

STORIES FROM THE LAND

RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP: BUILDING CONNECTIONS

WITH GABRIEL BROST
JANUARY 2026



When I think about the work I do with youth and on the land, I always come back to relationships and connection. Everything I have learned, everything I have grown into, and every step I have taken started with people who believed in me, supported me, and walked with me in a good way. My story is rooted in community, shared experiences, and learning how to connect across similarities and differences.

I did not get into land-based leadership because of a title, a plan, or a job posting. I got into it because people welcomed me in. Elders, mentors, youth, and colleagues taught me through their actions and showed me what it means to lead with respect, humility, and care. They also taught me that strong relationships are built by recognizing both what we share and what makes each of us different.

I have been lucky to work with Northern Youth Leadership, supporting youth ages 10–17 across the Northwest Territories. Whether it is canoe trips, camps, leadership programs, or sitting around a fire together, I have learned that connection grows when people feel safe to be themselves. Youth come from different communities, backgrounds, and experiences, but on the land we find common ground while respecting our differences. The land is where I see people's true selves and where I see my own.

**“THE LAND IS WHERE I SEE
PEOPLE'S TRUE SELVES
AND WHERE I SEE MY
OWN.”**



“WHEN YOUTH FEEL SEEN AND SUPPORTED, THEY RISE. THEY SHARE THEIR HUMOUR, THEIR STRENGTH, AND THEIR COURAGE. THEY LEARN WHO THEY ARE WHILE LEARNING ABOUT OTHERS AROUND THEM.”

Out on the land, everything slows down enough for real connection to happen. You hear laughter carry across the river. You see youth step into leadership without even realizing it. You learn to work together in ways that do not always show up in a classroom or meeting room. The land teaches us to listen to one another, to notice our similarities, and to honour our differences with care and respect.



For me, leadership is not about being perfect. It is about being real. It is about listening deeply, showing care, and being willing to have hard conversations when something does not feel right. It means holding space for different perspectives and understanding that everyone brings their own story. Taking care of myself helps me stay grounded so I can support others in a good way.

Working with youth has taught me a lot about trust. Trust is built slowly through shared experiences, early mornings, long paddles, late-night talks, and inside jokes. It grows when people feel heard, valued, and respected for who they are. Often it is the small moments that create the strongest connections.

Being part of the YOLO Community Network has helped me grow as both a leader and a learner. Connecting with others who care about youth and land-based learning reminds me that none of us do this work alone. Relationships are what move things forward. They allow ideas, programs, and people from different places and perspectives to grow together.

When youth feel seen and supported, they rise. They share their humour, their strength, and their courage. They learn who they are while learning about others around them. Being able to witness that growth and support that journey is something I do not take lightly.

In a world that moves fast, this work reminds me to slow down. To listen. To laugh. To pay attention. These are the moments where connection is strengthened, understanding across similarities and differences is built, and real growth takes root.

