

## **From Embers to Flames:**

# **Identifying strategies of resilience and mental health among inner-city Aboriginal youth**

Overview of project & report on

**Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network**

***Prairie Research Centre Call for Proposals 2015***

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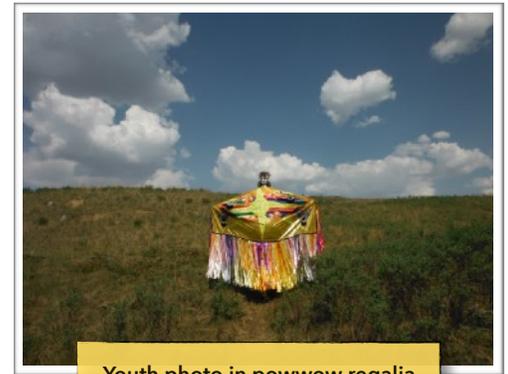
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## Introduction

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 Indigenous 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 neighbourhoods 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.



Youth photo in powwow regalia

To address these issues, this project we built on strength based models of resilience, by asking two central questions: (1) what are the existing strengths, knowledge, and capabilities of inner-city Indigenous 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 was 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.

## The Youth Resilience Project

This community-based research project situated at the Engagement Office at Station 20 West, a satellite center of the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, aimed to generate knowledge of resilience and well-being among urban Indigenous youth (i.e., First Nations and Métis). The project took place primarily within the inner-city neighbourhoods of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (i.e., Pleasant Hill, Caswell Hill, Riversdale, King George, and Westmount), and combined

various research methods such as photovoice, qualitative talking circle interviews, and Indigenous methodologies, together in order to generate knowledge of youth resilience. By evaluating the evident protective factors/strengths in the youth lives, experiences, and stories, this research identifies critical developmental challenges and indicators in becoming healthy Indigenous youth within an urban environment.

Before the start of this research engagement in Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods, we underwent significant consultations with



Orientation to the project in the Fall of 2014

community elders and various partners. A Community Advisory Research Committee (CARC) comprised of two local Indigenous parents, three older Indigenous youth (ages 19-25), and two local Indigenous elders from Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods was established in early on to guide and drive this research and engagement process. Four Saskatoon community organizations working with Indigenous inner-city youth (i.e., Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC), White Buffalo Youth Lodge (WBYL), Core-Neighbourhood Youth Co-op (CNYC), and the Pleasant Hill Community Association (PHCA)) were also invited to be community partners in this project and representatives of these organizations participate in CARC meetings. Previous experience in the research community, the formation of the CARC, and crucial guidance and support from our Aboriginal partner organizations, has ensured that this project meaningfully adheres to concerns voiced by Indigenous researchers and the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS-II—Chapter 9) and UAKN principals regarding “community-driven” ethical guidelines (Baydala et al., 2006; Bennett, 2004; Hatala, & Desjardins, 2010; Schnarch, 2004). Additional financial and resource based support was offered by the University of Saskatchewan Community Engagement Office at Station 20 West and the Canadian Institute of Health Research's (CIHR) Institute of Aboriginal Peoples Health (IAPH), and the Saskatoon Health Region (SHR).

Our on the ground research team involved two main Research Assistants and one lead research, bringing together diverse interdisciplinary skills and perspectives.

Kelley Bird-Naytowhow is of Cree decent from Montreal Lake reserve in northern Saskatchewan. As a child, Kelley was uprooted via the “sixties-scoop”, adopted by a Caucasian family and raised in rural Ontario. This situation left Kelley without the appropriate rearing of what it meant to be a young Indigenous man. As a result, he spent many years in search of his true identity, which eventually turned negative and led him to spend over 10 years within a Federal penitentiary. Having been out from the “inside” for over 3 years now, Kelley is confidently pursuing his 4th year of a Bachelors of Indigenous Social Work degree as a student at the First Nations University of Saskatchewan. Kelley is now seriously committed to “re-writing” his story with the aims of making a difference among Indigenous communities, and especially among the youth.



