

## Regina Downtown Business Improvement District

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Path to Reconciliation mural project was a collaborative initiative between Regina Downtown Business Improvement District (RDBID) and the Creative City Centre (CCC). This mural was unique to Regina Downtown's Urban Canvas Program, as it was installed on the paving stones of a pedestrian-only city block. The project was a 325 foot-long by 8-foot-wide path down the centre of the FW Hill Mall, on the 1800 block of Scarth Street. The mural was designed and installed by two local indigenous artists: Geanna Dunbar and Brandy Jones, and supported by a local Elder and Cultural/Indigenous Art Advisor from the First Nations University of Canada. The vision of the project was to incorporate the community through the common language of art to foster conversations about reconciliation. This was executed by designing a culturally significant project that allowed all members of the community the ability to engage with. The two lead artists designed the mural to resemble traditional indigenous beadwork, specifically a beaded belt. In total the design consisted of 350 rows of eight beads in unison forming a literal path, giving the project its name: Path to Reconciliation. The painting was completed as scheduled between June 1st and June 17th. The installation was achieved with the support of almost 200 volunteers. Led by the artists, volunteers helped stencil and paint each bead while engaging with community members about the mural and reconciliation efforts. The project concluded by a dedication on National Indigenous People's Day, on June 21st, 2023.

### INNOVATION

The Path to Reconciliation was originally a one-off pandemic recovery project. As the RDBID began to engage with their Indigenous artists and advisors, it became clear that this project was much bigger than originally intended. The RDBID leveraged the momentum generated by this project and submitted an application for additional funding from the Canada Council for the Arts to expand the project. The success in the Path to Reconciliation project led to a successful funding application to begin developing a multi-year mural development program in partnership with schools across Regina. This project extension will create and install multiple murals in Regina's downtown core, focusing on reconciliation in Treaty 4 Territory. In the coming years, project extension would see every high school in Regina contributing to the research, development, design, and installation of multiple large-scale murals in Downtown Regina. Each mural would be led by different local indigenous artists and be supported by an Elder and cultural advisor. These murals will share elements of the history, present day, and future reconciliation efforts for Treaty 4 Territory in Saskatchewan within Downtown Regina. Through this process, RDBID will continue to build partnerships with various citywide organizations and communities. What originally was a project intended to beautify the downtown core evolved into a project that:

- Generated conversations about Truth and Reconciliation
- Encouraged reflection on the community's role in Reconciliation efforts
- Brought over 200 volunteers together
- Educated community members about Indigenous history and culture
- Increased pride in our community

### OUTCOME

The impact of this project is still present today. Working on a daily basis on a colourful mural that dominated a busy pedestrian-only block gave us hundreds of opportunities to engage with passersby. People were interested in the meaning of the work; they encouraged the artists and volunteers with comments of approval and appreciation for the beautification of the street. When RDBID showed them the images from above that made it possible to recognize it as beadwork, their eyes would light up with pride. The corporate community were very interested in the meaning of the work, and whether the organization would be doing similar projects in the rest of downtown. Every day, conversations happened that gave RDBID hope that reconciliation is possible. The volunteers who participated in this project came from all walks of life. During their three-hour shifts, the conversations often turned to reconciliation, and how they wanted to do something to contribute to reconciliation in Regina, but they were not sure how until

they had the opportunity to volunteer with us. The social media interest in this project continues to grow. The CBC Instagram video continues to be shared every day, while video posts from the artists and their partners are still growing in views and shares. The intent with this project was to start the conversation around reconciliation in a very public manner, and the organization certainly achieved that. They are now looking for ways to continue the conversation, and to continue the work of reconciliation in Regina.

