

## The Football and Other Conversations at NPSS

Alyssa: Basically, my dad had all of her Canadian money in one like bag. It was like a fanny pack and he referred to it as “the football” for some reason. So, when we got off the airplane, we had that. And my dad was like carrying it around. He had to do something and I can’t remember what it was. We were waiting in line for, I think it was like an immigration check or whatever, and he gave it to my brother. So, my little brother just forgot about the “football” on the bench and I guess that was the story of how we almost lost all of our Canadian money at the Canadian airport.

Rose-Eva (hosting): Hello, and welcome to Unheard Youth, a podcast focusing on newcomer youth voices all across Canada. I’m your host, Rose-Eva Forgues-Jenkins. We started off this episode with a story that was shared with us when we traveled to Fort St. John, British Columbia. That story inspired the name of this episode entitled, “The Football and Other Conversations at North Peace Secondary School.” You’ll hear more from the youth at North Peace Secondary School or NPSS for short, as we hear their conversations on the topics of identity, migration, and belonging.

I chose the story that Alyssa ---- shared with us at the beginning of the episode because first of all, I think Alyssa does a great job of telling that story, and we get a glimpse of what migration of Canada looked like for her family. It comes off as a funny moment that happened to her family. But it also shows how migration can make us vulnerable.

On this episode, we’ll learn all about the lives of these high school students as we see the way that movement has impacted their lives. Some of the students that you’ll hear from have lived in Fort St. John their whole lives. Some have relocated from other cities in Canada, and others have moved from all the way across the globe. Stay tuned to hear what these insightful youths have to say. Later on in the show, we’ll be sharing some facts about the City of Fort St. John, but first we’ll hear from some youth about their thoughts on living in Fort St. John.

In this conversation, you’ll hear from Kobe, Shallom, and Earl, as we hear about Kobe’s internal migration of Fort St. John. The term “internal migration” means migration within the same country, so in this case, migrating from one province in Canada to the other. Here’s that conversation.

Earl: Hello. My name is Ear ----- . I was born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. However, my family was originally from the Philippines. I am currently living in Fort St. John, British Columbia, and I am a student in North Peace Secondary School in the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade.

Kobe: Hi, there. My name is Kobe ----- and I am an aspiring writer and youth leader in the Peace River North District. I am currently working on reconstructing and redefining leadership in my high school community as well as providing creative opportunities and outlets for youth in a stereotypically very work-focused town.

Shallom: Hello. My name is Shallom----- . I am an international student from Nigeria. My final year, that’s Grade 12, I’m talking about the topic of identity, immigration, and belonging.

Earl: What makes you who you are?

Kobe: I think the things that make me most me are the things that I'm best at. And I would attribute those to usually things that are sort of English-based. Things like public speaking but also things like writing and poetry. And I think what made me who I am is being given the opportunity to really enhance those abilities and being given creative opportunities for them by either making them myself or by really awesome people in my community.

Shallom: Did you immigrate into Canada?

Kobe: I did not. I migrated from somewhere else in Canada to Fort St. John. But I am a Canadian citizen. Born citizen, so ...

Earl: So, connecting to what you just said, like what do you want to become after you finish school?

Shallom: You said you came from Saskatoon. Is there like a difference between like the culture in Saskatoon and the culture here in Fort St. John?

Kobe: I think the culture in Saskatchewan is a lot more, almost family-based. I'm from a very, very, very small town. I'm from Kennedy, Saskatchewan, which I believe is legally considered a hamlet. Like we don't even have a grocery store anymore, right? And I think it's there because it's so small you have a really, really big sense of community.

You know, even my grandpa, he moved away there, and even like six or seven years later when he passed, they named the town gardens after him. And here, in Fort St. John, I feel like the community is a lot less brought together, and I feel like we're really, really work centric. And I think that that's a problem, especially for youth in this area who were born to people here, who got jobs that don't necessarily want to work in those trades, and I think that's something I know I want to develop and build past.

Earl: Another question about your home town. How did you adjust to Fort St. John?

Kobe: I moved when I was really young. I moved when I was around four, I believe. And so, adjusting wasn't super huge, just because I wasn't really exposed to much of it at first. You know, I was exposed to my Kindergarten -- or my preschool class--and that was about it, so the transition was kind of smooth that way. I think it was, if anything, more jarring when I went back to visit and I realized, hey, this place is tiny, you know?

Shallom: You're not originally from Fort St. John. So have you ever felt the pressure to maybe change so you'd belong to certain class or group of people?