Orientation to the project in the Winter of 2015

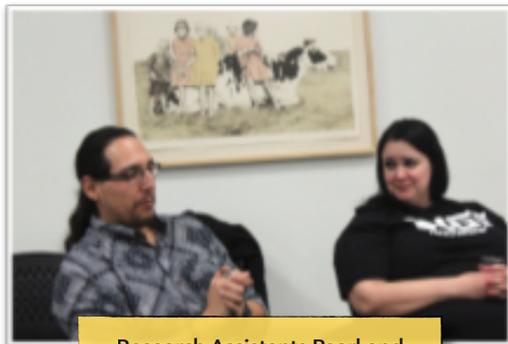
Tamara Pearl is of Cree background from One Arrow First Nations in central Saskatchewan. Tamara was raised on social services in Saskatoon inner-city neighbourhoods having significant interaction with the foster care system in her youth. Despite never finishing high school, Tamara entered the University of Saskatchewan as a Special Mature Student and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Anthropology degree. Following this, Tamara entered Law School and is now a second year Law student at the University of Saskatchewan. Tamara wanted to become a lawyer because it provides an exceptional opportunity for both her own personal empowerment as an Indigenous woman, but also to assist with the empowerment of diverse peoples facing injustices.

Her hopes after completing law school are to work at the United Nations while also serving as an Indigenous lawyer in Canada.

Andrew Hatala was born and raised in Calgary in a family of mixed European background. Andrew completed a Bachelors of Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan and then went on to pursue a PhD in the Culture, Health and Human Development program. This involved a collaborative research project with the Maya Healers Association in southern Belize looking at the relationship between Indigenous and non-indigenous forms of healing, medicine, and mental health (Hatala, Waldram, & Caal, 2015). Following this Andrew was the lead on the CIHR post-doctorate fellowship project in the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology entitled, “From Embers to Flames: Identifying strategies of resilience and mental health among inner-city Aboriginal youth.” For the last 8 years, Andrew has also lived in Pleasant Hill, one of the five core-neighbourhoods in Saskatoon. During that time he has become involved in the community and gained volunteer experience with Indigenous youth in activities with local schools and organizations. This youth resilience project was therefore first envisioned to build on previously established relationships with Indigenous individuals, communities, and organizations.



Orientation to the project in the Spring of 2015



Research Assistants Pearl and Bird-Naytowhow

### **Research Approach and Methodology:**

Within our approach to research engagement and our research team, we attempted to embody the “two-eyed way of seeing” where the contributions of our combined Indigenous and Western “ways of knowing” (worldviews) work alongside one another with a respect that the youth have been able to relate with. Likewise, Kovach (2009) underlines our responsibility to go beyond the binaries of Indigenous-settler relations “to construct new, mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action” (p. 12). This two-eyed seeing framework proposed by Mi’kmaq elders Albert and Murdena Marshall was a means to bridge Western science and Indigenous knowledge; an approach that recognizes the benefits of seeing from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and finally to use both of these eyes together (Martin, 2012). 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 well-being that lends itself to dealing with some of the most pressing issues facing Indigenous peoples and

communities, especially the youth (Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2009). As a team, this approach allowed us to discuss the crucial value of both Western and Indigenous approaches in bettering our understanding of urban Indigenous youth resilience and health (Hatala, 2008). Our approach also fosters equivalent consideration to diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews such that one worldview does not govern or undercut the contributions of others. In this way, our project navigates a balanced consideration of contributions from our diverse worldviews and perspectives, both of our team and community partners, which helps us, in some small way, to rewrite and “re-right” past abuses in research and engagement with Indigenous communities (Smith, 1999).

