

The Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity presents:

**RURAL TALKS TO RURAL
5TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

**CONFERENCE
SUMMARY**

**OCTOBER | BLYTH,
16 - 18 | ONTARIO**

**Exploring Our Differences
Together**

www.ruralcreativity.org



CANADIAN
CENTRE FOR
RURAL CREATIVITY

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Conference Theme

Exploring our Differences Together

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The Rural Talks to Rural (R2R) biennial conference has become a staple in Huron County since 2016. This event supports rural development in Ontario and through its connections, and collaborative initiatives, in rural and remote communities across Canada and beyond.

R2R24 THEME

The CCRC is committed to contributing to a strong Canadian rural voice through collaboration, dialogue, and building collective wisdom. This year at the Rural Talks to Rural (R2R24) conference we provided a space and place to explore our differences together and highlight various formats on how we can listen, learn, and collaborate.



At the conference, we asked:

How may we grow our capacity and courage to invite, host, and harvest the conversations that matter in our rural communities? Daily, we face a lot of noise and change such as accelerating technological innovations, climate crises, shifting economies, polarizing forces, and an overwhelming amount of information.

Exploring our differences together isn't about changing someone else's point of view necessarily, it's about coming to an understanding that there are many ways to view the world. Leading questions, opportunities, and/or challenges about rural development were explored in very meaningful and impactful ways.

WHAT HAPPENED?

The conference explored key rural issues and opportunities across our landscape, including artificial intelligence (AI)/data's impact on our rural communities, innovation in economic development, and leading practices and research.

R2R24 provided various formats, methods, and models to step into this dialogue - through documentary presentations, storytelling, participatory leadership methods, art, and simply providing the place and space for rural to talk to rural.

Overview

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The primary goal of this conference is to equip delegates with actionable ideas that they can share and implement within their own communities. It aims to foster meaningful connections that evolve into collaborative efforts, ultimately strengthening the rural voice to influence policy, planning, and development. By learning from the experiences of other rural communities, attendees can turn new insights—whether innovative solutions, alternative approaches, or fresh ideas—into tangible action. Above all, this conference is about rural people engaging with one another, exchanging knowledge, and building a collective impact.

This conference was timely offering the opportunity to explore our differences together, with a focus on participatory leadership and taking collective wisdom into action through different models, formats and creative expressions including a live documentary presentation, keynote speakers, panel discussions, facilitated workshops, storytelling, music and art. Delegates were provided meaningful and appropriate opportunities to share ideas and learn about the issues facing our rural communities today. The conference continues to showcase local businesses and organizations.

R2R24 engages people from diverse backgrounds and organizations working to support rural development, innovation in agriculture and the local food and beverage scene. The community members include artists, politicians, academic researchers, farmers, healthcare workers, students, entrepreneurs, etc. We aim to cross-pollinate through all rural strata and not be confined to one group or one topic.

In summary, R2R24 is a gathering to have folks share ideas that are working in one rural community that can then be adapted or adopted in another. It is an opportunity to connect with those you mightn't have met to share knowledge. And it is to add to a growing rural network that connects rural places and people and gives voice to rural people when it comes to making decisions for the future and health of their community.

You can view pictures, videos and read testimonials about the conference on our website at:

<https://www.ruralcreativity.org/projects/rural-talks-to-rural/r2r24/>



Highlights



Keynote Addresses Dr. S. Ashleigh Weeden, Rural Futurist, Policy Whisperer and Champion for People and Place Centred Public Sector Renewal.



Dr. Wendy Wong, Author of WE THE DATA: HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE (winner of the Basillie Prize for Public Policy) and Professor of Political Science and International Relations at UBC Okanagan.

Participatory Leadership Workshops using global-renowned Art of Hosting practices and methodologies (see more on page 14).



