

ACTIVITY  
REPORT  
2021-2022



I belong!

*"Whatever the problem,  
community is the answer"*

- MARGARET WHEATLEY



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Secrétariat aux relations  
avec les Québécois  
d'expression anglaise

Québec 





## INTRODUCING 'I BELONG!'

In 2019, the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise (SRQEA) conducted consultations with representatives from the English community across the province. Their findings were unsurprising: most English speakers (still) do not feel a strong sense of belonging to the province. To better understand why that is, and to try and bolster the community's sense of belonging, the SRQEA awarded project funding to six COM-Unity based organizations, including LEARN.

Through its involvement in the COM-Unity project, LEARN is helping young Quebecers in grade 5+ to actively reflect upon, express and shape their sense of belonging to Quebec society.

# PROJECT AT A GLANCE

For the second school year in a row, LEARN offered English-language schools a chance to participate in a series of project-based learning opportunities that empower students to explore their identity and sense of belonging to Quebec society through the arts and acts of community service.

This school year, LEARN introduced two new arts-based project opportunities leaving students with 6 unique ways to participate:

• 1 •

## Puppetry

**NEW!**

Students explore and express their identity and sense of belonging to their local communities by storytelling with puppets and everyday objects. The students' creative process is guided by professional puppeteers.

**MORE ON PAGE 6**

• 2 •

## Podcasting

**NEW!**

French Second Language & English Second Language teachers and students collaborate with an artist to develop podcast episodes exploring the themes of bilingualism and belonging in Quebec society.

**MORE ON PAGE 8**

• 3 •

## Spoken Word

Students explore the relationship between identity and belonging as they witness performance pieces by artists from the Black, Indigenous and LGBTQAI2+ communities of Quebec. Students had an opportunity to turn the lens inward as they developed literary or visual arts pieces of their own with support from a local artist.

**TO SEE EXAMPLES OF SPOKEN WORD, [CLICK HERE\\*](#)**

• 4 •

## Digital Storytelling

Students explore what it means to them to belong to a community as they participate in a 6-week Digital Storytelling project, with support from digital media experts.

**TO SEE EXAMPLES OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING, [CLICK HERE\\*](#)**

• 5 •

## Take Action

Students engage in a Community Service Learning project, where they plan, implement and reflect upon positive actions that foster a greater understanding and sense of belonging to their communities.

**MORE ON PAGE 10**

• 6 •

## Comic Zine Creation

Students interview English-speaking seniors from their community to learn more about some of the ways in which they've helped to shape Quebec society. Their stories form the basis for the creation of a comic zine, with guidance from professional comic book and multimedia artists.

**TO SEE EXAMPLES OF COMIC ZINE PROJECTS, [CLICK HERE\\*](#)**

\* <https://hosted.learnquebec.ca/belonging/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2021/08/LRN-Belong-report-2020-2021.pdf>

