

ṣx<sup>w</sup>ḡamət (*home*) Outreach and Publicity Report

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## Introduction

The Outreach and Publicity for the 2018 tour and Vancouver run of *šxʷamət (home)* built off of our successes from our 2017 inaugural run of the play. Our 2017 run was very well received, and invitations to tour began even before the Vancouver run was complete. We decided to tour this production across BC and Alberta in early 2018, and we ended up booking 23 shows in 21 communities.

*šxʷamət (home)* is a theatre production that asks questions about Reconciliation - questions that we don't know the answers to. It emerges out of the psyche of "post" Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canadian society and asks the "What now?" question: Knowing about the injustices towards Indigenous people in this country, what does this knowledge compel us to do? What behavior changes do we need to make in order to make Reconciliation real and meaningful? How do we take action and transform our communities towards Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?

These questions and this context were not only posed to audiences who saw this production, but also informed the outreach and publicity process. We were able to witness and bring together partnerships and collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities during the organizing period. We also witnessed the many challenges in terms of Reconciliation across the communities that we connected with. Deep scars left by colonization, Residential Schools, and racism affects the dynamics between people in the communities with which we were connecting.

We went into the outreach process being as cognizant as possible of these politics, and our approach was to the best of our ability, be as real and honest about how *šxʷamət (home)* could be a conduit for communities to have a grassroots dialogue – through the theatre – about some of these questions about Reconciliation. Overall, we had many successes in bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together, with sold out performances throughout the tour. We received lots of feedback throughout the outreach process and after the performances about how powerful and meaningful the organizing process was, on top of the impacts from the piece itself.

This year's tour was also a very big undertaking for the outreach team, as we absorbed the role of the publicist. Because of our successes last year with digital media and digital ads, we decided to take on the publicity internally, and hire some additional help for 5 weeks to support the process. We hired a Volunteer Coordinator for the month of February to help with the Vancouver outreach and publicity, which was a relief for the outreach team. We sold out the Vancouver run right after opening night, and people were clamoring for tickets for the whole week, meaning the word of mouth was spread far and wide!

## TOUR BOOKING

Theatre for Living has had a mandate to knit together partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations to sponsor every show in each community we tour our productions into, for many years. Because of the subject matter of the play - Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities – the collaborations between these organizations had a deeper meaning in the

organizing process. Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborations on a play on mental health is different than a collaboration on a play on Reconciliation. Relationship building and navigating these relationships at a community level is in many ways what Reconciliation is all about!

## Collaborations for šxʷʔamət (home)

We started receiving invitations to tour šxʷʔamət (home) in 2017 shortly after the first run in Vancouver, which sold out 3 days after opening. The fact that the production toured right after its first run, in many ways made it a little easier to network. In many communities, organizations leapt to book the show, and not miss out on the chance to bring šxʷʔamət (home) to their communities. Many First Nations organizations that came on board were very happy that these questions about making Reconciliation real and meaningful were finally being asked. They really resonated with the themes in the play, that actually questioned “Reconciliation”, and if it was just another form of assimilation. During the tour booking period, we heard lots of positive feedback about the way that the play is crafted to ask people to find ways to make practical and real changes towards Reconciliation.

The total network for the tour was well over 200 organizations. Below is a list of the core organizations that came together to bring šxʷʔamət (home) to their communities:

Chilliwack	Skwah First Nation
	University of the Fraser Valley
	Sto:lo Tribal Council
	Coqualeetza First Nation
	BC Association of Family Resource Programs
Victoria	Unitarian Church of Victoria
	Songhees Wellness Centre
	Cadboro Bay United Church
	Victoria Native Friendship Centre
	Belfry Theatre
	Hulitan Family and Community Services Society
Nanaimo	Snuneymuxw First Nation
	Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services
	Nanaimo Art Gallery
Qualicum	Qualicum School District (SD69)
	Qualicum First Nation
Courtenay	Komoks First Nation
	Comox Unitarians
	Comox Valley School District (SD71)

