

## FARM AND WILDERNESS CAMP REPORT ~ AUGUST 2017



### ~SUMMARY~

During 5 days of late August 2017, nineteen participants between the ages of 12 and 17 and twelve adult staff and volunteers shared a number of activities, workshops, and projects together that focused on sustainable, small scale agriculture, forest survival skills, eco-building, healthy eating, mindfulness, and valorizing traditional knowledge of various cultural systems. The Young Roots collective organized and fundraised for the week in the preceding months in order to create an optimal experience and to provide an affordable price and several fully sponsored participant spaces.

The notable impacts of the experience on the participants were: eating delicious and healthy food; experiencing new things in nature, being exposed to and practicing new skills such as gardening and building with cob; experiencing deep reflection on life, food, and nature; and personal achievements through completing projects relating to the themes of the workshops.



### ~INTRO~

We believe in the power of land-based learning experiences to ground us as human beings and help us become more compassionate, aware, and responsible members of our human and natural environments. In organizing this program, we had in mind our people who are often excluded from these types of experiences. Therefore we put in extra effort to outreach to people who are African-descendent, indigenous from North America and elsewhere, racialized, migrant, and low-income. We also created programming that practices and valorizes the ancient, often non-western knowledge systems of our ancestors, whether Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, Andean, Kanien'keha (Mohawk), or Celtic, to name a few. We encouraged the group to engage in practical activities and reflective ceremonies that help us take a distance from the often toxic urban environment and all its technologies, live fully in our bodies, and get in touch with the deepest parts of our spirit.

### ~DAY 1~

On the first day, some of the participants stopped along the drive up to brave the brambles beneath a nearby electric line and picked several quarts of blackberries for desserts during the week. The arrival to camp had us bonding with icebreakers and cooperative games, followed by a lunch and tour of camp and the farm led by some of the campers familiar with the place. We had a group introduction where we set expectations and then jumped into our first workshops. Some of the group harvested and made pickles that we enjoyed a few days later, while others spent time at the farm learning how to start fire from friction and grilling tofu for our first delicious dinner. That evening had us relaxing around the campfire, roasting marshmallows and sharing stories in the spoken word tradition, guided by our talented friend and volunteer Kim aka King Kimbit.



~DAY 2~

On the second day we got a little lick of the tornado that hit our neighbours in Lachute very hard. Once we had waited out the worst of the storm, we gathered outside the dining hall to participate in the slaughter of one of our chickens. Val led us in a traditional Kanien'keha prayer and reflection on giving thanks to the animals we eat, and the whole world around us that sustains us.

The campers who were interested watched and participated in killing, plucking and butchering our chicken who fed us in the next day's curry stew that we heated over our campfire. It is a deeply humbling experience to do even a small bit of our own killing, and we appreciate that chicken not only for nourishing our life-force, but for bringing us to a place where we could meaningfully reflect on the cycle of life and death, and the sacredness of eating animals as food.





That night we lounged around the projector and watched *Princess Mononoke* (dir. Hayao Miyazaki) as rain continued to pound. It is a beautiful film that led us to conversations about human relationships to technologies, each other, and the sacredness of the natural world.

~DAY 3~

The following day we began building our cob oven, made of clay, sand, and straw. It's a task that requires getting muddy, and is not for everyone. Many participants were quite adventurous and persevered through the process. Cob is a wonderful building material that can be often used as an alternative to cement. Whereas cement requires massive amounts of energy to produce, and is quite toxic, we built our oven in a "spa-day" theme, getting our pores treated with natural clay from our neighbour's creek down the hill, mixing in straw organically grown by a friend across the river and sand from the property. Cob (also known as adobe) is a building material many of our ancestors were very familiar with, as it was and remains popular--especially in Africa, Europe, and Central and South America. And with reason - it is sturdy, it breathes well, and is widely available in nature.

Also that day, Liang and Camila sat with everyone to talk about food and seeds - we were all in awe to learn about the thousands of different potato varieties that have been developed by Andean Peoples, and about some of their healing properties. As we



moved on to other seeds, some participants were able to pitch in and teach us about seed varieties from their homelands.

Liang then led a group in some quality time on the farm, harvesting, weeding, taking care of the chickens, and Camila facilitated small group discussions on soil health, nutrient cycles and how mining in the region (right next to camp) would potentially greatly affecting our water and soil health - and ultimately the health of nearby residents and animals



#### ~PERSONAL PROJECTS AND DAILY TASKS~

After our lunch each day the participants would work on their personal projects. This was a chance for them to work on something creative and tailored to their interests. Facilitating the personal projects we had our awesome staff and volunteers: Jennifer of the [Red Apron](#) was the chef for the week and guided participants in cooking delicious food creations—we all enjoyed Erica's personal project of colourful and fiber-rich cupcakes our final morning;

- Val gave insightful context of the history of wampum (beads traditionally crafted from sea shells) in Kanien'keha culture, and led several participants in making beautiful jewelry and embroidered hats;
- Kim aka King Kimbit and PJ Williams guided poetry workshops that culminated in a magnificent spoken word and piano piece performed by participants Nigah and Mariana;
- Witnise led traditional Haitian dance workshops as well as freestyle dance, which led to performances by Jason as well as Ty and David;
- Paula delivered workshops on stop motion film and guided Dylan, and a team of Prospero, Borys, and Takeru in creating and producing short films that were both profound and hilarious.





It was inspiring to see the participants present creations they had worked on with such passion.