To identify strategies for health, well-being, and resilience, this project involved photovoice methodologies and qualitative interviews with over 32 Indigenous youth. Drawing on Indigenous epistemologies of time and the four seasons, this project employed photovoice four consecutive times over one year, from October 2014 to October 2015. These youth were invited

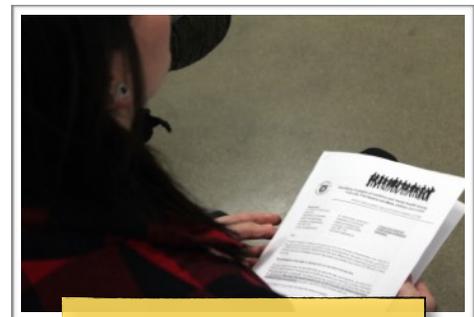


Youth and research team gather for a photo workshop

take photos of aspects of their lives and community that provide or foster strength, well-being, and resilience. Photovoice fosters

youth voice in community action and development and for perhaps hidden skills and talents to become apparent from sharing their stories (Harper, 2002; Wang, & Burris, 1997). By understanding that youth need to be heard in a safe environment, which is not the case with many, we are able to promote knowledge that examines current and past assumptions about the status quo of youth, and allows them to ask questions that may not have been voiced otherwise. Our project took place over an entire year and included four sessions of photo taking data collection.

Following each phase, talking circle interviews occurred with the youth to learn about the meanings and experiences behind their photos. All participating youth took the lead in “telling their story.” Our intent was to capture diverse stories of challenge and resilience that could assist other youth in the community who show lower degrees of resilience. These youth were invited take photos of aspects of their lives and community that provide or foster strength, well-being, and resilience. In this, our project is also transformative in nature; in that, we open spaces for the youth in our project to gain insights into solving problems and creating further positive opportunities for reflection, voice, and growth through the arts-based approach of photovoice.



Reading over University ethical consent forms

The objectives and rationale of such a project can be drawn from the existing inequities of mental illness and social distress that have become quite evident in Saskatoon and other urban

contexts (Modupalli, Cushon, & Neudorf, 2011). Adversity in this context is seen in the contexts of hundreds of years of colonization that has impacted the lives of Indigenous youth and their families in a variety of ways. This is not to dwell over the past, but to better work with what we have now for the development of healthier youth and communities in the future.

Youth Participant Demographics			
	Totals	Male	Female
Participants	28	12	16
Interviews	38	9	29
First Nations (Plains Cree / Dene)	21	9	12
Métis	7	3	4
Average Ages	19 (14 - 27)	21 (15 - 27)	18 (14 - 27)
Attending High School	8	3	5
Attending College / University	2	0	2
Not in school or work	13	6	7
Working full time	5	3	2
With children	9	5	4

As a concluding Knowledge Translation and Exchange aspect of our project, we plan to work with the Indigenous youth to design and set up a three-week art installation exhibit, from November 28 to December 18 2015, at the Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Programming (SCYAP). This exhibit will highlight the stories and experiences of urban Indigenous youth resilience and will be an example of how this team has built upon the current relationships within the community of Saskatoon.

### **Engaging Methodologies**

The following sections outline our research approach in more detail and several insights that have emerged while working with and engaging urban Indigenous youth in Saskatoon. More insights have emerged than can be mentioned here. As such, we focus on four central aspects of Indigenous engagement that we feel are either relatively new to the existing literature, or offer important perspectives regarding the integration of Indigenous and Western forms of knowledge.

#### **1. Relationship building with youth:**

One approach to engaging youth was to adopt a conversational or talking circle method that recognizes youth as active participants in the research project and contributors to community knowledge. Oral histories and lessons is an Indigenous traditional way of disseminating

knowledge over the generations (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). This collaborative storytelling “is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm” and “it involves a dialogic participation that holds deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others” (Kovach, 2009, p. 40). In this way, our project used the photos produced by the youth as stepping-stones to explore and elicit their deeper stories and experiences. This approach is also sometimes termed photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002), and is important because it “de-centers” the youth during the conversations or interviews in order to allow them to be more comfortable and open. The conversational method considers “the relationship that evolves between sharing story and listening, it becomes a strong relationship” (Wilson, 2001, p. 43). Indeed as Bustamante et al. (2015) observe, “youth appreciate research projects that welcome their voices in processes that are fun, transformative and rewarding, and researchers learn at least as much as the young people do in the process” and that “the point is to honour youth choices in framing individual and shared life events and conditions – “nothing about us without us” – without adopting tired scripts that serve adult agendas” (p. 37-38).