Campbell River	Laichwiltach Family Life Society
	Wei Wai Kum First Nation
	Wei Wai Kai First Nation
	John Howard Society Campbell River
Port Hardy	Port Hardy City Hall
	Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw School
Kitamaat Village	Haisla Health Centre
	Kitimat Museum and Archives
Hazelton	Gitxan Health Centre
	Hazelton School District/HATS Theatre
Vanderhoof	Sai'kuz First Nation
	Good Neighbours Project
Prince George	Global Neighbourhood Network
	Aboriginal Housing Society Prince George
	Prince George Native Friendship Centre
	Lheidli T'enneh First Nation
	Carrier Sekani Family Services
	BC Northern Health Authority
	UNBC
Chetwynd	Northern Lights College - Aboriginal department
	Chetwynd Healthy Communities
	Saulteau First Nation
Peace River	Sagitawa Friendship Centre
	WJS Canada
St. Paul	University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'ı nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills (Blue Quills College)
	Family and Community Social Services St. Paul
Edmonton	University of Alberta (Faculty of Medicine)
	John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights
	Canadian Native Friendship Centre
	Boyle Street Community Services (Four Directions Program)
	University of Alberta Aboriginal Student Services
	Amiskwaciy Cultural Society
	RISE (Reconciliation in Solidarity Edmonton)

Medicine Hat	InterAct Theatre Society
	Medicine Hat College (Indigenous Support Department)
	Metis Nation
Calgary	University of Calgary (Social Work program)
	Scarboro United Church
	Iniskim Centre
	Elbow River Healing Lodge
	Mahmawi-atoskiwin
	Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee
	John Howard Society Calgary
	Unitarian Church of Calgary
Nelson	LV Rogers Secondary School
	Selkirk College
	Circle of Indigenous Nations Society
	Capitol Theatre
	Unitarian Fellowship in Nelson
Penticton	Okanagan Nation Alliance
	Penticton Arts Council
	Many Hats Theatre
Kamloops	Western Canada Theatre
	United Church in Kamloops (Aboriginal Relations)
	Thompson Rivers University
	Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc First Nation

In terms of collaboration dynamics, we knew going into the outreach process that the ways that we knitted together the relationships would impact the organizing. Having Indigenous organizations on board at the get go, as opposed to bringing Indigenous organizations on board later on in the process changes the dynamic on the steering committee: the idea behind this is to have Indigenous folks in leadership positions of the steering committee, as opposed to bringing them later, which may be perceived as an afterthought.

The shows which had big audience turnouts always mirrored the outreach process, the relationships between organizations in communities, and the relationships they had with us at Theatre for Living. Community partners that followed the PROC (Publicity and Outreach Schedule) that we provided to them, resulted in big houses, and wide outreach. The ones that were challenging to get to follow the

PROC resulted in lower houses (which were rare). The successful audience turnout that we had throughout the tour speaks to the strength of the Theatre for Living outreach process, that has been developed over the past three decades for grassroots community outreach.

In Chilliwack, we had one of the most diverse collaborations on the tour. We worked with several of the local First Nations, who all contributed to spreading the word out to their communities. We were even able to get flyers distributed to each home on certain reserves. The show in Chilliwack was also a big learning experience for us, as this was the first show on the tour. One of the things we learned in the Chilliwack outreach process was the importance of digital communication and online ticket sales. Because people do everything on their phones nowadays, we realized that we needed to encourage our sponsors to have tickets available for purchase online. Ticket sales in Chilliwack were very slow the first 4 weeks of concentrated outreach, and we realized this is due to the geographic/transit barriers that Chilliwack has, and that if the tickets were only available for purchase at the Stó:lō tourism gift store, this would be a barrier for people to purchase tickets. Online tickets are much more accessible, and it wasn't until the sponsors put tickets available through Eventbrite, that sales leapt up.

In tandem to the availability of ticket sales online, was the distribution of digital materials. If materials were being widely shared on social media and went viral, having a ticket sales link we could embed with the digital materials meant that the venue on which to purchase tickets could be brought literally into people's hands.

*šxʷ?amət (home)* was a huge hit on Vancouver Island! The two shows in Victoria sold beyond the capacity we were hoping for. Similarly, with the shows in Nanaimo, Comox, and Campbell River. The organizers in Victoria had a lot of interest in doing further work on Reconciliation after the performance, and so they helped to create the dialogue guide that was made available for communities if they wanted to take conversations further after the production. One community raised a desire to build relationships through social events, and hosting dinners. This led Cindy Charleyboy (our Outreach and Publicity Assistant) and I to realize that we could also be creative in our conversations with communities about strategizing ways to take conversations about Reconciliation further into communities: it didn't *have* to be a structured or facilitated dialogue and could take shape in a variety of different ways.