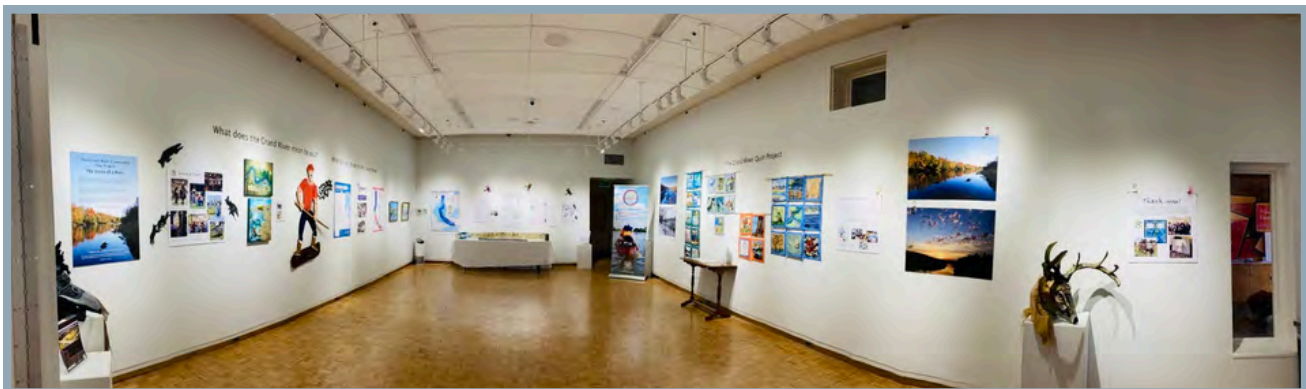
Highlights cont'd

Pathways to Practice - 12 stations presenting a host of topics using research and economic development best-practices. This was a joint effort with the Economic Development Council of Ontario, the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph and Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health.



The Assembly Live: Rural Canada - a presentation produced by Porte Parole on the Blyth stage. Porte Parole is a theatre company that creates and produces original documentary plays about contemporary life to inspire diverse audiences to think critically together about current social issues.

R2R Art Gallery featuring the Two Row on the Grand and The Voice of the River - a cultural experience that brought people together to share stories, build community and understanding on the history and shared experiences of the Grand River



Features

Local Fare

Delegates delighted in the county's finest food and beverages. Local chefs, bakers, auxiliary associations and breweries were showcased. See page 20 for the complete list.

R2R24 Video

When R2R comes around we get to work with Nick Vinnicombe of Lake Affect Media from Walton, Ontario. Nick has been with us at R2R since the very beginning shooting documentaries of the conference that continue to resonate.

The R2R24 video will soon be available on www.ruralcreativity.org. You can also catch up on past R2R videos on our website:

<https://www.ruralcreativity.org/projects/rural-talks-to-rural/>

R2R24 Podcast Series

The R2R24 podcast series was created and led by Shauna Rae of Radar Media. Shauna lent her passion for rural and remote Canada along with her communications expertise to create an incredible series - a collection of sounds, stories, interviews and observations.

Listen here: <https://soundcloud.com/radarmedia/sets/rural-talks-2-rural-r2r-2024>



G2G Rail Trail

This year's conference included a guided nature walk with local knowledge keepers Sheila Robson, and Ken Albert along with Maitland Valley Conservation Authority General Manager Phil Beard, and Chris Lee of the G2G trail association. A large group of participants joined the guided nature walk on the G2G Rail Trail to learn about how the trail nurtures community and Indigenous connection to the land.

R2R24 Market

The R2R Market was hosted by Eat Local Huron and The Village Bookshop in Bayfield on Day 3.



