



Japanese Canadian Legacy Society Grant Report: 2025 Intergenerational Wellness Retreats

July 2025

Introduction:

The Toronto chapter of the NAJC hosted and facilitated two intergenerational wellness retreats in the early months of this year. These two events brought diverse groups of generations together in a space of healing, connection, and renewal. Both retreats were grounded in the lived experiences of Japanese Canadian individuals and the community. These two events held space for participants to reflect on collective histories and their impact, facilitate and strengthen intergenerational relationships, and explore the individual and collective aspects of wellness. The retreats were guided by expert presenters and facilitators who were uniquely positioned to meaningfully engage with and encourage reflection among all participants.

Summary of Small Group Notes:

Following Pauline Kajjura's antiracism keynote presentation, participants were split into three groups to discuss the content of the talk, as well as to share personal stories and reflections. Sharing circles were either grouped by similar or mixed generations. The groups explored similarities and differences in their experiences as Japanese Canadians, using the framework of social location as covered in the presentation. The outcome of this dialogue highlighted the importance of recognizing and learning about intergenerational trauma. Sharing stories about personal experiences across generations was also identified as a necessity for community healing to take place. Solidarity with other communities was highlighted as another priority.

Across the different generations of wellness retreat attendees, the sharing circles offered a space to openly discuss the often challenging topics of Japanese Canadian identity and the impacts of incarceration and relocation. Participants shared that their families handled the topic differently, with many expressing that it was not discussed. Many described feelings of anger, grief and shame being passed down from one generation to the next, others, of having conflicted relationships with their own heritage. An overarching theme was that connection with the Japanese Canadian community eased these feelings and helped to establish a more stable sense of identity. Personal



experiences of racism were discussed, as well as worries about the current political landscape. Microaggressions, covered in the keynote, were another topic of conversation.

The question of what the community will look like moving forward came up, specifically with the majority of younger generations being mixed. Responses were split between worries about community erosion contrasted by the acceptance and embrace of a broader, more diverse Japanese Canadian future. Intergenerational relationships and open conversations were established as another critical site of community healing. Overall, it was agreed upon that the preservation and sharing of Japanese Canadian history and stories can act as a form of wellness and resistance, especially for those that did not grow up with the war years being talked about openly.

The sharing circle groups at the second event reflected upon the screening of Mitch Miyagawa's *A Sorry State* (2013). The session was structured by two questions: "What came up for you during the film?" and "What are you celebrating/mourning?" After introductions, each participant was given two minutes to respond during each round with the focus being on open listening rather than dialogue. Despite not engaging in conversation, many similar themes arose as in the sharing circles at the first event. Passed-down emotions such as shame, grief and anger, the acknowledgement of intergenerational trauma, questions of identity across generations but especially for mixed Japanese Canadians, and solidarity with other communities were all discussed once more.

For many, the film brought up memories of different time periods depending on the viewer's generation. The screening connected some attendees to emotions they felt growing up when there might not have been an open conversation about Japanese Canadian incarceration in their families. Silence was a theme that emerged, as well as the acknowledgement that everyone processes experiences differently. Engagement with the histories of other communities who also received apologies gave some participants the feeling of not being alone. There was a sense of sadness and frustration about the current state of the world and how injustice is still occurring so widely. The importance of place also came up, reflecting the trips to Japan and to the original pre-war family home in the film. Some participants discussed their own visits to the camps, Japan for the first time, or even the venue itself - Momiji.

There was a deep sense of loss expressed, present in many ways including lost cultural connections, family stories, access to Japanese language, the pre-war community, loved ones themselves and the older generations more broadly. The question of what the effect of this collective trauma was for the current Japanese



Canadian community came up in multiple groups, though it remained an open-ended question. It was identified that there is a need for community spaces for collectively processing emotions related to Japanese Canadian identity and history. For many, celebration took the form of appreciating younger generations' enduring interest in and connection to Japanese Canadian and Japanese culture.

Feedback and Testimonials:

Retreat #1 - Intergenerational Strength as a Pillar of Health, Sunday, February 2, 2025:

Participants were sent a post-event survey to fill out after the retreats to get a sense of the impact of the events. Most respondents were in the 61-70 and 71-80 age ranges and while a variety of generations participated in the retreat, most respondents were sansei. The majority of the participants felt that the event met and even exceeded expectations and felt that the presentation was engaging. Many participants noted that the length of the keynote presentation was appropriate, however, some felt that the presentation went too long. The panel discussion that followed the presentation was deemed to be insightful by most of the participants. The breakout sessions were similarly rated as effective in encouraging discussion and sharing. However, some participants felt that the length of the breakout sessions was too short.

