



From Embers to Flames: Identifying strategies of resilience and mental health among innercity Aboriginal youth

KEY FINDINGS

The four main themes that resulted from this project entailed the importance of relationship building with Indigenous youth, having wider community engagement, community ethics, and Indigenous knowledge. The involvement of community Elders played a significant role in the success of this project.

- Relationship building with youth through collaborative storytelling is essential in including Indigenous paradigms and perspectives that are inclusive and holistic.
- Wider community engagement is essential to ensure that there are creative environments that foster relationship building for youth where they feel free to self express.
- Community ethics that include Indigenous cultural and ethical protocols that are meaningful have positive impacts and create long lasting relationships in research.
- Indigenous knowledge creates opportunities for the participation of the community as a whole and ensures that the processes and protocols benefit the community while addressing mental health and well-being.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of mental illness and social distress enacts a significant toll on Canadian adolescent populations. The research illustrates that that fifteen percent of young Canadians between the ages of 14 and 24 are dealing with some form of mental illness that may include forms of anxiety, depression, addictions or other social distresses. Amongst Aboriginal populations, the percentage of young people dealing with a form of mental issue is double the national average. This research examines the issue of mental illnesses, addictions and the crucial need for focused research among Aboriginal populations. The purpose of this study was to understand further and address the resources, knowledge, and

capabilities required to address mental illness and addiction inequalities of Aboriginal youth. The intent behind this project was to capture diverse stories of Indigenous youth.

PARTNERSHIPS

This research project spans across many partners and stake holders regionally and nationally.

A detailed list of the collaborating partners is below:

- Saskatoon Tribal Council;
- White Buffalo Youth Lodge;
- Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan Inc.;
- Core Youth Neighbourhood Co-op;
- Resilience Research Centre at Dalhousie University;
- Saskatoon Health Region;
- Saskatoon Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit;
- Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Program;
- Pleasant Hill Community Association; and
- University of Saskatchewan

METHODOLOGY

To identify strategies for health, well-being, and resilience, this project involved photovoice methodologies and qualitative interviews with over 32 Indigenous youth. During the course of the project, the youth were invited to take photographs of different aspects of their lives and community that attributed to the themes of resiliency, well being and strength. Through photovoice it fostered community and action and development. At each stage in the project development, Indigenous youth were taking the lead in telling their personal story. This research builds on strength based models of resilience, by asking two central questions: (1) what are the existing strengths, knowledge, and capabilities of inner-city children and youth?; and (2) what are the contexts (i.e., family, culture, and community) that support existing strengths? The research team approached this project through the “two-eyed way of seeing”. This is comprised of understanding research through a combined Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and world views.

MAIN FINDINGS

Having engaging methodologies attributed to a successful outcome for this project. There are four central aspects of Indigenous engagement that were offered enhanced skill development and relationship building among the participants.

1) Relationship Building With Indigenous Youth

One approach to engaging with youth was to adopt a conversational and talking circle method that establishes everyone in the project as equal and active participants. This also allowed for respect to occur between the researchers and the participants. The

conversations evolved from sharing to relationship building. Adopting the Indigenous perspective of “all of our relations” was also important to acknowledge that we are all connected in some way. To further support positive spaces, the project organized several activities such as fires, local ceremonies and excursions out of the city.

2) Wider Community Engagement

It was important for the organizers to consult with community Elders and partners when developing the framework for this project. Having valuable input through stakeholders expressing their interests, concerns and ideas was useful for the research team. Community engagement was done through community feasts, story telling, and being out on the land with community members.

3) Community Ethics

The OCAP principles were established to provide specific direction on how the community should be involved in the research process and how research with Indigenous people should be completed. The research team also consulted the Saskatoon Tribal Council. The research team provided an offering of tobacco to acknowledge the cultural protocol of knowledge exchange. Smudging was also done before every meal and before every talking circle.

4) Indigenous Knowledge

Working from an Indigenous perspective meant abiding by the teachings of “Mino-Pimtsiwin” or the “Good Life”. This teaching encompasses having healthy relationships within the community. This teaching was the grounding for the project. The project also acknowledged the changing of the four seasons. The changing of the four seasons is also tied to the medicine wheel teachings. This correlates back to the principal that everything is related in community.

CONCLUSION

The first planned community engagement session occurred at the Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Program Art Gallery in Saskatoon. The stories and the photos of Aboriginal youth and the theme of resiliency will be shared at this three week long art installation in November and December 2015. The exhibit also will highlight the personal experiences of urban Aboriginal youth. The results and outcomes of this research will inform mental health promotion strategies and policies for urban Aboriginal youth through the building of knowledge, concepts and theory. This project was also shared at different conferences throughout Canada. The collaboration and partnerships among Indigenous youth and Elders were vital to the successful outcome of this project.

For more information on this project visit:

<http://uakn.org/research-project/from-embers-to-flames/>

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: www.uakn.org



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