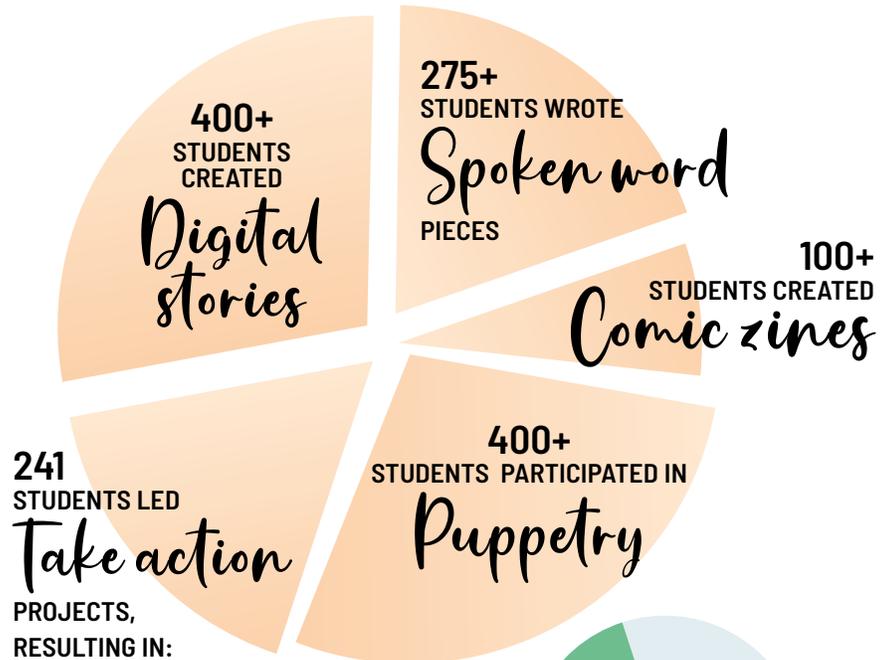
# FACTS & FIGURES

**44** ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

**77** CLASSROOMS

**11** QUEBEC-BASED ARTISTS FROM ELAN

**1 535**  
STUDENTS PARTICIPATED!



- 241** STUDENTS LED *Take action* PROJECTS, RESULTING IN:
- TRUTH & RECONCILIATION INITIATIVES
  - GSA CLUBS
  - THEATER PRODUCTION (EXPLORING THEMES OF IDENTITY, BULLYING, BELONGING)
  - MUSIC RECORD (EXPLORING THEMES OF IDENTITY, GENTRIFICATION, BELONGING)



## PROJECT RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS INCLUDED:

- Orientation and debrief sessions with LEARN
- One-pagers describing project steps and curriculum connections
- Question prompts for student reflection and discussion in elementary and high school contexts
- Note-taking template for students
- Grading rubrics (select options)
- Interview guide for students interviewing seniors (comic zine)
- Linguistic challenges worksheet (podcasting)
- Interview guide for ESL & FSL students (podcasting)
- Support with grant writing (podcasting)
- Facilitated opportunities to showcase student work

**TAKE ACTION TEACHER TOOLKIT**

**Think Big** BRANSTORM YOUR #1 goal first to start the rest of the task!

**Spoken word** **TEACHER'S GUIDE**

**1 GET INSPIRED** (15 min)

**2 REFLECT AND DISCUSS** (15 min)

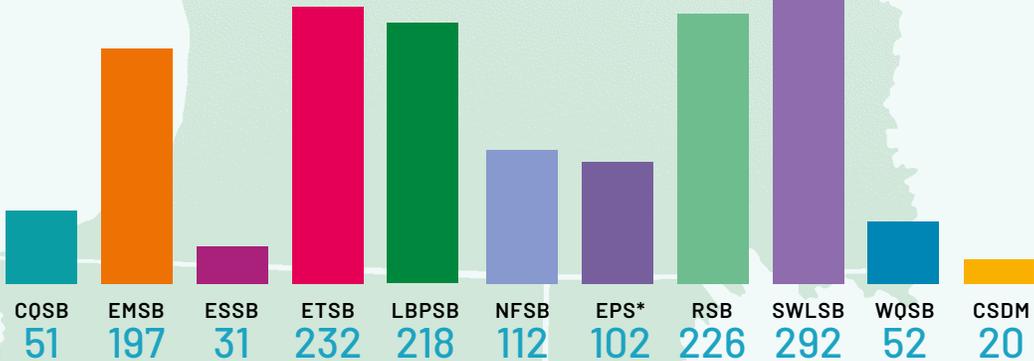
**3 CREATE** (20 min)