The participants rated the venue, food, and overall comfort positively, using "excellent" and "very good" to describe their experience. When asked what the most valuable part of the event was for them, one participant wrote, "connecting discussions about social justice to a JC context - I often encounter these conversations outside of the JC community, such as in training sessions at work, but to be able to engage with these topics from a place grounded in my own community is a wonderful thing." Another participant shared, "hearing from other generations. Also hearing accounts that supported and mirrored my experiences. All this reinforced a feeling of connection within the JC community." Connecting and sharing with others in the community was a common theme that underlined all of the responses. Participants were also asked what topics or formats they would like to see in future events. One participant wrote, "a format where there is more opportunity to engage via breakout rooms or within small groups. A learn and reflect model or something similar would be very interesting." Another stated, "perhaps more specificity on community manifestations of intergenerational trauma."



Retreat #2 - Deepening the Journey Through Film and Dialogue, Sunday, April 3, 2025

A post-event survey was sent to participants as a way to gather feedback. A wide range of participants responded to the survey with most respondents being in the 61-70 and 71-80 age ranges. While respondents varied in generation, most were sansei. Almost all participants who responded to the survey stated that the film and the Q&A deepened their understanding of the issues presented. One participant wrote, “it was interesting that the monetary compensation for the redress was less important in the eyes of the victims, than the recognition and formal apology. Also more importantly, the need to put in place, policies that ensure that this type of discrimination, never happens to anyone else, in the future. Otherwise the apology is hollow.” Another noted that “his [Mitch’s] multiple perspectives, Indigenous, head tax, were illuminating and important to sharing.” Many participants noted that it was an interesting film.

When asked about the post-film reception venue, food, and overall comfort, participants said it was “excellent” and “very good.” One participant highlighted that “the nisei members really appreciate the Japanese food, so important to community.” Participants were asked how they found Kunji Ikeda’s mindfulness and movement break and the majority of respondents stated that it was “energizing and fun.” Many participants found Mitch Miyagawa’s wellness presentation and ancesTREE activity engaging, and many found the sharing circles that followed to be an effective exercise in encouraging discussion and intergenerational insight. With regards to the event’s organization and flow, participants gave a positive rating. Participants similarly rated the dinner venue, food, and overall comfort very positively and offered “excellent” and “very good” ratings.

When asked what the most valuable part of the event was for them, participants offered diverse responses. One participant shared, “the food and mingling was wonderful. Glad the vendors were Japanese. The sharing was especially good for nisei to have the invitation to talk about experiences and opinions to an interested group. Therapeutic!” Another wrote, “sharing stories in small groups. The workshop Mitch ran. Q&A after film screening. Hanging out and talking with folks in-between events. The food is ALWAYS delicious!” Many of the responses noted the value in connecting with others and sharing stories within a community space. Participants were also asked if there was anything that could be improved in carrying out the event. A few comments noted that those who were hard of hearing could not hear everything and that the sound system could be improved. Another participant commented that for the craft activity, perhaps a traditional Japanese craft might have fostered more of a connection.



Many participants who responded to the survey found that the event deepened their understanding or inspired further action. One participant wrote that the event inspired “more intergenerational sharing.” Another shared that “as a caregiver to three nisei, decided to become more involved with attending community events both for the elders, myself and yonsei adult children, to share our experiences especially in a proactive and healing manner. (Instead of not talking about the trauma of racism).” Another person wrote that “the event made me feel I am a part of a larger, diverse, and beautiful JC community. I got to hear from and speak with a lot of people, and learning about their lives and family stories was so inspiring. I think it validated a lot of peoples’ complex feelings about their histories and family relations, like it did my own; like it’s okay to be angry about the past and its difficult legacies, at the same time that we can celebrate ourselves and what has come of that past.” Overall, it is apparent that the event encouraged reflection and connection among participants.

Retreat Agendas:

Retreat #1 - Intergenerational Strength as a Pillar of Health, Sunday, February 2, 2025:

The retreat began at 10:00 am with a meet and greet, registration, and an assortment of refreshments at the Centre for Social Innovation (192 Spadina Avenue) in Toronto. Around 10:30 a.m. Kim Uyede-Kai, Vice president of the Toronto NAJC, welcomed everyone, gave a land acknowledgement, and offered an introduction to the retreat and introduced the keynote speaker, Pauline Kajiura. Pauline then led a presentation featuring selected videos, interspersed with Q & A opportunities to maintain flow and engagement. After Pauline’s presentation, at 11:45 a.m., the panel discussion commenced featuring Ron Shimizu, Sharon Yamashita, and Kristofer Sakamoto-Marshall. A lunch break at 12:45 p.m. followed the panel discussion and bentos from Ginko Japanese Restaurant, along with Uncle Tetsu’s cheesecake, were served. At 1:45 p.m. the afternoon portion of the retreat began, with breakout sessions taking place in various rooms in CSI. Each breakout session was led by a facilitator who guided discussions and a notetaker who strictly recorded themes and sentiments, and omitted any personal details. A mid-afternoon break followed, from 3:15 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. After the break, participants gathered together for breakout group sharing. Notetakers or a designated spokesperson shared key insights, themes, takeaways, and potential next steps from their breakout sessions. The retreat concluded at 4:30 p.m. with closing remarks which included final reflections and acknowledgements, and a participation gift.