In Courtenay, the students at the high school we performed at made these beautiful art installations on Reconciliation issues to decorate the hall, and also to raise awareness about the issues before the play came to their community:



One of the most enjoyable parts of the outreach process was listening to communities to see where they were at in terms of Reconciliation, and the work that they wanted to do in their communities. In St. Paul, the tour sponsors from University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills (Blue Quills College), were deeply invested in Reconciliation and had done a lot of work in the community prior to the show coming to St. Paul. The college itself was actually a former Residential School, which is now the first Indigenous university in Canada that is run by 7 of the local First Nations. The community was also selected to be profiled by CBC in their program that followed up on communities after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The organizers in St. Paul had done extensive work in the

community around Reconciliation before *šxʷamət (home)* came to their community, which made the outreach process quite successful. Just prior to the production, they had organized a Walk for Reconciliation, which helped galvanize support and publicity for *šxʷamət (home)*. This made for a very meaningful environment for the play to perform in.

In Medicine Hat, the organizers were very enthusiastic about the production as well. While the actual reserves were quite a distance from Medicine Hat, many First Nations people attended the performance. This is because the Aboriginal program at the local college was very supportive of the production. There was also a conference in town at the time on Reconciliation, and a bunch of elders came as well. To the surprise of the organizers, both the mayor and the local Member of Parliament attended the production as well.

The organizing in Nelson raised a number of hurdles to address, mainly because of the tumultuous political situation regarding the Sinixt First Nation, who had been “declared extinct” by the Canadian government. This has created numerous conflicts between the local First Nations, and also between people in the area. This obviously affected the organizing of *šxʷamət (home)* in Nelson, and I think speaks to some of the very complicated layers in terms of “Reconciliation”. A major theme that has come up over and over again with this production is the importance of relationships when we talk about Reconciliation. The policies and proclamations from the government on Reconciliation are important; the education is important; but what are the behaviour changes that need to happen? What about the interpersonal relationships that need to be transformed as well?

We also encountered some complicated situations where navigate how rural communities were perceiving us in the “urban South”. For example, some organizers in rural communities were skeptical of our 6 weeks to production outreach and publicity schedule that we have devised, and actively encourage communities to follow. In EVERY community, when we follow up about outreach and publicity on a weekly basis, they all say “our community is a very last-minute community”, and often imply to us that things in rural communities just happen at the very last minute. While I believe it is true that rural communities operate differently when it comes to organizing events such as ours, I believe there was also a reluctance to listen to our very carefully laid out 6 week to production schedule. But when they finally started to follow the PROC schedule, it resulted in ticket sales or RSVPs. This is largely because the PROC schedule is designed to be tailored to each community; the first half is designed to organize the network, and the last half is activating the networks. It can be scaled down for smaller communities, or scaled up to larger communities and urban areas – it is not developed from an urban “perspective”, it is a broad structure that can be adapted and reshaped.

## Social Media

One of the major learnings from this tour is the power of social media as the *primary* way that people receive and share information. Everyone communicates through Facebook. In rural communities, it was imperative that we have social media materials that people could share through their networks and in Facebook groups. In urban areas, where there is more “competition” for visibility, it was a little harder to gain traction, as opposed to rural areas where notice of an event coming to town was made viral very easily.



With the possibilities of paid facebook posts, we can insert our ads and campaign material directly into people's phones and social media timelines, and target audiences that would be interested in the production. This makes advertising very efficient, even for social justice-oriented work like ours. One of the key learnings was to figure out what keywords to use in the audience targeting. We were VERY good at this, as almost all of our posts went viral within days of posting and boosting. I believe this is a testament to the philosophy of outreach vs. publicity that Theatre for Living follows. As the Outreach Coordinator, I was very closely connected to the development of the work, and therefore I was very familiar with the many layers of interest and "entry points" that this production has to different communities. This gave me a tremendous amount of knowledge about target audiences without the need for research that would normally be required by an external publicist to learn optimal keywords.

**Social Media results:**

Total Social media budget: \$6000

**FACEBOOK:**

18,520 people took action

729,922 impressions

256,111 reach

**GOOGLE:**

TOUR: 4,793,533 impressions 2,466 clicks

Vancouver ad: 868,016 impressions 5,509 clicks

GOOGLE GRANT: 7,911 impressions 275 clicks

These results mean nearly 6.5 million times our ads were viewed throughout the tour ("impressions"). For a budget of \$6000, that is very good!