An afternoon outing with the youth and research team in Summer 2015

Axiology must be foregrounded in positive relationships with Indigenous young people (Bull, 2010). During all such talking circle conversations with the youth, therefore, it was paramount for a framework of values and morals to be evident. Such relationships center on a deep respect for what is being exchanged. This respect occurs not only within our actions, but it also lay within what words we choose to use and what was left without saying in our actions and attitudes (Brown, 2005). Building this respect also takes empathy to see that a conversation does not subtly oppress or denigrate the youth. In other words, we must be free from a patronizing attitude in our language with the youth and strive to meet them to where they are at in their lives. The youth want to be heard in a safe environment where they can allow themselves permission to shine. In addition to respect, this axiological environment was also fostered through other values such as trust (them trusting us that we were not there to ‘fix’ them), transparency (sharing all transcriptions and exchanging our intent behind our actions/words), caring (caring for what we considered their story as being ‘sacred’ in nature) and honesty (being open about the vision and goals of the project and its limited ability to create positive lasting change). These values and moral ways of being are often referred to as “soft skills” and are becoming more central in areas of research,



A group photo after orientation in the Fall of 2015

education, and development (Gibb, 2014; Hatala et al, in press).

These values or “soft skills” ultimately inform our vision of youth as “little elders,” as our brothers and sisters who may one day become community leaders. The term “little elders” comes from the idea that our team acknowledges and respects that the youth are seen as their own knowledge keepers, for they hold their own sacred story impregnated with much insight and depth of what leads to resilience and well-being. This is to say that our vision of how we see the youth is important and we argue that researchers must reflect on what visions of youth they hold and the visions of youth held by society around them—our vision shapes our reality and therefore informs our engagement with youth.

There are many theories and assumptions of youth—and especially Indigenous youth—upheld by the wider society and community. The images of youth that often persist in the minds of parents and teachers alike are often of rebelliousness, irrationality, and frivolity. The media, too, plays a key role in shaping perceptions of Indigenous youth held by the wider community (Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010). Media presentations and images of urban Indigenous youth in Saskatchewan are all too often littered with an over representation of participation in gangs, use of drugs, illicit sexual activity, and excessive lawlessness and violence. We realize that the way young people are seen by others has an enormous effect on them. Thus, we must acknowledge that a dark picture of youth prevalent in society helps create the conditions for undesirable patterns of behavior to be propagated.

The vision of youth upheld in our project looks critically at such negative assumptions in order to avoid the overgeneralization that a state of “crisis” or delinquency are a necessary developmental

condition of Indigenous youth. We acknowledge and are critical of the fact that most prevalent conceptions of youth emerge from within Western cultural frameworks and assumptions that place excessive emphasis on self, on gratification, on biological change, on sexual awareness, and on material achievements. They often focus narrowly on class, racial, and gender identity, neglecting insights from Indigenous forms of knowledge that include the inherent aspects of youth nobility, spirituality, and resilience (Brokenleg, 2005). It is doubtful that efforts inspired by such negative visions of youth can do much more than help youth become adjusted to the norms of today’s society, a society whose materialistic and racialized outlook, tends to destroy spiritual

susceptibilities and inherent strategies of resilience among youth. The conception of youth we embrace, therefore, is informed from Indigenous Methodologies and Knowledge and takes into consideration all aspects of the human person (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) while asserting the inherent nobility and altruism that, under the right environmental conditions, all



Photo workshop in the Fall of 2015

youth can demonstrate. This concept of “little elders” shapes our vision and interaction with youth throughout our project, providing a framework and safe environment where such a vision can manifest.

