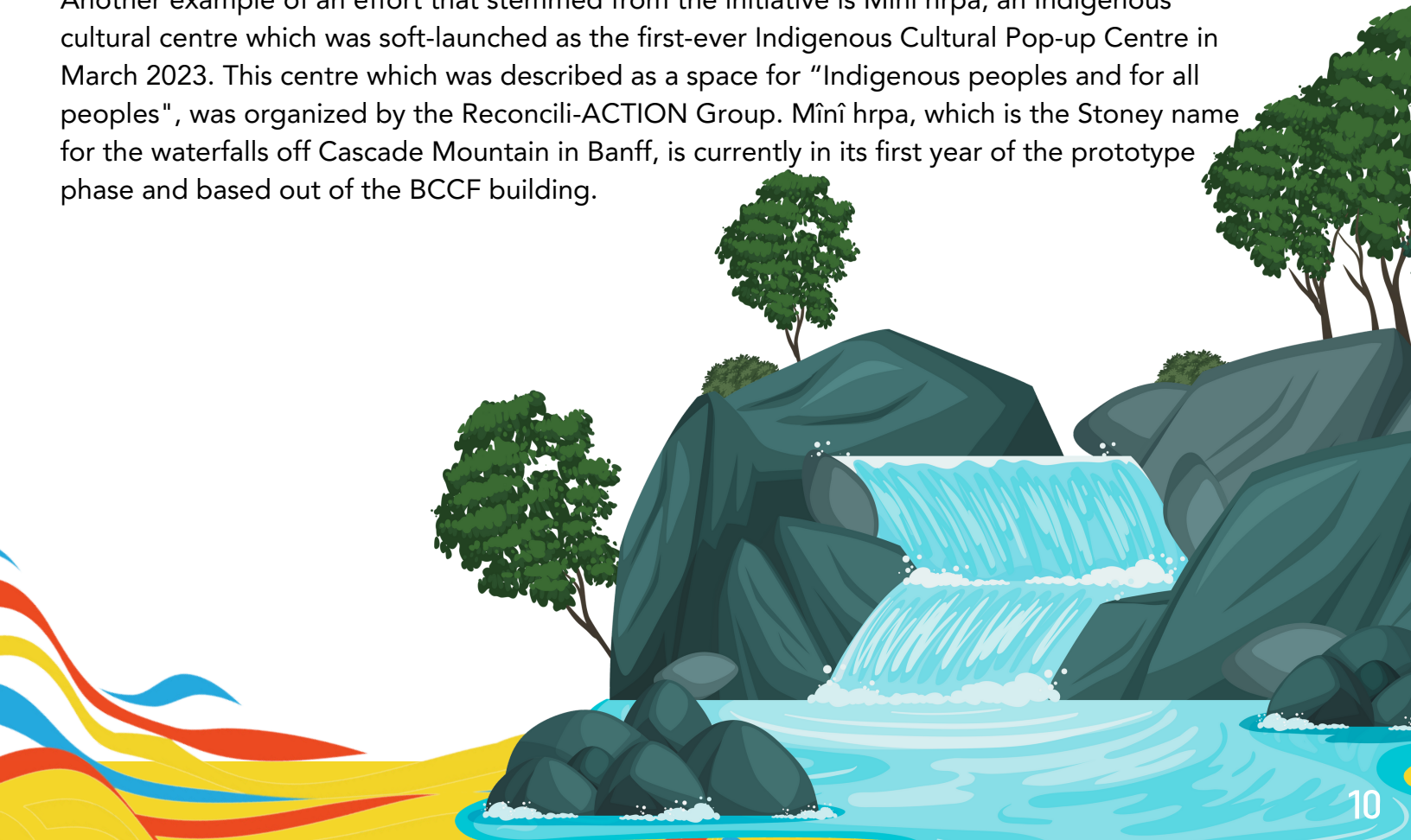
Events and actions that are flow from the initiative



The ever-moving resilient waters of the Bow River span vast areas of land and converge with many other waterways. Similarly, the Moving Mountains Initiative and the events, spaces projects, and processes that were intertwined with it, span across a vast array of efforts and actions. Some of the ripples and waves that ebbed and flowed outward from the momentum of the Moving Mountains Initiative included efforts such as collective gatherings; sovereign spaces; active and collaborative artistic and cross-cultural events, the development of business cases for innovative ventures and the development of a journal to serve as a means to keep people who have participated in the initiative connected.

For example, two broader gatherings were hosted with the aim of deepening collaborations and furthering established conversations across sectors. These gatherings, entitled the “Civil Society Forums” hosted in August 2022, and the “Gather and Share” event hosted in March 2023, invited folks to hear about the work in process and to break out into smaller groups for conversation – moving between micro and macro efforts to give community accessible opportunities to engage with the initiative and come together.