Kobe: I think the biggest pressure to change in Fort St. John was through our education. I feel like because it's so trade focused and NPSS itself has really, really awesome trades programs. Right? They're fantastic. The dual credit program is great for trades. But that's not what I want

to do and growing up, I felt kind of pressured to transition into that space where I could succeed here as opposed to trying to bring about as many opportunities for myself who isn't trades focused, and take them somewhere else.

Shallom: Thank you for telling us a bit about yourself and signing out, I'm Shallom -----.

Earl: I am Earl ----.

Kobe: And I am Kobe ----. Thank you very much.

Rose-Eva: Thank you for that wonderful conversation about life in Fort St. John. Next, I wanted to share some facts about the small town. To help me out, I invited Emily Gwun-Shun Lennon to be my co-host. Emily traveled with me to Fort St. John and facilitated social justice workshops with the youth. I am very happy to introduce Emily to the podcast.

Emily: Hi. My name's Emily Gwunsun-Lennon. I work at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers where I work with newcomers to build capacity in various ethnocultural communities. So, when Rose-Eva reached out to me to work on this project, I was immediately super-excited. It really appealed to me because I'm passionate about social justice and love working with young people, so I was pretty excited to explore these topics with the students.

Rose-Eva: Later on in the show, Emily and I will tell you what those workshops look like. But first, a bit more about the City of Fort St. John. So Fort St. John is quite an interesting city. It's on the smaller side but there's been quite a bit of population growth. In 2011, the population was 18,000 people but then in 2016, it was at 20,000 people.

Emily: It's also interesting thinking about the history of Fort St. John and its movement. Also, if you think about it in the context of indigenous folks that have lived on that land for so long and you just ... the nature of human migration over the years.

I was interested in seeing how the population has changed over the years, too, and it seems like the number of non-Canadian born people has really increased in the last five years, especially, but also, I found really interesting was that Fort St. John was established as a trading post in 1794. But since then, it sounds like the location of Fort St. John has moved like six times. The trading post was even closed for a couple decades like maybe 40 years in between these moves, so it's interesting just to think about this as we're listening to the students' stories in the context of a place that has such a history of movement.

Rose-Eva: Before hearing more conversations from the youth at North Peace Secondary School, we want to talk about the organization that we partnered with to make these recordings happen. The Settlement Workers in School program or SWS program. We wanted to understand more about how the SWS program works with newcomers in Fort St. John. Here's my conversation with the program coordinator for the SWS program.

Jane: My name is Jane Drew and I am the Settlement Coordinator for the SWS program in Fort St. John, B.C.

So SWS is short for Settlement Workers in Schools. And we started the Settlement program in 2010 and at that time, it was a B.C. provincial program and basically, it's to help newcomers, refugees, permanent residents that moved to Fort St. John from another country. So, not just from somewhere else in Canada but from another country. So, we help them settle into the community and schools, which is hence settlement, right?

So, we do needs assessments with them, language assessment, try to place the kids in the school according to their age, age appropriate, and also their background education. But then, on the flip side, we try to bring awareness to Canadian kids and the kids that are already in the schools about accepting them and being a little more open-minded. So, like what we can tell the kids, the newcomer kids, oh, if you do A, B, and C, you'll be accepted, but on the other end, if they're not accepted then they can do A, B, and C over and over and over again and get discouraged. So, the Settlement program is to help settle them into the schools, but in order to do that, we have to kind of help settle everyone. So, we've been doing that since 2010. Now we are a federally funded program, so the country said, "Hey, these are great programs. Why don't we make them all unified across the country so everybody's doing the same thing?"

So, we flipped over to Federal about three years ago and so now we're pretty much on par with the rest of the country although I have to say, I think Fort St. John's really excelling.

Rose-Eva: You talked about the reception of the Canadian kids, how settlement is not only about the newcomers that come here, but of the Canadian kids as well. Can you kind of expand upon what that means?

Jane: The biggest thing for those kids or for anybody, for that matter, it's the fear of the unknown, right? So, to bring awareness is to maybe alleviate a little bit of that fear of the unknown. So, we will talk to the Canadian kids and we'll introduce them to the newcomer kids and we'll talk about food and we'll talk about what they've studied and we'll talk about what kind of music they like. Like, just the things that really, that bond people together, no matter where you're from or what you do or what language you speak. There's always certain bonds that you have. So, we expose those bonds and we try to expand on them and build foundations. And just because, you know, you see somebody eating something that you'd never eat, it's like ah, that's gross. It's like, well, it might not be gross if you want to try it. And if you don't want to try it, that's okay, but they may think what you're eating is gross. Or oh, what you're wearing, that looks funny. But, you know, maybe it looks funny to you but it doesn't look funny to them.