Outcomes

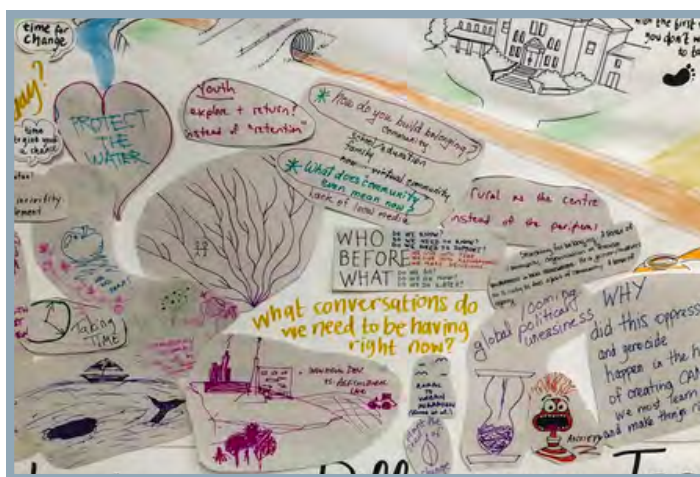
Supporting Local

Hospitality services were provided by local chefs/bakeries/breweries/coffee roasteries, and local accommodations: Khawla Kitchens, Coastal Coffee, Pine Cafe and Bistro, Cornerstone Pizza and Subs, Blyth Legion 420 Auxiliary, White Carnation, Eddingtons of Exeter, Cowbell Brewing Company, Benmiller Inn and Spa, Hotel Lux, Blyth Inn, Corner Farm Cottage, Carriage House Suites, Wild Goose Studio Suites, Trail Way Cabins, and Maelstrom Winery, and Cowbell provided their produces and Blakes' Orchards apples for delegates.

We partnered with Eat Local Huron to provide local produce and products, and The Village Bookshop in Bayfield to sell books based on the conference theme. This also included keynote speaker Wendy Wong's Lionel Geller book We the Data: human rights in a digital age. Lake Affect Media from Walton was the conference videographer and technician. Blyth Centre for the Arts provided technical requirements, Art Gallery assistance and conference crew with the rental of the facility.

Collaboration

R2R explores community development through **economics** partnering with EDCO (Economic Development Council of Ontario - including Huron County Economic Development), **culture** with the Blyth Art Gallery Committee and Centre for the Arts, **rural health** through Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health, **tourism** via Regional Tourism Org. 4, Six Nations Tourism, the G2G, Grand River Community Play: the Voice of the River. Other contributions from economic developers offered economic strategies/methodologies - many of which are already in practice in different rural communities across the province as well as a focus on **capacity development** and **communication** with the Art of Hosting participatory leadership workshop team.



Outcomes cont'd

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Investing in Youth

Youth scholarships/discounts for university/local high school students were offered to 15 students. Austin Silversmith, an Indigenous student, from Six Nations opened the conference with a Thanksgiving Address. The students participated in the Pathways to Practice and in the workshops over the three days of R2R24.

Diversity

R2R is an inclusive event that brings people from many cultures together. Indigenous people from the Chippewas of Nawash, the Mi'kmaq Nation from Newfoundland, and Six Nations people from the Grand River participated. The Thanksgiving address 'the words before all' opened and closed the conference, the Two Row on the Grand was featured in the Art Gallery, and Sheila Robson and Ken Arnold Indigenous knowledge keepers acted as guides for the G2G Nature Walk. The conference also enjoyed the participation of Mohawk Elder Ellie Joseph in the Pathways to Practice plenary session and as part of the Story Circle feature. Lastly, participation from Newfoundland Mi'kmaq community members in a Pathways to Practice session.

In addition, there was pan-Canada representation with delegates originally from Africa, India, the Highlands of Scotland, and Northern Ireland, as presenters and delegates. The conference included recent immigrants to Canada from across Ontario.

Impact Measurements



Metric #1 - Registrations in-person and online.

R2R24 in Blyth saw an increase of over 40% in paid full conference registrations compared to R2R22 in Brussels, ON. Including presenters, artists, volunteers, and facilitators, the Blyth Memorial Community Hall saw up to 120 people attending, many from local government, and municipal economic development departments across Huron. Given the post-COVID times, it is encouraging that more people are attending this conference, including our virtual delegates. Virtual delegates not only participated in the keynote addresses, and presentations, they could view and engage in one of the Pathways to Practice stations.

Metric #2 - Number of collaborations/partnerships.

This metric continues to unfold and is one of the most exciting outcomes of R2R24. The foundation of this conference is based on collaborations and partnerships. The mission of the CCRC is, “to connect rural and remote communities through networking, collaboration and the sharing of stories and ideas.” The conference continues to evolve and new this year we saw a collaboration with the Art of Hosting facilitation team and Porte Parole Productions and their amazing documentary presentation “The Assembly Live: Rural Canada.” R2R could not happen without the partnerships, support and collaboration with Libro Credit Union, The Municipality of Central Huron, Community Futures Huron, Huron County, University of Guelph, Cowbell Brewing Co., The Rural Voice, The Citizen, Blyth Printing, Huron (Commodities) with representatives attending and presenting at the conference. They are very much a part of the conference.