Another example of an effort that stemmed from the initiative is Mîni hrpa, an Indigenous cultural centre which was soft-launched as the first-ever Indigenous Cultural Pop-up Centre in March 2023. This centre which was described as a space for “Indigenous peoples and for all peoples”, was organized by the Reconcili-ACTION Group. Mîni hrpa, which is the Stoney name for the waterfalls off Cascade Mountain in Banff, is currently in its first year of the prototype phase and based out of the BCCF building.



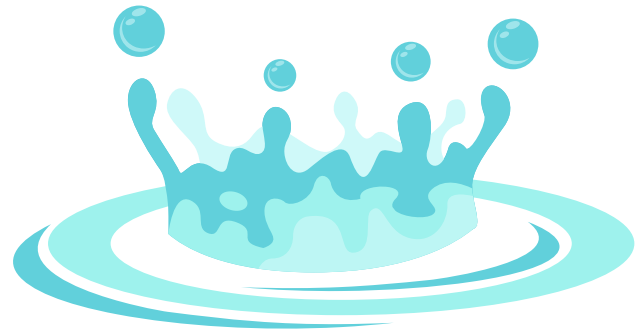
Similarly, the event “Stories of the Land” was another collaborative effort organized by the Cultural and Environmental Learning Group for cross-culture learning and sharing between Îyârhe (Stoney) Nakoda First Nation members and the Bow Valley community. The event was co-hosted by artsPlace, Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), Friends of Kananaskis Country, Banff Canmore Community Foundation and leaders from Stoney Nakoda First Nation.



In a different stream of action, Moving Mountains Initiative’s Affordability and Livability Learning Group worked to develop the business case for a mobile “field kitchen” food truck or another form of mobile food service that would provide artisan chef-made meals using rescued food items from across the Bow Valley.



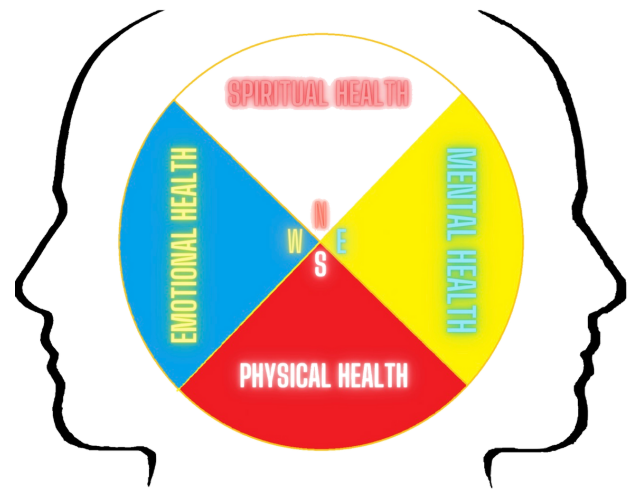
Another ripple effect from these efforts is that Bow Valley community members identified a need to be kept in the loop about the initiative and its activities. Subsequently, Moving Mountains created a bi-monthly journal that will serve to continue momentum and engagement of the initiative. The journal focused on coming together in kindness, storytelling, art and conversation while offering information on the processes connected to the initiative and insights by the initiative's team, participants and other contributors.



Many forms of artistic work also emerged in ripples and waves from the initiative including the artistic work of Chanelle Simeon who created graphic designs to reflect the work being done in Bow Valley. These graphics became embedded within the visual identity of the Moving Mountains Initiative and are represented on the pages of this Toolkit. Chanelle described her work in the following way:



*The Colours I've chosen to fill in symbolize the Stoney Nakoda medicine wheel; which I believe fit perfectly into what Moving Mountains is aiming for; colour meaning:
White – North, Air & Wind. Winter, Spiritual Health, White people, Elders & Grandparents
Yellow – East, Fire, Tobacco, Spring, Mental Health, Oriental People, Birth/Childhood
Red – South, Earth, Sweet Grass, Physical Health, Aboriginal People, Youth/Adolescence
Blue – West, Water, Sage, Emotional Health, Black People, Adulthood/Parents*



Chanelle Simeon

The Graphic artwork I've created tells the story of two individuals who have the same goals and aspects that work and revolve around the Medicine wheel: White-Spiritual Health (Elders/Grandparents), Yellow-Mental Health (Birth/Childhood), Red-Physical Health (Youth/Adolescence) & Blue-Emotional Health (Adulthood/Parents). Moving Mountains has opened my mind & perspective on all type of art, whether it be physical, written or digital. It has led me wanting to learn more so I can contribute my knowledge to the communities and work together with surrounding communities to better the relations between the many diverse communities that make up the Bow Valley.