So, just really trying to alleviate that fear of the unknown, bring it to light, expand and make the awareness, and see where it goes from there. And, with kids, it's a whole lot easier because they're a lot more open. Because it's like some kids will look at the kid out on the soccer field and they don't care what language they speak. They don't know where they're from and they don't care what color their skin is. But, he can kick a ball, I want him on my team. That kind of thing.

Rose-Eva: That was my conversation with Jane Drew from the SWS program. Next up, you'll hear from Arya, Racheal, and Georgianne. Let's take a listen.

Georgianne: My name is Georgianne Forester. I am from Jamaica. I am in eighth grade. I came here in 2015, August 27.

Racheal: Hi, my name is Racheal Lynn. I am a Grade 12 French immersion student. I have lived in Fort St. John my whole life. My whole family is here. We have just never left, I guess. We're just still here. It's great. I really like other languages and I would love to be able to learn more after high school and do something with my knowledge of French.

Arya: Hey, my name is Arya Shu. My family's are all from China, so I speak Mandarin and English, and I've been here in Canada, Fort St. John, for two years. And I'm here for high school in Grade 11. And recently, I'm learning how to solve Rubik's cube and other Asian puzzles because I'm really into it. And my goal is to have a science or a math major in post-secondary education because I love learning new technology around the world.

Racheal: So, you said you are from China. How did you feel when you first came to Fort St. John?

Arya: So, I felt great hospitality from this cozy town. I was welcomed by the SWS program, the local SWS program, and I joined a lot of community services like the World Fair and Mother's Day Run, and also in the Interactive Clubs sponsored by Rotary Club. Yes, but I feel the winter's pretty cold here. It's so different from my small town back in China.

Racheal: And, what do you miss most about your country?

Arya: What I miss most about China, I mostly miss Chinese cuisine and the people there. Because in Canada, you cannot really find the classic international Chinese cuisines but back in China there're like classic and traditional restaurants everywhere. I also miss the people there because I haven't seen my Chinese friends for two years and my grandparents are also in China and they're moving here next year, I think. Yeah, I miss them pretty much. And how about yourself?

Georgianne: I mostly miss the weather and the food and beaches. Yeah.

Arya: Yeah, me, too. I miss the weather there. It's pretty warm over the year. Except for winter, sometimes it's chilly.

Racheal: You speak English like really well. Like really good, considering you've been here for two years. Actually no, I want to resay that. That sounds really rude.

Arya: It's okay. People will say that.

Racheal: Okay, so before you came to Canada, did you learn English in China or did you learn it once you got here?

Arya: Okay. So many people don't know that English is actually a mandatory course back in China, so I've been learning from Grade One and from Junior High, I had an English teacher

from Britain. So, he corrects a lot of my wrong grammars and pronunciations. So, thanks to him, I can now speak English in Canada.

Racheal: Any situation where you feel uncomfortable or you don't belong?

Arya: Mmm. Not really, but I'm going to tell you a story that happened airport. So, when I first came here, I landed in Vancouver airport and I saw a large coffee shop, it's called Tim Horton's. So, back in China, even though there's a coffee shop called Tim Horton's because they only drink Starbucks there, and I find everyone had a little red cup with a coffee in it. Yeah, I find it's pretty popular in Canada. And, after I tried it, I find it's better than Starbucks.

Racheal: When you first came to Canada, what did you think about the weather, especially when it came to winter? Because we've had some brutal winters here.

Arya: So, what I did is to ... I went to the mall directly when the winter came, the first day of snow, I bought a whole suit of winter gears. I think the key thing is to be strong and live tough through the winter. But the good thing is, you have heat everywhere, like in your apartment, in your school, so it's warm indoor. Yeah, it's pretty nice, actually.

Racheal: What do you want to become when you finish school?

Arya: Okay. Ooh, this is a tough question because I have a lot of ways to choose from. So, I just mentioned I want to go to math or science majors, but I also want to try graphic design or engineering. And for engineering, because it's a really hard program and requires high level of mathematics and science knowledge, but I still want to give a try and I want to try to electrical engineering or aerospace engineering.

Racheal: If you were able to move anywhere else in Canada, is there somewhere you would go in specific or just kind of where it's nice?