Learning from the last 3 productions I worked on at Theatre for Living, I knew that we needed more materials to feed into social media. People have short attention spans and get distracted easily. I also believe that storytelling and diversity allows for multiple entry points for many different people from all walks of life, to be drawn to our marketing materials. The beauty of the Theatre for Living play creation process is that it incorporates all of these elements already: storytelling, and real diversity.

Based on these reasons, we created a series of images for social media based on the popular Facebook series "Humans of New York". We called our series "What Does Reconciliation Mean To You" (WDRMTY), and I interviewed numerous people that were involved in the production on their personal stories, and the questions "What Does Reconciliation Mean To You?". The campaign was a huge hit, and many of these images and stories went viral. The success of this campaign was integral to the success of the overall outreach and publicity.

One of the key components of the process of creating the WDRMTY campaign was the process of the interviews. Part of my personal ethics of doing this was keeping the interviews as open ended as possible, and letting the participants guide the interview. The broad structure of the interview was "who are you, what's your story, what do you want to share", and "What does reconciliation mean to you"? This allowed participants to shape their own story, without me manipulating the direction of the story. I believe this is also why the campaign was so powerful – the participants really took ownership of the campaign itself, which really helped the word spread at a grassroots level.

We also hired a videographer to help film the interviews of the cast, which I then edited into short clips that could be shared on social media. These were also very well received.

## **Dialogue Guide, Post-show Reconciliation work**

Like past tours and productions, we brainstormed ideas about what we could develop for communities to take action from the plays into their communities. Meg Roberts, one of the cast members, raised the idea of a post-show dialogue guide, where communities could have a resource to facilitate conversations about Reconciliation after the play performs in their communities.

With the help of some of the community sponsors on Vancouver Island, the Theatre for Living team, along with Meg put together a series of materials that communities could opt to use in conversations they wanted to facilitate with community members after the performances. These documents will live on our website.

We also added a column to our newsletter sign-up sheet, where audience members could opt to connect with other people in their community who were interested in doing Reconciliation work together. I connected these people via email after every tour stop. We also created a Facebook group for people throughout the tour who wanted to share ideas about work around Reconciliation they were doing in their communities.

## **Vancouver run**

We completely sold out the Vancouver run by opening night, and had to add an additional row to increase the capacity to make room for more people for the whole run!

Because ᓃx<sup>w</sup>?amət (home) ran last year at the Firehall, and sold out days after opening night, we used that as a marketing strategy to create urgency for people to get tickets quickly. As usual, the matinee sold out within days. The run quickly sold, I believe mostly due to the social media campaign that was growing exponentially throughout the tour, peaked just in time for the Vancouver run. Being able to capitalize on the success of the tour, and continuously build momentum was a key factor in the success of the publicity for the Vancouver run.

We had a wonderful volunteer from UBC who organized campus wide outreach and events for us on the topic of “What Does Reconciliation Mean To You?” Cindy and I went up to UBC to give a seminar workshop at the Liu Institute for Global Studies at the UBC Point Grey Campus, where we showed the 2017 play, and gave a presentation. The volunteer did a wide range of campus outreach, including putting up posters, and engaging teachers, classes, and student groups to bring them out to the show.

Because we amalgamated the outreach and publicity work, we were also able to hire another assistant to join our team, Hazel Bel-Koski, who took on the ground outreach for Vancouver. We hired an external postering company to put up our posters and distribute postcards in two runs, 2 weeks apart. The rest of the posters, Hazel put up herself in different areas, including: West End, Commercial Drive, Main Street, Kitsilano – and others.

## **Voucher program**

Theatre for Living runs a voucher program for the homeless and no-income population so that the play can be accessible. Since last year, we have found that the voucher program has been quite challenging to ensure RSVPs actually show up. Last year's run experienced 80% no-show rate, and due to that frustration, we lowered the allocated spots for vouchers from 25% to about 13%. In our efforts to minimize no-shows we very stringently outreached and followed up with service providers to bring clients. We had a 4 fold RSVP and follow up procedure, and even so, we experienced up to a 50% no show rate for the voucher program each night.

There was even a significant number of no-shows for paid tickets at the Firehall, which was very frustrating. There were several large groups who had purchased tickets, and didn't use some of their paid tickets (which we cannot legally resell) so for a couple nights there were empty seats of people who had paid for a seat.

## **Webcast**

Compared to the past 2 webcasts that I've been a part of, we received the most communication/responses from our outreach efforts this year. We meticulously went through our database to find key people to connect with who then spread the news through their networks. I even experimented with some social media targeted ads, targeting people who were interested in Augusto Boal. This proved to be quite successful in terms of the new interests to the company that came in: we saw a spike in newsletter sign ins from people all over the world who had an interest in Forum Theatre, and I received a number of email inquiries from people about the webcast.