Stewardship of the River

Lessons learned and wise practices to sustain the work

Being stewards of the Bow River requires knowledge and the carrying out of wise practices to ensure the waters are kept living and healthy. By stewarding the waters in a good way the water holds future possibilities and growth and will be protected in order to continue forward its momentum for future generations.

Similarly, stewarding the work of the Moving Mountains Initiative requires putting into action wise practices and lessons learned along the journey in order to ensure the momentum of the work continues forward.

Some of the wise practices and lessons learned in order to steward the work of the initiative in a good way were as follows:

1) Ensuring continual dialogue and open communication

Participants of the initiative noted having open dialogue was an important part of the process, and further, ensuring land protectors can speak freely in the space was another wise and helpful practice identified for the work. Participants also expressed the need to continually expand the range of voices they hear from and to continue the work of building networks and connections across Bow Valley.

“So I think that model is one that could be extended to voices we didn't hear from...we worked tangentially with Bow Valley Immigration Partnership, who holds a lot of relationships with refugee and newcomers and immigrants, and but we didn't actually build relationships directly with a lot of those groups.”

2) Committing to building trust and relationships

Committing to building trust and relationships alongside moving at the pace of trust and not rushing the process was another wise practice and lesson learned by participants. Participants described the need to continually build trust and connections with one another across sectors and communities and to take active steps to safeguard the trust that has been built. With relationships and community at the core of the work of Moving Mountains, participants regularly noted that building connections with care and kindness were key considerations in carrying out the efforts of the initiative and any projects or efforts that stemmed from it.

“What are the commitments to this work moving forward to ensure the trust is not lost, for sustainment to the work, with some strategic deliverables what is a viable long term structure that can support that commitment”

"We push and strive that friendship and moving along forward is what causes this program to keep going. So on top of that, with the support of the community, not just with our Stony reserve, but with the outside community as well, that helps move this initiative forward."

3) Continuing to learn about the cultures present in the Bow Valley and supporting Indigenous ways of life

Continuing to learn about the cultures present in the Bow Valley and taking action to support and lift up the Indigenous ways of life was another important practice that informed the work of the initiative. Participants expressed a desire to learn about one another's cultures through gatherings, supporting artists, showcasing artistic work and having spaces specifically designed for this purpose. Additionally, participants noted a need for reconciliation in action which was described as genuine non-performative and sustainable action towards the 94 calls to action.

In connection with this, it was also learned that dialogue about reconciliation, in particular with Parks Canada workers, is another helpful step.

4) Honouring and giving space for youth leadership

Contributions from youth leadership and youth-generated ideas and initiatives combined to create another lesson learned from the Moving Mountains Initiative. Youth involvement in the initiative and the perspective of younger generations not only were described as giving hope to the community but were also seen as key elements of the initiative that gave momentum and inspiration to the tasks at hand. Youth were actively involved in various parts of the initiative and the efforts which stemmed from it, and participants noted that their involvement lent impetus to carrying forward the work with strength. Additionally, youth were seen as the stewards of the responsibilities and possibilities that will carry forward for future generations. Relatedly, working intergenerationally so relationships can be built not only across sectors but across generations was another important element and lesson of the initiative. Sharing intergenerational knowledge and moving the initiative forward through a range of perspectives was ultimately a practice that proved to bring learning and growth to the journey of the initiative as a whole.

I see opportunities for non-natives and native communities, lots of artists here, with crafts and elders with storytelling, can give them exposure. Same with non-natives too they can start learning about our culture.

“...With linear projects there's this idea that things start and end in a linear fashion, but with collaborative practice, it's like it like any practice, it doesn't necessarily come to an end.”

As the waters of the Bow River are in continual movement, it is clear that the river is alive and will carry on its own life far beyond the present generations. The nature of the river is cyclical and ebbs and flows. Similarly, the Moving Mountains Initiative was the first part of a continual journey towards building a stronger Bow Valley across civil society. Participants noted that beauty, love, and trust among many other qualities and characteristics, framed the work of this initiative. With many possibilities at hand and the work and efforts of the initiative continuing on, the initiative has been embedded with qualities and values that will carry it forward into the future with sustainable momentum. Like the waters that converge with the Bow River, the work of Moving Mountains holds many possibilities to continue converging with new ideas and connections made across communities, sectors, and perspectives. It is therefore hoped that the efforts of the Moving Mountains Initiative will continue to both serve and inform the learning and journey of future generations.

MINTOYEDABI

All My Relations