**4 CELEBRATION** (10 min or more)

**5 COMPLETE IN A SLAM** (OPTIONAL)

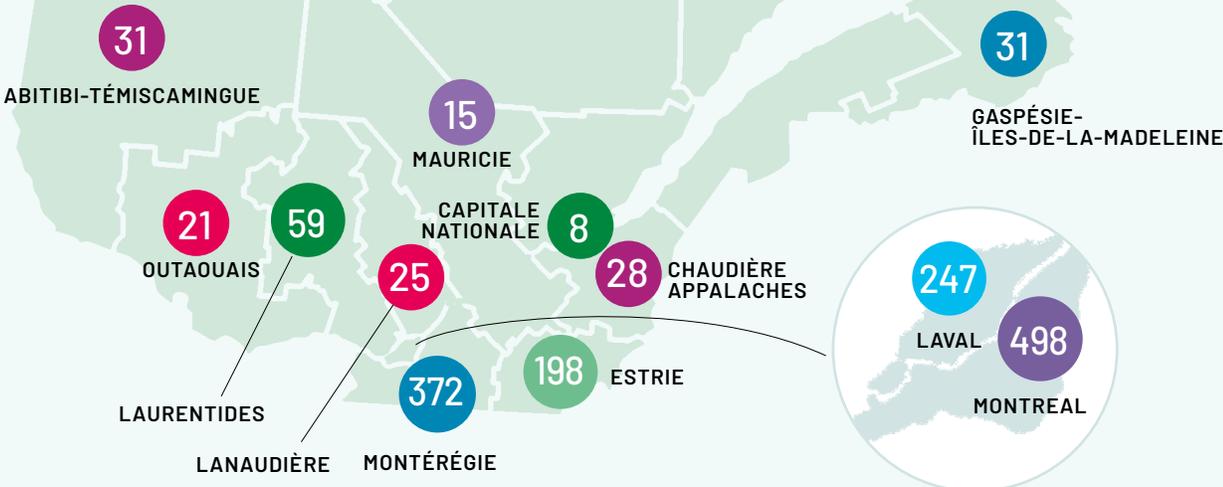
# STUDENT PARTICIPATION RATE

## BY SCHOOL BOARD



\*English Private Schools

## BY REGION



# B Puppetry

Traditionally, the art form of puppetry may not be as popular as some of its theatre counterparts, but for the more than 400 students from 21 different classrooms across Quebec who participated in the 'I Belong!' Puppetry option, it was an attractive medium that did not disappoint. Facilitated by professional puppeteers Maggie Winston and Daniel Hickey, members of ELAN ArtEd's roster of Teaching Artists, the Puppetry option workshops were aimed at having students explore their sense of belonging and identity through storytelling with puppets and backgrounds they created.

New this year to the 'I Belong!' project options, the unique art form proved to be not only very accessible for those who participated in it but a catalyst for having students open up about belonging. Hickey credits the program's success, in part, to how playful the medium can be, making it easier for students to tackle difficult topics. "Something really valuable that puppetry can do is provide a



distance from yourself to be able to reflect on yourself," he said. "I think talking about yourself, your identity, where you belong or don't belong can be really scary and really difficult to identify. What puppetry does is provide that distance and can give you a chance to feel a bit safer when discussing the hard topics."

Teachers who chose to participate in this option with their classes began the project by introducing their students to the 'I Belong!' concept and prompting in-depth discussions with their students with thought-provoking questions provided by LEARN. "I used the theme of belonging for my ERC lessons and my English lessons," said Elizabeth Viens, a grade six teacher at ADS Elementary(ETSB) in Danville. Viens, who had Hickey as the facilitator for her puppetry project, chose to use the theme of belonging across different subjects. "My students really enjoyed making the puppets and they were having fun," Viens said. "They were engaged throughout the project and making the theme of this project cross-curricular invoked some amazing discussions."

The same was true for teacher Danielle Walsh who teaches grade 6 at La Tuque High School (CQSB). Winston led the workshops for Walsh's class of 15 students. Walsh was amazed at the outcome of the project. "My students shared a lot about gender identity and their feelings about belonging to the LGBTQ community," Walsh said. "It was a very eye-opening experience to say the least. I had one student say he felt like he didn't belong at school, which is a start for us [school staff] to help improve his journey here at school."

Viens had a similar experience of having her students share their worries about not fitting in with a certain group, although their concerns were focused on the fear of transitioning to high school. "I had students speak out and say 'I'm not a popular kid. I'm the kind of kid people are going to pick on in high school,'" Viens said. "Their



peers would then say that they will stick up for them if they are being picked on in high school. It created a nice community within my classroom and reflected how close-knit these students are.”

Both puppeteers had the students create different types of puppets, which included puppets on sticks and puppets made from everyday objects. The students would then design and make a background for their puppets to perform in front of. The performance would consist of a story that reflected the discussions they had about belonging. “This was a super inspiring project where students and teachers gained new skills,” said Winston. “I think any chance where students get to do something a little bit different than what they’re used to in the classroom is a good experience.”

Walsh echoes Winston’s sentiments when reflecting on the outcome of using an unconventional form of art in her classroom. “I think that even if teachers are hesitant, they should give it a try,” she says of bringing puppetry and conversations about belonging into the classroom. “Even if you feel like you don’t have time in your class, it’s really worth it to take on this project and see what your students are going to do with it because they will surprise you.”