Impact Measurements cont'd

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Collaboration was also evident with participation and the delivery of leading rural-based research from some of the leading post-secondary institutions in Canada such as The University of Guelph (School of Economic Design and Rural Development), Memorial University, Grenfell Campus in NFLD, University of Waterloo, and Wilfred Laurier University.

Given the momentum of R2R24, the CCRC, in collaboration with Huron County and its municipalities has begun discussions for the programming and theme of R2R26.

In the words of someone who attended R2R24 and is involved in economic development in the North Huron Township, these words were shared:

"We were delighted to host the Rural Talks to Rural Conference, organized by the Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity in our township last week! From inspiring and informative assembly, and workshops to engaging G2G trails and the R2R Art Gallery, it was a fantastic opportunity to connect, share ideas, and collaborate with so many passionate individuals. The insights gained and the relationships built will undoubtedly strengthen our communities moving forward. Looking forward to more events like this that bring us together!"

We are also pleased to report that survey responses shared that a **high number of new connections or the reconnection of past contacts made at the conference**. Survey results also shared several new collaborations or shared ideas are underway. We hope to find out more about these collaborations, projects and shared ideas in the coming months.

Metric #3 - Engagement with local hospitality services, entrepreneurs, and partner organizations.

Since its inception, the Rural Talks to Rural conferences, which began in 2016 committed to investing money back into the community, R2R24 did just that. **For every dollar Huron County invested into R2R24, \$3.50 went back into the local economy**. This number does not reflect the shopping, and restaurant visits outside of the conference nor the visitors who will return to Huron County because of their experience at R2R24.



Impact Measurements cont'd

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Our collaborations extend to local businesses that include Coastal Coffee, Khawla Kitchens, Pine Cafe & Bistro, Cornerstone Pizza & Subs, The Legion Auxilliary #420, White Carnation, Eddinton's of Exeter, and a host of local accommodations. In fact a new collaboration with the Blyth Hospitality Group developed into a meaningful relationship and partnership. Delegates booked rooms in Blyth and surrounding areas as far as Benmiller Inn & Spa. Additionally, we heard from delegates about their plans to visit the Blyth area to enjoy the G2G Rail Trail, the lake, and accommodations.

In the words of a local business owner, Ben Gingrich of Coastal Coffee sent us this note:

"Amazing work on the R2R24, AGAIN! After 10 years the R2R conference continues to build on its reputation of being a productive time of pondering, learning and engaging in conversations all things rural."

More results from our post-conference survey

- **100% of the responses shared that overall, they were satisfied to very satisfied with the conference.**
- **80% were satisfied to very satisfied with the keynotes & topics.**
- **90% agreed that The Assembly Live: Rural Canada provided an effective model on how we can explore our differences together.**
- **80% agreed that the Pathways to Practice session illustrated effective collaboration between economic developers, researchers and community organizations on rural issues.**
- **100% were satisfied to very satisfied with the Art of Hosting Participatory Leadership workshops and 70-90% shared there is the potential to use the approaches and/or frameworks in their respective work areas. For example, 80% of respondents shared that the World Cafe could be used or has the potential to be used in the workplace and/or community.**

