



UAKN  
Urban Aboriginal  
Knowledge Network

RCU  
Réseau de connaissances des  
Autochtones en milieu urbain

## RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY

### Prairie Research Centre

#### **Name of Project:**

From Embers to Flames: Identifying strategies of resilience and mental health among inner-city Aboriginal youth

#### **Research Start-up Summary and Abstract:**

Mental illness and social distress enact a significant toll on Canadian adolescent populations, yet are unevenly distributed throughout the country. Current estimates suggest that 15% of young Canadians between the ages of 14 and 24 cope with some form of anxiety, depression, addictions or other social distresses, while estimates among Aboriginal populations are twice the national average (35%), with addictions and suicide being five to six times the national average. Additionally, the Saskatchewan 2010/2011 Student Health Survey found that First Nations and Métis youth from low-income, inner-city neighborhoods of Saskatoon were significantly more likely (17.2%) than city averages to report poor mental health status, depressed mood symptoms, and suicide ideation in the past 12 months. These mental illness and addictions inequities signal a crucial need for focused research among Aboriginal youth.

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 operating principle behind this study is that the resources, knowledge, and capabilities required to address the mental illness and addictions inequalities of Aboriginal youth are already present within inner-city contexts and young people themselves. *Hidden resources of resilience represent small embers that can, through the intervention of informed strategies, be fanned into flames.* These resources need to be identified for the benefit of this population. A mixed-methods approach will be employed in this research. Qualitative stories will be generated from inner-city youth to determine their successful coping strategies. The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28) will also be administered to quantitatively identify sources of stress, risk, and resilience. Finally, an arts-based photovoice project will also occur and involve 20-30 Aboriginal youth from inner-city contexts, inviting them to take photos of aspects of their lives and community that provide or foster strength and resilience. Following the photo aspects of the project, we will again conduct open-ended qualitative interviews with each youth regarding their photos and stories of resilience and community well-being. All participating youth will take the lead in “telling their story.” Our intent is to capture diverse stories of challenge and resilience. These stories can assist other youth in the community who show lower degrees of resilience. The results of this research will identify sources of resilience and positive mental health strategies that can inform early intervention theory and policy to promote the mental and community health and wellness of Aboriginal youth in Saskatoon and other Canadian urban contexts.

## **Engagement objectives:**

To learn about university-community collaboration and adherence to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS-II) regarding community partner driven priorities and principles of Indigenous Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) of research data, a Community Advisory Research Committee (CARC) comprised of two local Aboriginal parents, three older Aboriginal youth (ages 19-30), and two local Aboriginal elders from Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods was established to guide this research. This project also involves mixed-method community-based research with several partnering organizations serving Aboriginal youth populations, including the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC), White Buffalo Youth Lodge (WBYL), Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan Inc. (MACSI), Core Youth Neighbourhood Co-op (CYNC), and the Pleasant Hill Community Association (PHCA). The main work of this project is strategically located in the Community Outreach and Engagement Office of the University of Saskatchewan, an inner-city satellite of the university also located in the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood. This project is also supported through national partnerships with the Resilience Research Center (RRC) at Dalhousie University, and receives provincial guidance from the Saskatoon Health Region (SHR) and the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit (SPHERU).

A primary concern of our research is to affect meaningful participation in knowledge creation that is conducive to building healthy community environments, social cohesion, and well-being. As such, we intend to learn about how to foster effective education and training of community members and youth to enhance their participation in the generation, application, and diffusion of knowledge. Specifically, the lead researcher (Hatala) will provide mentorship to youth in the community who will assist in the administration of the CYRM-28 survey, photovoice project, and in the detailed qualitative interviews.

Our first planned community knowledge translation and dissemination initiative will occur from 28 November 2015 to 18 December 2015 at the Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Programming (SCYAP) art gallery in Saskatoon. The stories and photos of Aboriginal youth resilience will be shared during this three-week arts installation. In addition to the community knowledge translation event, 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 that may well be applicable to similar urban Canadian contexts. University collaborators will work together with Aboriginal community partners in helping this research build on existing strengths and shape future policy and practice within their organizations.

### **Name of Principal Investigator:**

Andrew R. Hatala, PhD University of Saskatchewan

### **Project Supervisor:**

Sylvia Abonyi, PhD University of Saskatchewan

### **Youth Research Assistants:**

Kelly Bird-Naytowhow, University of Saskatchewan

Tamara Pearl, University of Saskatchewan

Tyson Brittan, University of Saskatchewan

### **Collaborating Friendship Centre and/or other urban Aboriginal organization:**

Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC)

White Buffalo Youth Lodge (WBYL)

Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan Inc. (MACSI)

Core Youth Neighbourhood Co-op (CYNC)

Pleasant Hill Community Association (PHCA)

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