Retreat #2 - Deepening the Journey Through Film and Dialogue, Sunday, April 3, 2025



The retreat began at 12:30 p.m. with a welcome and land acknowledgement offered by Fabiano Takashi Rocha, a Toronto NAJC board member. A film screening of *A Sorry State* (2013) by Mitch Miyagawa and a director talk with a Q & A took place after the welcome. At 2:00 p.m., following the film a 15 minute movement break was led by Kunji Ikeda. After the movement break a reception was held, offering a variety of treats and appetizers. Then, from 3:00 to approximately 3:45 p.m., an interactive wellness presentation was given by Mitch. This led to sharing circles until 5:00 p.m., which included a facilitator for each group and was overseen by Mitch. The sharing circles then came back together as one large group to reflect on how shared listening and honouring our individual paths strengthens the whole. The retreat concluded with dinner from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Conversation and connection were served as attendees and organizers shared an informal dinner together courtesy of Ginko Japanese Restaurant and Uncle Tetsu's. A participation gift was given to participants and a group photo was taken.

Keynote Speakers:

Retreat #1 - Intergenerational Strength as a Pillar of Health Keynote Speaker

Pauline Kajjura is a sansei and the daughter of survivor Ben Kajjura. She is a passionate advocate for social justice, equity, and inclusion, with a focus on promoting respect, understanding, and self-awareness. Pauline provides education and training to organizations such as Mountain Equipment Co-op, to help them achieve their equity, diversity, and inclusion goals. She has served as Project Manager for Community Inclusion and Equity at the City of Hamilton, where she led initiatives to prevent and address hate. Her leadership roles also include serving as Executive Director of Information Hamilton and Financial Coordinator at the Sexual Assault Centre of Hamilton and Area. In addition to her professional roles, Pauline has made significant contributions to several boards and committees, including the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion, YWCA Hamilton, Immigrants Working Centre, and the National Association of Japanese Canadians' Human Rights Committee. Her work continues to inspire and drive meaningful change in the communities she serves.

Retreat #2 - Deepening the Journey Through Film and Dialogue Keynote Speaker Mitch Miyagawa



Mitch Miyagawa is a multi-faceted facilitator, project lead, event producer, and artist based on Vancouver Island. His work crosses many areas and fields, including health, education, arts & culture, and inclusion/diversity. Mitch is a Nonviolent Communication facilitator and trainer, a seasoned team leader, community builder, and entrepreneur, who applies an open and appreciative leadership style to motivate diverse teams to reach common goals in settings ranging from festivals (100+ volunteers) and campus events (30+ student leaders) to retreats (50+ participants) and online forums (300+ community members). Mitch is also a filmmaker and writer known for his 2013 documentary *A Sorry State*, which won the Writers' Guild of Canada Screenwriting Award for Documentary. It was commissioned by TVO and Knowledge Network. His play *The Plum Tree* was produced several times across Western Canada, as well as a public reading at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and was published by Playwrights Canada Press in 2004. He also wrote the play *Carnaval*, produced by Gwaandak / Nakai Theatre in Whitehorse, and was a finalist for National and Western Magazine Awards for Essay. Mitch's work in many areas is rooted in his beliefs in the power of respectful listening/ embodied connection, power sharing/exchange, artistic expression/collaboration, the wisdom of the natural world, and the beauty, mystery, and energy of the human spirit. (Bio sourced from <https://www.cnvc.org/trainers/mitch-miyagawa> and <https://japanesecanadianartists.com/artist/mitch-miyagawa/> on July 6, 2025)

Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes:

The goals of the two retreats were to foster intergenerational dialogue with an emphasis on healing and wellness, and to offer participants a safe community space for reflection. This was achieved by offering a keynote presentation, a panel discussion, the viewing of a film accompanied by a director's Q&A, small-group sharing sessions led by expert facilitators, and a collaborative art project. Additionally, sharing a variety of refreshments and meals together offered an informal space for dialogue, connection, and reflection among participants. Both retreats were important forms of deeper community-building as they were in-person events and reached a wide range of community members who were between the ages of 19 and 100. According to the post-event surveys sent to participants, the majority of respondents found the retreats to be meaningful and aided in fostering reflection and connection.