While working with an Indigenous perspective and applying the proper methodologies, we also acknowledged the term “All of our relations.” Within many Indigenous ways of knowing, the term “All of our relations” refer to acknowledging that we are all connected in some way. This includes the two-legged, four legged, the flyers, crawlers, swimmers, the seen and unseen. This is an interconnection that needs to be respected as it allows us to be mindful of that balance in our own lives. It also helps our research team manifest important values and virtues of respect, humility, and justice as we recognize that as the youth improve so do we all. By being aware of and shifting our paradigms as researchers, we allow ourselves to see in different ways in order to positively interact with the youth involved. In addition to being seen as “little elders” for their inherent knowledge and wisdom, youth in our project are also acknowledged as being “brothers or sisters,” which allows for Indigenous pedagogy and relational ethics of kinship to inform our ongoing engagement and relationships with youth.

In order to further support positive spaces for the urban Indigenous youth participating in this project and to positively engage the youth, the project organized several activities such as fires outside of town, the option of choosing to participate in a local ceremonial sweat lodge, and a three-day extrusion out of the city. By honouring and expressing their power of choice and by them selecting these activities, terms such as capacity building were on the forefront of our minds and the intentions of this project. As Ryan and Robinson (1990) argue, “the ultimate goal of research is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of lives of the people involved” and that “the beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community itself [rather than researchers]” (p. 57-71). It is here where engagement within the research facilitates transformations of what healthy benefits of relationship building can bring forth (Mertens, 2009).

## **2. Wider community engagement**

Before the start of this research engagement in Saskatoon’s core neighbourhoods, we felt we needed to honour consultation with the community elders and partners through the formation of our CARC, which is central in CBPR and Indigenous Methodologies (Botha, 2011; Minkler, 2005). Valuable input, concerns, interests and ways to be of assistance were a few of the insights that were born in respectful discussions during committee meetings as to each phase of our project. The dynamics involved in any close kinship is echoed in the positive engagement of community scholarship and research. Importantly, youth



Data analysis workshop in the Fall of 2015, preparing for the photo art show

voices were front and centre in these consultations, ensuring the project evolved in a good way with youth input.

In addition to the engagement with the CARC, there is a need to get in the public reality and meet in person to invest in careful consultation as to our intentions, as well as the processes of the research itself. Smith (1999) argued that reciprocity in education implies a way of being together that includes an emphasis on a shared journey, rather than just the accumulation of knowledge. Our project thus strives to resist research power dynamics in favour of research empowerment dynamics in community relationships.

Community engagement can also be done in a creative environment that fosters relationship building as well as support and encouragement for the youth to feel free to self-express. Talking circles to introduce each seasonal round of photovoice after sharing a meal, as well as guardian appreciation feasts, barbeques on the riverbank/lake, and reflections or story-telling by a fire, are among some of the welcoming environments constructed for disseminating what our research entails, all the while relationship building among the youth and families. This supports wider community engagement by providing direct lived experiences for the youth.

The unique combination of our interdisciplinary team has also allowed for some atypical skills to be of service to the furthering of the mission statements of fellow community organizations. Kelley Bird-Naytowhow has experience and training in conducting sharing circles to provide a safe space for youth and young adults who face challenging and even severe living environments. His sharing circles were, and are being held in the comfortable meeting room on Friday evenings within inner-city Saskatoon. Bird-Naytowhow is also involved with STR8 UP, a local community organization in Saskatoon that aids and supports ex-gang members and strengthens men, with the help of women participants as well, to become nurturing and present fathers.