Arya: I'd go for the latter. I'd just go with my heart, like wherever my heart wants to go. We sometimes find Singapore is really a good place. Maybe I just want to go there and live there and find a job. But practically, I'll say, I'll go to the place where it has the most job opportunities and education opportunities, like here in Canada.

Racheal: How do you balance your old culture, like Chinese culture, and Canadian culture?

Arya: Okay, that's a good question because people always say like there is a huge difference between Oriental cultures and the Western cultures. But, I found how I blended into society was pretty natural. So, I didn't mean to change my own lifestyle or my personal habits, try to blend into society, because I found Canada is like a melting pot. So, here you can find Oriental cultures everywhere. You can also find American cultures and European cultures. So, here you can be yourself. You don't have to change like significantly.

Rose-Eva (hosting): That was Arya's conversation with Georgianne and Racheal. There's a moment in that conversation that I thought about editing out, but in the end, I decided to keep it. When

Racheal first asks Arya about speaking English, Racheal stops herself, decides it's not an appropriate question, and then asks a different question instead. I wanted to include this moment because we get to hear Racheal reflect on the impact of her words and correct herself. I think it's important to hear how these youth are in the process of learning, just like everyone else.

I know, I've definitely had my own moments where I've said something to someone and then later I thought, oo, how could I have said that in a better way?

Thanks again to Racheal and Arya for giving us a chance to reflect on the impact that words can have.

On our trip to Fort St. John, Emily and I tried to structure our social justice workshops in a way where youth could reflect on the power of words and storytelling. Here's Emily and I describing how we structured those workshops.

Emily: We split the first day into two main parts, so we had storytelling and social justice. But we tried to really weave those two together. So, in the morning, the students and I explored social justice topics like power and privilege, then we watched Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Ted Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story", to talk about how making assumptions about people based on one element is dangerous. So, we talked about how doing this can negatively impact others by reducing them to a one-dimensional character and we also worked through some activities to better understand stereotypes and get the students reflecting on their identities.

Rose-Eva: So, after our great morning session, I showed some examples of radio made by youth. Youth Radio is based in the United States and it features youth-made radio content. We listened to the piece entitled, "With a Deported Father, California Teen Lives Life between Borders." And then we talked about the power that stories have to shatter stereotypes. It was really important for me to use examples of radio that was created by youth, so that the youth in Fort St. John could see that there's people just like them that are out there making radio.

So, at the end of the day, we got the youth to make their own questions. So, they don't want to talk to each other about, so they wrote down their questions, and we took those questions and we printed them off and the next day we said, "Okay. Here are your own questions. The questions are printed off so that you can discuss with each other which questions you want to talk about and tell each other which questions you don't want to talk about." So that they were in complete control of the questions themselves and then how they were answering those questions.

Emily: And I thought it was great to see how they put together those questions for each other. Because they're coming from their classmates, they were questions that we may never think of asking. And they did a really great job of being very thoughtful, I think, in putting together those questions.

I think the afternoon ... I think you did a great job, also, of showing some of these students how storytelling is so powerful and that they have that power in them, too. Because if I think back to when I was a teenager, too, I didn't think that I had much of a voice, but I think that it was nice to work with these students and see them as they were realizing that they had so much to say.

Rose-Eva (hosting): For the last conversation on this episode, we have Viadelina, Vera, Precious, and Alyssa. You will recognize Alyssa's story from where we got the title for this episode.

Viadelina: Hi. My name is Viadelina ---. Here we will be interviewing Alyssa and with me I have –

Precious: Precious.

Vera: My name is Vera.

Alyssa: Hi, my name's Alyssa ---- and I'm 17 years old. I'm originally from the Philippines but moved to Fort St. John in 2015.

Viadelina: Hi. So, why did you immigrate to Canada?

Alyssa: Me and my family moved to Canada because we wanted a better life and we couldn't get that back home, basically.

Viadelina: What do you miss about your native country, Alyssa?

Alyssa: I really miss my relatives and our traditions, especially during the holidays. So, during New Year's, we would usually have like a New Year's Eve party and we would just stay up all night.

Viadelina: Does it feel like home here to you?

Alyssa: I really don't think so. Like, I don't really have any complaints, but you really can't replace what home is, like what you grew up in so, and not really say that it's home for me here.

Viadelina: Do you think you fit in in Fort St. John?

Alyssa: I'm not sure that I do completely. Like, I try to be, like I try to be part of the community, but at the end of the day, there are just some things about Fort St. John that I can't relate to. Like little things, like their habit of making small talk and talking about the weather a lot. I just can't do that. So, I can't really say that I feel like I belong like 100 percent.