Looking Ahead

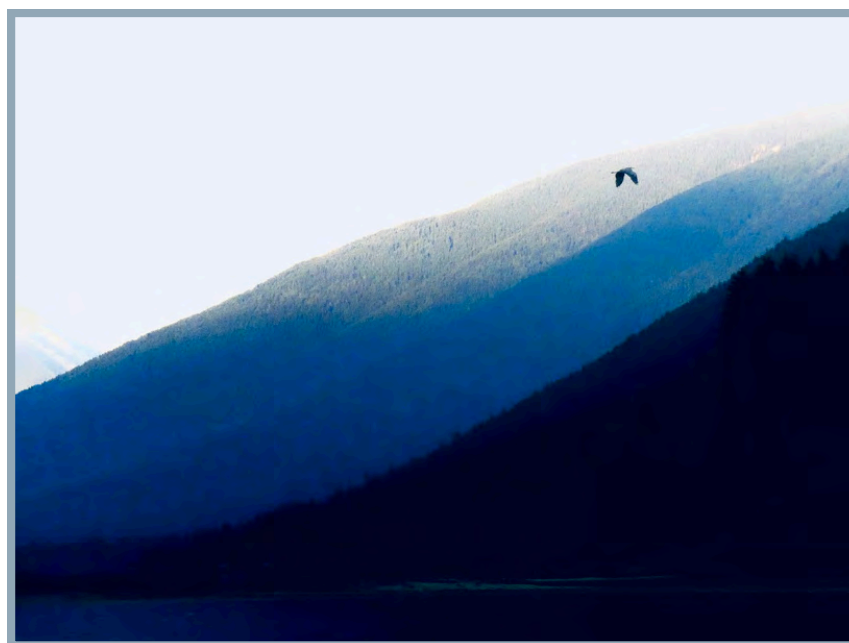
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The CCRC celebrated 10 years at R2R24. The organization has evolved since 2014 but our tenets have remained true - 'leaving the campsite better than we found it,' and treating others as we'd like to be treated - acknowledging that everyone has something to contribute, be respectful, lead with curiosity, and a collaborative mindset. As we look ahead, there are several initiatives underway:

1. **Launch R2RLocal** – in collaboration with different communities across the province and country, the CCRC takes R2R on the road. Using the engineering of R2R, the CCRC offers the R2R model in support of the issues, challenges, and opportunities within the region where R2RLocal is taking place. We've identified three communities that are interested in this collaborative project and can keep OMAFA posted on its progress.
2. **Continue building a rural network to create a strong rural voice** – a voice that speaks to investment, policy, programming, healthcare, entrepreneurship, and the local community. We have been developing this network over the past 10 years with artists, scientists, local and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, academics, and students - and at R2R24 the momentum and network grew again.
3. **Continue to experiment at R2R** – for example this year we brought in Porte Parole and used the Rural Assembly Theatre as a tool for exploring our differences together. We also programmed a three-day workshop using the Art of Hosting Participatory Leadership practices with leaders from Ontario, Northern Ireland, and the Scottish Islands. The idea isn't simply to do things differently – the idea is to learn from the teachings of others who are using creativity in a way to be engaged in community development. As shared by Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher, "In all matters it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things we have long taken for granted."
4. As we work toward R2R26 we continue to **build programming that engages, provokes, and puts into action** the thoughts and discussions that happen at the gathering.

The CCRC strives to advance the needs and promote the interests of rural or remotely located communities through networking, collaboration and the sharing of stories and ideas. We strive to establish an inclusive gathering place, a place for creativity and meaningful participation.

Conference Image



We are delighted to showcase R2R24's conference photo, "Blue Heron in Flight" by artist Kelly Rebar. In some cultures, a blue heron symbolizes being present, at peace, and in balance. In others, it represents patience, wisdom, good judgment, self-reflection, determination, and the ability to progress and evolve.

As Kelly shared:

"Taken from a canoe while paddling on Kootenay Lake on a summer evening a few years ago. I noticed a great blue heron and an osprey in a fight for a fishing spot. Their flight antics were dramatic to observe as they chased each other back and forth across the west arm of the lake. Finally, the osprey gave up and flew off. The image of the heron was captured after the struggle - as it flew one last time to the other side of the lake, and disappeared into the night. The light and soft shades of blue of the image are dreamlike, I know, but the quality of light that makes it so is due to a nearby forest fire that was burning out of control; the shades softened due to the heavy smoke hanging in the air. It impacted both those birds, as well as me, and every other living thing in the area."

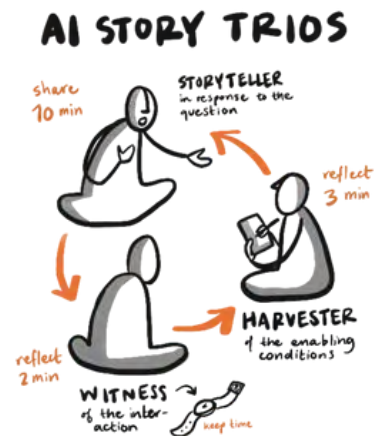
A very apt image for this year's conference theme - **Exploring our Differences Together.**

Participatory Leadership Workshops ⁻¹⁴⁻

How may we grow our capacity and courage to invite, host, and harvest the conversations that matter in our rural communities?