For Hickey, there was an element of surprise with all the classes he worked with. He was pleased about how the students connected to the theme of belonging, with them oftentimes being very specific about their identity and giving that identity to their puppets as well. “I noticed that classes were really excited straight away to build things with their hands and then that excitement often turned into an excitement to share stories and to talk about their puppet,” he said.

Winston and Hickey conducted all their workshops virtually, allowing them to work with classes province-wide. Although the virtual nature of hands-on workshops such as these could be tricky, both Winston and Hickey said the support they received from the teachers was paramount to making this project a success. “It was up to the teachers to make sure their students were prepared before each session,” said Winston. “And they delivered. If they weren’t prepared, we would have lost time and because puppetry involves many steps, it was very important that the students had their materials prepared ahead of time.”



The teachers were equally as impressed with their puppeteers, lauding their professionalism and ability to engage students virtually. “Daniel [Hickey] was so dynamic and made the students and myself feel very comfortable, very quickly,” said Viens. “We felt as if we’d known him for a long time. He had all these different games to get the kids moving and engaged. I was able to get many little tricks from him on how to improve my online teaching.”

Although puppeteering may seem like an unconventional way of having students dig deep and face harder emotions, the outcome of this project was inspiring to all who took part in it. “There was so much pride from the students when they presented their puppet shows,” said Hickey. “Not only did the students explore the theme of belonging, but this project was also about young people getting together talking about their stories, presenting those stories, and feeling proud about what they accomplished at the end.”

# B Podcasting

**The popularity of podcasts is undeniable. There is an ease that comes with not only listening to a podcast but also creating one to communicate ideas and opinions. Capitalizing on these facts, LEARN introduced a podcasting option to the 'I Belong!' lineup. A pilot project focused on developing podcast episodes that explored the themes of bilingualism and belonging in Quebec society. The 105 students who participated in this option were part of a unique experience.**

Sound artist and project lead for ELAN's ArtistsInspire Grants, Guillaume Jabbour, facilitated this pilot project for four schools - two elementary and two high schools. The Podcasting Option was designed so that a French as a Second Language (FSL) class and an English as a Second Language (ESL) class work together to create 21 podcast episodes.

Using an interview guide and linguistic challenges developed by LEARN, FSL students asked ESL students questions in French and received answers in French and vice-versa for the ESL students, encouraging the students to communicate in both their mother-tongue and second language. "It's amazing what the students are able to do in both languages," said Jabbour of working on a project that used both French and English. "This project wasn't about having the perfect grammar or finding the perfect words to use. It was about communication and it was a reflection of the reality of this generation and the fact that they are going to have an incredible ease with bilingualism."

The two teachers who piloted the Podcasting Option in their high school classes were very cognisant of the fact that their students were part of a unique project, they believe to be critical while navigating the tension of protecting the French language and protecting linguistic

minority rights in Quebec. "I think the initial excitement for the students was more of a nervousness to actually be speaking their second language to first language speakers," said Stacy Dale, a grade nine ESL teacher at Collège Laval, a private school in Laval. "This project really struck a chord with my students and got them curious and talking about different things. It was great to see them give each other a taste of francophone and anglophone culture."

Isabelle Alarie, a grade 10 FSL teacher at St. Thomas High School, located in Pointe-Claire shared similar sentiments with Dale, commending LEARN for introducing her to a project unlike any other she's ever participated in. "This was a fantastic project," said Alarie. "Students will rarely speak their second language with someone other than their teacher so this created a very authentic learning environment for the students. The concept is amazing."

The students connected over a variety of topics, all centered on bilingualism and their sense of belonging in Quebec. Aside from introducing each other to English and French popular culture, Bill 96 (an Act respecting French, the official and common language of Quebec) ended up being a topic of discussion as well as the importance of bilingualism, something most of the students involved agreed was crucial for having a good job in not only Quebec, but in all of Canada. "The conversations were really genuine and honest," said Jabbour.

Alarie and Dale divided their students into groups of two or three and had them converse virtually with one another





via Zoom. Under Jabbour's guidance, the students recorded their bilingual conversations and edited them into podcast episodes. "What surprised me the most, is how simple making a podcast can be and how easily it can be done in the context of a classroom," noted Alarie of her experience with podcasting for the first time.