I scheduled a number of conference calls and Skype calls with interested parties to chat with them a bit about the production. Many were very appreciative to be able to personally connect with someone about their questions, and I think this was a way to solidify connections with people globally.

Some highlights of the webcast outreach included the Okanagan regional library hosting webcast events throughout their entire network of libraries. A classroom in Accra, and the University of Ghana connected with me early on to organize a webcast party – they stayed up till 4am to watch the webcast!

## **Tour Publicity**

I believe the publicity for the tour was a huge success, considering we were simultaneously managing the outreach schedule with all 21 communities, and it was also the first time myself or Cindy had ever taken on a publicity role!

One of the strengths was the angle of our press release, in which we talked about the production as a way to make Reconciliation real and meaningful. It asks the "What now?" question, and gives people an opportunity to find ways to bring Reconciliation into their own community and their own lives. We got many responses from CBC radio, television, and web, which was a goal of ours from the get go.

We also received some networking support for publicity through Alberta Health Services, Northern Health, and the Native Friendship Centre networks.

Here is a list of the publicity that we were able to secure:

Calgary	Residential School Magazine Canada
Calgary	CBC - The EyeOpener
Calgary	CBC The Weekend
Calgary	CBC Calgary
Calgary	University of Calgary
Campbell River	Campbell River Mirror Newspaper
Chetwynd	CHET-FM
Chilliwack/Surrey	Surrey Now Newspaper
Comox	Comox Valley Spotlight
Edmonton	CBC Edmonton
Edmonton	U of A campus radio
Edmonton	CFWE radio in Edmonton
Edmonton	Metro News
Kamloops	CFJC Television - Mid Day Show
Kamloops	CBC Kamloops
Kitimaat Village	Northern Sentinel Newspaper
Medicine Hat	Local TV
Nelson	Nelson Star
Peace River	Peace River radio PSA
Peace River	Peace River Record Gazette
Penticton	Keremeos Review
Port Hardy	North Island Eagle
Port Hardy	North Island Gazette
Prince George	CBC Radio Prince George
Prince George	Prince George Citizen
Terrace	CFNR Canadian First Nations Radio
Vancouver	CityTV Breakfast TV (media sponsor editorial)
Vancouver	CBC Radio NXNW
Vancouver	CBC Radio On The Coast

Vancouver	Redeye - Vancouver Co-op radio
Vancouver	Gunargie - Vancouver Co-op radio
Vancouver	Gunargie - Vancouver Co-op radio
Vancouver	Georgia Straight
Vancouver	City TV/Breakfast Television
Vancouver	Review Vancouver
Vancouver	Roundhouse Radio
Vancouver	UBC Graduate school of journalism
Vanderhoof	Omeneca Express Newspaper
Victoria	CBC Radio Victoria
Victoria	CBC Radio Vancouver Island
	Discourse Media
	APTN

**Media Buys and Sponsorship**

On top of our social media budget, we also purchased one set of print ads in the Georgia Straight, and they were our “media sponsor”. We had 5 ads, including one in their spring arts preview issue, which also came with a contest, blog, and social media visibility. This is the same package we’ve had for the past few years, and I think was a good idea to have some print visibility. It’s hard to gauge the effectiveness of print ads anymore, as we know that print advertising and print news is a dying industry.

CityTV also came on board as our media sponsor again this year for the tour. This year we also were able to get them to do some editorial for us through Breakfast Television.

I did reach out to some of our networks to see if we could do some cross promotion. We were successful with the Talking Stick Festival, who cross promoted our material through social media, and also through their newsletter. A large number of organizations also put our material through their newsletter list serves, including some university school departments, community organizations, service providers, and health providers.

**Conclusions**

For the final large production of the company, I am very proud of the big successes that we had for the tour and the Vancouver run. I believe that we were able to learn from our past tours, as well as adapt to current outreach and publicity trends (i.e. social media) very effectively. I am also excited to see we were able to accomplish this through the “What Does Reconciliation Mean To You?” campaign, where we optimized our use of social media to share stories and themes from the play to engage people

online. The feedback that we have received from the outreach and publicity process was also really positive, and I'm very pleased with what we achieved working with communities to bring ʔamət (home) across BC and Alberta!