Art of Hosting AND HARVESTING CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

The Art of Hosting (AoH) workshops provide the opportunity to have these conversations and learn how to invite, hold, and lead others through such conversations - whether at the workplace, community, or home. The AoH is an approach to leadership that scales up from the personal to the systemic using personal practice, dialogue, facilitation, and the co-creation of innovation to address complex challenges. Delegates participate in four AoH practices - The World Café, Appreciative Inquiry, Two Loops, and ProAction Café.



World Café Conversations are an intentional way to create a living network of conversation around questions that matter. A Café Conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action in groups of all sizes.

The **Two Loops Model** is a map of how change works in living systems. It charts the movement and relationship between systems of influence and emerging systems, and it is a helpful tool that invites leaders to reflect on where their organization is in this lifecycle and what kind of leadership is most useful.

Instead of taking a problem-solving approach, **Appreciative Inquiry** offers a possibility focus, a move from “what is” to “what could be”. Based on a powerful, affirmative question, people interview each other to uncover experiences that resemble what we want to create. Tap into the latent capabilities of the group to create the success they’re seeking.

ProAction Café is a method for creative and action-oriented conversation where participants are invited to bring their project or ideas in which they need help to manifest in the world. We have space for 12 - 18 project ideas so consider signing up! Sign up sheet is in the Link.

Pathways to Practice Sessions

Pathways to Practice (P2P) took place on Day 3, Friday, October 18th, from 9:30 – 11:30 am. P2P presenters shared their work, engaged in dialogue, and connected with delegates.

STATION 1 LABOUR FORCE ATTRACTION	STATION 2 FOOD SECURITY & RESILIENCE	STATION 3 FROM DENMARK TO CANADA: HOW A SMALL RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPED A SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATED ENERGY SYSTEM
STATION 4 THE EVOLVING NATURE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE 21st CENTURY	STATION 5 DESTINATION NORTH: ECONOMICS, TOURISM & COLLABORATION	STATION 6 SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR THE HURON COUNTY FARM
STATION 7 WELCOMING, ATTRACTING & RETAINING SKILLED FOREIGN WORKERS IN ONTARIO	STATION 8 HOW'S YOUR RURAL HEALTH?	STATION 9 FROM THE ROCK: PLACED-BASED DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL NFLD & LABRADOR
STATION 10 TWO ROW ON THE GRAND + THE VOICE OF THE RIVER	STATION 11 OMAFRA UPDATE: RESIDENT RETENTION & ATTRACTION	STATION 12 PITCH IT/ TRY IT/ MOVE IT: MAINSTREET REVITALIZATION IN MINTO

Read full descriptions on www.ruralcreativity.org

Keynotes, Presenters & Facilitators



Dr. S. Ashleigh Weeden
Rural Futurist. Policy Whisperer.
Champion for People and Place-Centred Public Sector Renewal.
Day 1 Opening Keynote Address
Dr. S. Ashleigh Weeden opens R2R24 with the question,
"WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MEET THIS MOMENT IN TIME?"



Dr. Wendy H. Wong
Author of WE, THE DATA: HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Professor of Political Science and International Relations, UBC Okanagan
Day 2 Keynote Address & Story Circle Presenter
Dr. Wendy H. Wong unravels the sticky issues of AI and data when it comes to human rights, global governance, and data rights through a rural lens.



Ellie Joseph
Mohawk Elder from Six Nations of the Grand River; Two Row on the Grand
Co-founder
Day 2 Story Circle Presenter
Ellie Joseph, Mohawk Elder joins Dr. Wendy Wong and Ailsa Clark to share stories about our current direction of travel and how leading from curiosity helps to explore our differences together.



Ailsa Clark
Founder of Inspiralba, Campbeltown, Scotland
Day 2 Story Circle Presenter & Workshop Facilitator Team
Ailsa Clark of Inspiralba in the Scottish Highlands and Islands joins Dr. Wendy Wong and Ellie Joseph, Mohawk Elder in the Story Circle. She is also a practicing Art of Hosting (AoH) facilitator and is part of the workshop facilitation team.



