

STORIES FROM THE LAND

GROUNDING THE YOLO COMMUNITY

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The Youth on the Land Opportunities (YOLO) Community is, by most measures, still in its early days. Just a few years ago, it began as a simple idea, a resource hub to support land-based learning across the country. But like many things rooted in relationship and purpose, it has grown into something richer and more intentional.

At its heart, YOLO is about people. It is about those who show up every day in their communities, often quietly and without recognition, to support youth in building relationships with themselves, with the land, and with the people around them. The work is not easy, and it is never done alone.

And while the organization may still be young, the people guiding it forward bring a wealth of knowledge, lived experience, and a strong sense of responsibility to the work.

From March 30 to April 2, 2026, those people came together for the first time in person. The YOLO Community gathered in Chief Drygeese Territory, in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, on the traditional lands of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and the North Slave Métis.

There was no single agenda that could fully capture what those four days would become. There were conversations, moments of reflection, laughter, and time spent simply being together. Through it all, a shared understanding began to take shape.



It was the people in that space who gave shape to that understanding. These are individuals not only driving this work forward in their respective communities, but also guiding the future of the YOLO Community. Each person contributed in their own way, shaping both the space and direction of our time together:

- Pearleen Kanewopasikot, who consistently brought the conversation back to the youth in her community, asking thoughtful questions and holding a genuine excitement about how each piece of learning could be carried forward.
- Liz Halina, who helped push the group to think beyond existing structures, grounding discussions in the belief that when we lead with land and experience, everything else will follow.
- Lindsay Yasinski, who offered a perspective rooted in ongoing growth and self-determination, reminding the group that this work is not about arriving, but about continuing to learn, unlearn, and move forward with intention.
- Elder Wilbert Menacho, who grounded the group in place, reminding everyone of the voices and histories that continue to shape the land we gathered on.
- Heather Burke, who supported the space through careful observation and listening, ensuring ideas were acknowledged and built upon.
- Zahra Remtulla, who helped maintain a strong sense of connection throughout, guiding conversations in a way that kept relationships at the center.
- Wren Nicolardi, who consistently created space for others to contribute, stepping back when needed and encouraging a more balanced and inclusive dialogue.
- Steph Woodworth, who brought energy and momentum into the room, often moving conversations toward action and future possibilities for youth.
- Gabriel Brost, who spoke from both lived experience and leadership, reminding the group of the purpose behind the work and the importance of youth voice in shaping it.
- Sandlanee Gid, who anchored conversations in responsibility to the land, challenging the group to think about what shared stewardship truly looks like.
- Willie Poll, who supported the flow of dialogue and captured many beautiful moments, helping to carry forward the ideas and perspectives of others in the room.
- and Cheryl Antonio, who reinforced the importance of community throughout, consistently bringing the conversation back to what it means to move forward together in a unified way.





Together, these contributions did not stand alone. They built on one another, shaping not only the conversations that took place, but also the direction of where the YOLO Community is headed. We came together asking questions about the future: Who are we as a community? What are we being called to become? What responsibility do we carry in this work?

What emerged was a shared sense of direction. A commitment to remain grounded in authentic relationships, to honour lived experiences as knowledge, and to continue building a collective that moves with care, trust, and reciprocity. In the months ahead, this direction will take shape through continued gatherings, strengthened relationships across regions, and a growing network of people and programs committed to supporting youth through land-based learning.

Mahsi Chol