Like every pilot project, this one was not without its challenges. The high school teachers in particular, were faced with scheduling issues that sometimes did not have the students speak with each other for two to three weeks at a time. "When you're looking at two-to-three-week gaps between the students interacting with one another, the project kind of lost its steam," said Alarie, explaining that her class schedule and Dale's were so different that they had continuity challenges. "For next year, there needs to be a sharing of schedules when teachers are recruited for this project before the pairings are made."

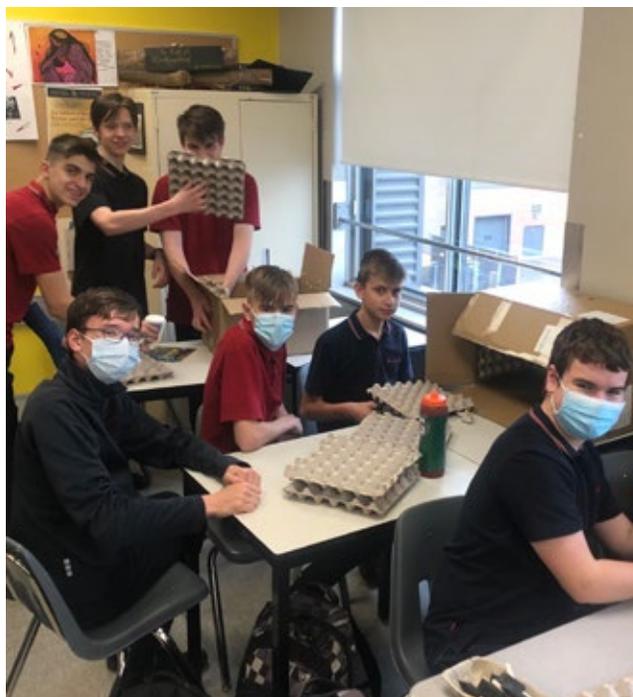
The use of new technology for teachers and students also made the efficiency of producing a podcast more difficult. Jabbour explained that students were unfamiliar with the Cloud, where their files were to be stored, which caused additional delays in production. "Moving forward, if this project will be continued virtually, the students will need a lot more instruction on how to work within the Cloud prior to beginning to podcast," he said.

Jabbour, Alarie and Dale all agreed the main obstacle they faced with this pilot project was not being able to have the students meet in person. Because of Covid-19 restrictions, the project was kept strictly virtual but all three remarked there would have been great benefits in having, at the very minimum, the introduction and ice-breaker session in person. "Had the students been able

to have their first few meetings in person, they would have connected more deeply and the awkwardness that comes with meeting virtually would have been eliminated," Jabbour said.

Jabbour explained that this project made use of the PÉLIQ-AN grant, which supports language exchange projects between students from English and French schools in Quebec. The grant is designed so that the FSL and ESL students meet in person a few times and go on a cultural field trip together. Unfortunately, this was not the case for this project but nonetheless, Jabbour, Alarie and Dale still saw the benefits that came with this podcasting pilot project. "It was challenging but it was great," said Jabbour. "We never forgot that we were doing something really different and interesting. We never forgot that this is something really cool."

In the end, all three agreed that despite the challenges the podcasting pilot project faced, they are hoping it will be part of the 'I Belong!' options next year. They commended LEARN for providing such detailed and useful resources for all involved and appreciated being part of a unique project they all said is important for Quebec students to participate in. "There was a pride amongst the students when they taught each other different things about French and English culture," said Dale. "There was great value in having them not only compare the two cultures but also to see how similar they are. This project provided an authentic conversation space that was just fantastic."



# Take Action

**Nathan Gage, a music teacher at James Lyng High School (EMSB) is no stranger to thinking outside the box to get his students to fully engage in his lessons, an approach to teaching that proved to be very useful when he incorporated the 'I Belong!' Take Action option into his classes. For the past six years, Gage and his students have been creating a 'mixtape,' a digital album that allows his music students to tap into songwriting, lyric writing, instrument playing, beat making, and recording.**

When Gage heard about the 'Take Action' option, he decided to have his 50 music students make the focus of this year's album be on their sense of belonging. "We wanted to use the 'I Belong!' project to focus the content of the lyrics and get the kids thinking about where they stand in the world," Gage said.