Stéphanie Heckman
Facilitator & Visual Illustrator
Stéphanie Heckman is a visual facilitator extraordinaire, working internationally from Belfast, Northern Ireland. Stéphanie, trained in AoH, along with Ailsa Clark and Casandra Bryant will facilitate the workshops.



Casandra Bryant
Workshop Facilitator Team
Casandra is honoured to work with Stéphanie and Ailsa as part of the AoH workshop facilitation team. Casandra traveled to Corrymeela, Northern Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation centre last year to train in AoH and met both Stéphanie and Ailsa while there.

Read full bios on www.ruralcreativity.org



Media & Wellness Artists

Creativity, curiosity, and working to leave the campsite in better shape for the next crowd, lie at the heart of Rural Talks to Rural. Creativity and curiosity are at the heart of those who imagine, develop, and produce their work. We are honoured to have these artists elevate R2R24.



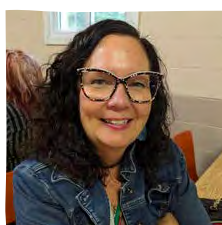
Alex Ivanovici and Brett Watson
Porte Parole Productions, Montreal, PQ

Day One - Presentation
"The Assembly Live: Rural Canada"
<https://porteparole.org>



Nick Vinnicombe
Lake Affect Media, Walton, ON

R2R24 Videographer & Technician
<https://www.lakeaffectmedia.com/>



Shauna Rae
Founder of Radar Media, Tames Centre, ON

Podcast, 'Clearing a New Path'
R2R24 Podcaster
<https://www.radarmedia.co/>



Tanya Porter
Founder of The Inner Space, Stouffville, ON

Lunchtime Yoga
<https://www.theinnerspace.ca/>



R2R Market

The R2R Market was hosted by Eat Local Huron and The Village Bookshop in Bayfield on Day 3.



The Village Bookshop
READ. EXPLORE. LEARN.

Read full bios on www.ruralcreativity.org



R2R24 Art Gallery Artists



Peter Muir, Grandview Theatre

Co-producing The Voice of the River. The Grandview Theatre brings professional theatre opportunities to the Brantford community empowering artists in Brantford, Six Nations and Mississaugas of the Credit.



Pat Flood

Pat is the lead designer for The Voice of the River. A professional theatre, film and television designer and a past President of the Associated Designers of Canada.



Cathy Nosaty

Composer/musician who has worked across Canada in theatre, film and television. She is an educator, collaborator, conductor on projects in all mediums. She is the composer/music director for The Voice of the River.



Marcia Ruby

A visual artist creating images that include drawings and words together that are as unique as they are powerful. A member of the creative team for the Voice of the River.



Pete Smith

Writer/actor/director/producer in theatre, film and television from coast to coast to coast. Director and writer for The Voice of the River.



Shadowland Theatre, Anne Barber

A collective of visual and theatre artists, Shadowland produces theatre events that include puppets and workshops. Anne is the Co-Artistic Director of Shadowland and has been conducting puppet workshops for The Voice of the River.



Hamilton Aerial Group (HAG)

HAG is a circus arts collective creating educational, highly artistic and entertaining performances for the community. They have provided stilt walking characters for The Voice of the River.



Ellie Joseph

Mohawk, Turtle Clan, from Six Nations on the Grand is co-founder of the Two Row on the Grand River and has participated in a number of presentations for The Voice of the River.



Aysen Lickers/Austin Silversmith

Cayuga actors from Six Nations of the Grand River have participated in The Voice of the River



Larry Devine

Visual artist, known as "The Rivermen Researcher" Larry's work combines his personal experiences with historical research.

Read full bios on www.ruralcreativity.org



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Conference Break Refreshments

**Khawla Kitchens:
Authentic Syrian &
Lebanese Cuisine**

Day 1 Lunch Vendor



Day 1 - Refreshments



Day 1 Dinner Vendor



Branch #420, Events

Day 2 & 3
Breakfast Vendor



Day 2 Lunch Vendor



Day 2 Country
Supper Vendor



Conference Rate
Accommodations



Conference Rate
Accommodations

**Corner Farm
Cottage**

Conference Rate
Accommodations



Conference
Facilities



Conference Rate
Accommodations





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