## **EXECUTION**

Project planning took place from March 15 to May 30, with weekly meetings with the project team and lead artists. During this time, logistics were mapped out, design ideas were contemplated, and guidance from a local Elder and Cultural Advisor was sought. May 29-31 was dedicated to site preparation, with the installation of the fencing and power washing of the paving stones. An empty storefront space located within F.W. Hill Mall was secured to use as our volunteer headquarters, and a place to store the mural supplies. Project installation and painting took place between June 1 and June 17. In the first 10 days of painting, almost 200 volunteers took an active role in assisting with the mural painting in four-hour time blocks. Once all 350 rows of beads were painted, the final section of the mural (an image of a white buffalo) was completed. The final step of the installation was sealing the entirety of the mural with two coats of concrete sealant. The project concluded with a dedication ceremony on June 21st, 2023. Powwow dancers and drummers led a procession down the mural to kick off the events of National Indigenous People's Day in Regina.

## **REPRESENTATION**

The project came to be when RDBID received a grant from the Canada Healthy Communities Initiatives (CHCI), for a street painting mural project down Regina's F.W. Hill Mall. Once the funding and location were secured, RDBID partnered with Regina's nonprofit organization, the CCC, to help facilitate the artists and supplies for a reconciliation focused mural project. The artists approached for the project were local Cree-Métis artist, Geanna Dunbar, and Inuvialuit-Gwich'in artist, Brandy Jones. During the designing stage, the artists sought knowledge from Elder and Residential School Survivor, Brenda Dubois and First Nations University of Canada Cultural Art Advisor, Audrey Dreaver. Both Dubois and Dreaver supported the artists through storytelling and historical knowledge that ultimately helped shape the artists' final design. The artist's goal of the project was to visually represent Saskatchewan's ongoing journey to Reconciliation through designing a literal Path to Reconciliation that could easily be installed with involvement of the community. A call for volunteers was released by RDBID and over 200 volunteers ranging from students, newcomers, corporate workers and families came together to contribute and start the conversation about Reconciliation in Regina through this project.

## **REPLICATION**

This project is extremely replicable in any Business Improvement District (BID) community. Any BID can engage with their local artists to create a mural. With the correct spatial utilization and creativity, one can transform a public area into a beautifully, culturally engaging space for the community. Art can convey any message. This is the unique factor of a project like Path to Reconciliation, as the RDBID was able to convey the message of Reconciliation in Regina. The replicability of a mural project like this can be achievable with a meaningful theme, a strong project management team and community engagement. To align the project to one's community:

- 1) Partner with local organizations and artists
- 2) Figure out what theme is meaningful to your BID
- 3) Find ways to encourage the community to engage with it with signage, media, QR codes, and volunteer opportunities

Public art can deepen the sense of community in any downtown neighbourhood, making it feel safer and more vibrant. By replicating and producing a project like Path to Reconciliation any BID will be adding vitality, value and reducing unwanted vandalism into their diverse neighborhood all while advocating a significant message within a public art mural project.

## **COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY**

The biggest challenge was the weather, which ran the gamut from 35-degree heat waves to torrential downpours and gale force winds. The fencing was blown down one night, and most days started with a necessary sweep to remove standing water from the previous night's rainfall. The simple solution to these challenges was a fantastic team, which the RDBID had. The RDBID team would arrive on the mural site early each day to clean up from the previous night's mess, sweep, set up the fence if needed, and gather the supplies. Amazing volunteers would also arrive early to ensure they could be there to support us and always had a smile on their face no matter the weather or task each day. As the weather is unpredictable in Saskatchewan, the team ensured that each volunteer, artists, and onsite managers had access to water, snacks, sunscreen and bug spray. The RDBID also set up a tent each day for shade that slowly moved its way down the mural as progression was made. Before the mural painting process began, RDBID's biggest concern was finishing in time for a dedication on National Truth and Reconciliation Day, but in fact the mural was finished in ample time.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Website: <https://reginadowntown.ca/pathstoreconciliation/>

Youtube: <https://youtu.be/8S96jTGx2nw?si=DGnztnZ9LiRH1GVE>

Instagram Reel: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CtSGArTN6SD/?igsh=MWW4NmFzend2bXRqZg==>

Drone Shot Instagram Reel: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ctugn-Tv4Mn/?igsh=N3p5Y2V2dXFpM2k1>