Viadelina: Are there any challenges you encounter during your settlement?

Alyssa: I guess the challenges would be like to the weather mostly. In Fort St. John, it's so much different than where I grew up. And basically, just like the people are so much different from where I grew up, too. So, I guess those are my challenges.

Viadelina: How is the hospitality here when you came to this country?

Alyssa: It was pretty good. I wouldn't really have any complaints about that, either. Especially when I first came to Canada we were on the bus and I remember someone just like recognizing

us, like they for some reason, knew that we were just like very new to Canada. That was probably our second day and we were just roaming around the city and I'll never forget how she just invited us to lunch and just basically paid for all of it. She talked a lot about life here and how she adjusted, since we both came from the same country.

Viadelina: Do you have any strategies to help you cope?

Alyssa: I wouldn't say that I have any plans, like a fixed strategy. I just kind of get into things, so I just really like to throw myself into activities and I just like grab every opportunity that I can.

Viadelina: How do you find the balance between your native culture and new culture?

Alyssa: I'm so pretty connected to my old culture so I really hang out a lot with my Filipino community, I guess. And I try to bring those two together in any way that I can, like I really like to share my culture with others. Like my language, I like to talk about that and like how I grew up. And I think doing that really helps the transition into my new culture in Canada.

Viadelina: What are some of your favorite stories that you have with your family?

Alyssa: Definitely, the one that I love the most is that when we were new to Canada, basically, my dad had all of our Canadian money in one like bag. It was like a fanny pack so I don't even know what was in there. But yeah, that was where all of our money was. And he referred to it as "the football" for some reason. So, when we got off the airplane, we had that, and my dad was carrying it around. He had to do something, and I can't remember what it was, but we were waiting in line for, I think it was like an immigration check or whatever. And he gave it to my brother, so my little brother just forgot about the "football" on the bench and I guess that was the story of how we almost lost all of our Canadian money at the Canadian airport.

Viadelina: So, this was the interview with Alyssa. My name is Viadelina ----. Here I have

Precious: Precious ---.

Vera: And Vera ----.

Alyssa: And my name is Alyssa. Thank you for listening.

Rose-Eva: That concludes the youth interview portion of the podcast. Emily, what did you think of what the youth had to say?

Emily: I was amazed with the maturity and insight the students had to share. I think there was a wide range of comfort amongst the students during these conversations. Some of them knew each other really well. Some of them didn't know each other at all. Yet, even within the friend groups, it seemed like they were discovering new stories about each other that they had never heard before, and I thought that was really cool.

I was also amazed with how reflective they were during that process, because I think just hearing some of them rephrase their questions or think, “Oh, wait. I don’t actually want to say it that way. I want to ask you a question in a different way.” And I think that takes a lot of maturity and insight, I think, to think about that.

Rose-Eva: That’s it for this episode of the Unheard Youth podcast. This episode is entitled “The Football and Other Conversations from North Peace Secondary School.” I’ve been your host, Rose-Eva Forgues-Jenkins.

Emily: And I’ve been your co-host, Emily Gwun-Shun Lennon. We’d like to thank everyone at North Peace Secondary School for putting up with us, taking over various rooms at their school, and we want to give a big thank you to the Settlement Workers in School program and most of all, to the amazing youth who participated in this project. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your voices and beautiful stories with us. We really appreciate it.

Rose-Eva: We would also like to thank our friends and partners at CJSR, 88.5 FM and the Edmonton Community Foundation. This project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada.

Thank you to Chivengi for providing the music featured on this podcast. The interviews featured on this episode were recorded in Fort St. John, British Columbia, Canada, located on Treaty 8 territory. So, before we went to Fort St. John, I didn’t know whose ancestral lands that territory belongs to.

So, I went to the website entitled “Native-Land.ca” to find out. So, this is an amazing website with an interactive map that you should definitely check out. So far, they’ve mapped out most of North America, Australia, New Zealand, and some parts of Central America. From that website, I found out that Fort St. John is located in Treaty 8 territory, which is the ancestral land of Beaver First Nations, Dene, Cree, and Metis.

This episode was produced by me, Rose-Eva Forgues-Jenkins. We produce this show at the Centre for Race and Culture in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Amiskwacîwâskahikan

The Centre for Race and Culture acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, traditional homelands for many indigenous peoples including the Nêhiyaw, Saulteaux, Niitsitapi, Metis, Dene, and Nakota. We pay our respects to the ancestors past and present who call this land home.