James Lyng was one out of five schools from across the Community Learning Centre (CLC) network to participate in this option. Using a Community Service Learning (CSL) project framework, the 242 students across Quebec who participated in the *Take Action* option were asked to take a critical look at their communities and build their sense of belonging by becoming active citizens and learners.

With the help of James Lyng's Community Development Agent, Sam Karimi, Gage applied for the 'Take Action' option, which included funding from LEARN of up to \$1,500 per project. Funding could be used to purchase any supplies needed to complete the project and to hire a local organization or community member to support student learning and engagement. Gage enlisted the support of local producer and rapper Jason Newcomen to help work with the students on their album.



Gage started the project by introducing the 'I Belong!' theme to his different classes, ranging from secondary one to secondary five. "We're a really small school so this project was for all our music students," said Gage. "When I spoke to them about the idea of 'I Belong!' at the beginning of the year, some groups latched on right away, especially when we got into the thought-provoking questions. It got them thinking about why they're here and how they can make their situations better."

Some of the thought-provoking questions incorporated by Gage from LEARN's discussion guide centered around what it means to belong to a place or group of people as well as where students might feel they belong the most and the least. His secondary one students identified strongly with their lives and their sense of belonging being disrupted by Covid-19 and chose to write, perform, and record a song about it for the album. "These students were in grade five when Covid-19 and the quarantine hit," Gage said, as he reflected on the different song themes chosen by his students. "It's [Covid-19] really changed their lives and impacted some meaningful years for them. That topic led to great conversations and excited them to explore their sense of belonging during those difficult years."

Gage explained how the music program at James Lyng often inspires students, who might otherwise struggle to come to school, to attend their classes every day. The

school's in-house recording studio is a big draw for students, as is the making of music. While students mostly engaged with the process of making and recording music, Gage said he saw some struggle when it came to lyric writing. His instinct to once again think outside the box kicked in and in order to engage the struggling students, he made this CSL project cross-curricular, involving the school's English Language Arts teacher. "There are some students who dragged their feet a little bit when it came to lyric writing," he said. "They are actually quite talented musically, but they just don't like writing the lyrics. So, I connected with their English teacher, and she is going to grade them on their lyrics for the songs they write. This will give them the motivation they need to get their lyrics done."

The *Take Action* option not only inspired the students involved but is expected to have positive ramifications throughout the James Lyng community. Once the album is released to the community, Gage explained that it will get many listens and those who listen will be moved by the messages in the music created by his students. "This project had a strong impact on everyone involved and those who listened to the album," said Gage. It's not just the act of talking and thinking about where and how they [the students] belong in society but also the act of creating music, creating rhymes and getting into the recording booth. They feel heard. They've started conversations and now they are keeping them going through their music."



Gage strongly encourages any teacher looking to affect a positive change, be it in the classroom or with the school community, to apply for the 'I Belong!' *Take Action* project and offered some sage advice to anyone who might be interested in bringing the option to their students. "The conversations on belonging are really important and as the project goes on, the conversations can get more specific which is great," he said. "We need to keep those conversations going. Teachers need to keep the process of doing a project like this one malleable. Don't define the process before you get in there. Have the students help you to find the process and the results will be amazing."

Gage is looking forward to continuing to produce yearly albums with his music students. The 20-song album entitled 'Rolls Royce Choices' will be released on SoundCloud in June.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 'I Belong!' project is funded by the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise.

The project was additionally supported by ELAN's ArtEd team, who works with LEARN to identify featured artists and expand participation through the use of its Artists Inspire grants.

Podcasting projects were also supported by the PELIQUAN program, which is made available by the Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ) and offers resources and financial support to schools participating in language exchange projects.

We would also like to thank Daniela Scoppa, who led interviews with participants and helped to draft this report.

The success of LEARN's 'I Belong' project wouldn't have been possible without the leadership of participating teachers, community development agents and featured artists.

Finally, a special thank you to participating students for reminding us of how powerful simple acts of kindness can be in fostering belonging and for having the courage to speak your truths - the fabric of our province is made more visible, and more beautiful, through your eyes.



### SPONSORED BY

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