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Prairie Research Centre

RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY

Prairie Research Centre

Examining a Community-Based Theatre Program as a Source of Resilience and Well-being among Indigenous youth in Saskatoon

Research Start-up Summary and Abstract:

Indigenous youth populations in Canada are rapidly growing and continually face health inequities. To address these issues, this project explores the relationships between participation in the COV arts-based theatre program and resilience and wellness outcomes for Indigenous youth living in urban contexts. Within this framework, our research approach is grounded in a “two-eyed seeing” community-based participatory context where Indigenous community and academic expertise collaborate to co-execute research objectives. Two-eyed seeing holds that there are diverse understandings of the world and that by acknowledging and respecting a diversity of perspectives (without perpetuating the dominance of one over another) we can build an understanding of health and wellness that lends itself to dealing with some of the most pressing issues facing Indigenous youth today. A transformative framework also draws on critical Indigenous and anti-oppressive theories that focus attention on the political and moral concerns arising from the history of colonialism, and how this history shapes the everyday experiences of those who have been marginalized. At the same time, this lens focuses on revealing cultural strengths, local Indigenous knowledge, and positive aspects of a community that are needed to promote resilience, health equity, improved well-being, and social change.

Saskatoon is the site for this project because of the history of relationships with Indigenous youth serving organizations in the area, and the large percentage of Indigenous peoples living in the inner-city. This project is community-driven with our close collaboration with Oseims Isbister-Bear as the Executive Director of Gordon Tootoosis Nīkānīwin Theatre. The founding vision of GTNT was to create a culturally grounded theatre training program for Indigenous youth in Saskatoon. Indigenous identity was at the core of this vision, and many young people have reconnected with their culture, language and history through our programming. The Circle of Voices (COV) Program is one of the central programs that will be explored in this research. It provides a safe environment to explore creativity among

Indigenous youth and its purpose is to assist aspiring Indigenous youth artists in strengthening self-confidence and cultural awareness, and provide an experience where youth can work with and among professionals in the theatre industry. Participants receive training in all aspects of theatre, attend workshops by local artists and COV alumni, attend plays, meet production teams and other theatre professionals in Saskatoon's diverse theatre scene and learn the skills needed to put on a full scale production. GTNT employs an Elder as a cultural leader, consultant and teacher who works with COV youth on language, personal and spiritual development. Based on previous and ongoing relationships, Osemis approached Dr. Hatala and requested that this research occur in order to generate knowledge regarding the collaborative research questions identified above.

Methodology:

Quantitative and qualitative data will outline the nature and experiences of youth as they participate in the design and implementation of participatory action projects, and particular changes over time on several wellness related measures.

Engagement objectives:

There is extensive data detailing the health inequities experienced by Canadian Indigenous populations, the goal of our research is to move beyond descriptions of Indigenous health inequities towards examinations of a community-based theatre program and its impact on the resilience and well-being of Indigenous youth in an urban context.

The primary research questions of this project that were defined through community consultations involve:

- (1) How can community-based theatre programs facilitate processes of resilience and wellbeing among Indigenous youth in urban Canadian contexts;
- (2) How can community-based theater programs facilitate decolonization and empowerment at embodied levels of youth experience; and
- (3) How can traditional Indigenous forms of culture be integrated into arts-based theatre programs that support resilience and well-being outcomes for Indigenous youth in urban contexts.

The first phase of the research designed to build the CARC and train local youth research assistants will commence in January and February of 2017. The first focus groups and rounds of interviews will start in the spring of 2017 and carry through to the fall of 2017. The final round of interviews and focus groups will then occur in the late November and December of 2017. The first community dissemination activity will occur in spring of 2018, while academic dissemination activities will occur in the summer and fall of 2018. A final report will be prepared for the UAKN in May of 2018. Approximately 30 youth from the COV program at GTNT will be invited to collaborate in this research process over the course of one year.

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