Also, each day everyone had duties they would rotate through. These included morning farm chores such as feeding the chickens, collecting eggs, watering, and compost, as well as cleaning the common areas of the dining hall and the cabins. The participants did very well in their tasks, and it gave the feel of being in a little village. It was a great way to practice having duties, contributing to the maintenance of a place, and building community.

### ~DAY 3 CONTINUES~

At night we packed up and went camping. We hiked up the nearby mountain (named jellybean for the immense smooth rock on top) and set up on a small plateau. This was a chance for teamwork setting up camp, starting a fire, and heating up our delicious chicken, chickpea, and vegetable curry stew.

Val led the group on a small vision quest, which required everyone to spend 45 minutes in silence and solitude in the darkness of the forest. Afterwards, everyone shared their reflections and observations around the fire. Most of us have such little time in our day-to-day lives that is spent in silence, uninhibited by technology, and out of our comfort zones due to the presence of mosquitos, animals, trees and life in the darkness. The experience of being in silence in the forest can bring up many emotions, thoughts, realizations, and visions. Among the group everyone lived the experience almost completely differently, and it was amazing to hear the candid, calm, and honest, and sometimes intense ways that everyone articulated their quest.



That evening, several participants continued their reflection process by keeping the fire alive, one at a time, throughout the night until sunrise. It was explained to the participants that this was a chance to practice responsibility, in the tradition of our ancestors' long relationship with fire, and also to reflect on tending our own inner fire.

~DAY 4~

In the morning, we awoke to a healthy fire, had our breakfast and packed up camp to head back to much awaited showers. That afternoon, while the participants enjoyed time together in the basketball court, staff and volunteers got to enjoy the lake before a workshop on entrepreneurship with Val and Camila touching on economic individual and collective empowerment as well as business ideas and ethics.

That night, the last night, we Dj'd a dance down by the pool. We intercepted the kids on their way to the speakers, because after a week of hearing a small selection of current pop and rap on repeat, we decided to inject some other vibrations into the airwaves. Witnise showed us some basic steps of traditional Haitian dance, and after a few songs we transitioned into the *ginga*, and Kai faced off against a few of the participants in a playful *jogo* (the game used to practice the martial art of Capoeira).

~DAY 5~

The following morning, after breakfast and packing luggage, we had our closing awards. Camila led us in a grounding ceremony, and then we presented each participant with a certificate that honoured skills or roles they had learned and/or flourished into. As a staff member was presenting each award, the group wouldn't stop mumbling the name of person who was going to receive it. By this time they knew each other so well that within a few words describing the person's qualities, it was clear who we were talking about.

After the ceremony, and after everyone had packed the cars and vans and were pulling away destined to the city and copious wifi, at least a few staff already began to feel nostalgic. The week was a whirlwind, but one filled with adventure, depth, and freedom. We will miss everyone, and think fondly back on the week. And we have already begun planning next year. The momentum is strong, and the call to the land is real. Axé!

~WE GIVE THANKS~



The Young Roots collective has been organizing, fundraising and planning in our spare time for the past 12 months in order to make Farm and Wilderness Camp happen. We were blessed with support, donations, and volunteer hours from numerous organizations, colleagues, friends, and family. Because of all this support, we were able to make the experience as financially accessible

as possible for the group of youth and their families.

*Special Thanks to:*

*Our Staff and volunteers: Valerie Gabriel, Camila Gordillo, Liang Cheng, Derek Myatte, Witnise Estimable, Marie Deckers, Jennifer Heagle, Kai Thomas, Kim Nguyen, PJ Williams, Paula Monroy, Iseah Richardson*

*Our Campers: Takeru, Paola, Tyler, Marjorie, Chi-Chi, Jason, Maddie, Borys, Megan, Amanda, Erica, David, Elijah, Tyonquay, Dylan, Mariana, Nigah, Prospero, and Sarah*

*C.A.M. ~~Shauna Joyce and Dane Savoury for guiding us through the administrative side of things*

*Our partner in Ottawa Karen of the Parkdale food centre as well as the Red Apron for their amazing support!*

*The stop motion workshop was facilitated by Paula Monroy and Camila Gordillo thanks to the funding and equipment provided by Concordia University Television (CUTV).*

*Our Funders: The Red Apron; Ministre d'éducation et enseignement supérieure (MEES); David suzuki Foundation; Kairos; UQAM Services aux collectives; GRIP UQAM; QPIRG Concordia; QPIRG McGill; AESS UQAM; Midnight Kitchen; The Ottawa Community Foundation*

*Family, friends, supporters <3*

## **ANNEX I: 2017 Expenses and Revenue**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>Amount spent</b>
Full-time Staff Salaries (6 core staff)	3 000,0 \$
1 lifeguard	250,0 \$
1 media staff (covered by CUTV)	650,0 \$
Other Wages or Honorariums (thank you gifts for 6 volunteers)	190,0 \$
Transportation (Van rentals, gas, stipend for volunteer drivers)	347,9 \$
Equipment and materials for eco-building	84,3 \$
Printing and photocopying	25,0 \$
Pre-camp meetings with families (snacks, transportation)	60,0 \$
Rent and Utilities at Camp Amy Molson	4 000,0 \$
Food	739,0 \$
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>9 346,2 \$</b>
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>11 575,0 \$</b>
<b>Excess revenue - will be used for FWW 2018</b>	<b>2 228,8 \$</b>