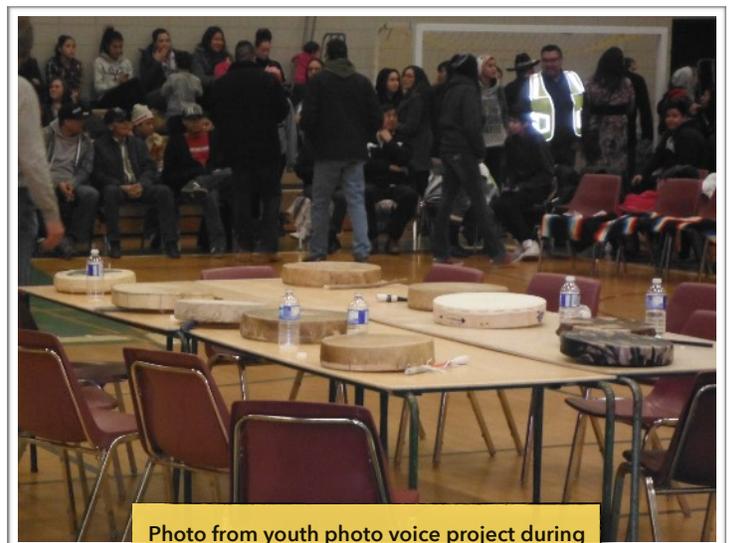
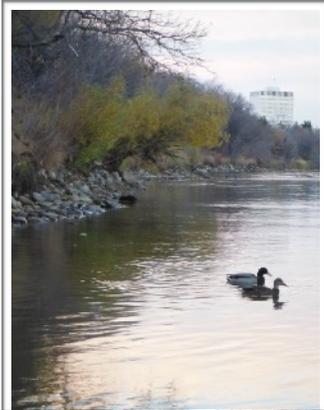


Photo from youth photo voice project during a Round Dance in Saskatoon

Tamara Pearl has previous training in archaeology and used her contacts with the Saskatchewan Archaeology Society (SAS) to help run Archaeology Fridays in the afternoon at the WBYL. Groups of children between the ages of 6 to 13 came to various events for seven Fridays over the summer. This included field trips to local sites such as Eagle Creek, two afternoons at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, and the Grace Adams site located at St. Mary's, a core neighbourhood elementary school. The SAS contributed by explaining some sites located near

Batoche, and brought the Archaeocaravan filled with interactive games and activities that explains pre-Contact and Contact history of the First Nations and fur-trading Europeans.

These involvements of the research assistants lending their talents to community partners enriched the services already in place for youth in the Saskatoon core neighbourhoods, instead of creating unnecessary work or being a burden in the endeavour to deepen the relationships with the community partners and youth participating in the youth resilience project.



Youth photo showing the importance of being connected with nature

Regarding the knowledge translation and exchange aspects of our project, there was communication with local Saskatoon media in preparation of our youth designed art exhibit, which was a culmination of our photovoice project. Being showcased for three weeks at a youth run art gallery in downtown Saskatoon this was a further opportunity where youth could share their perspectives and vision of resilience with a wider community audience. The youth themselves decided what data and pictures to disseminate at this art gallery exhibition, choices of medium, and designed all aspects of the show. The encouragement of local media to cover this art exhibit is important as it communicates a message to the youth and the wider community that their voices are worthy to be validated and that their community leadership can be acknowledged and celebrated. As such, youth participated in several media interviews on radio and television to further share their stories and build empowering experiences. In this way, “Community-based research becomes a place

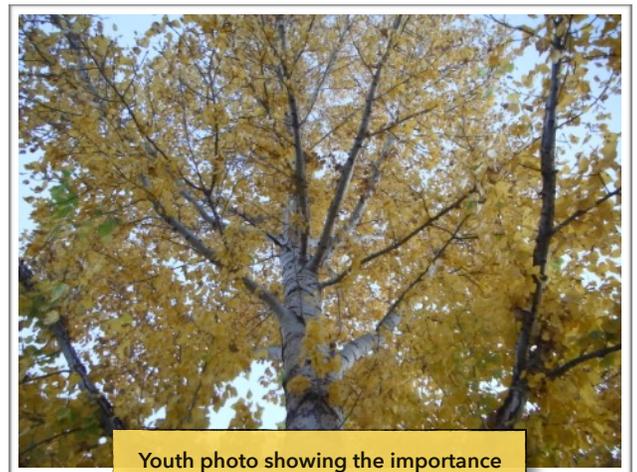
where community partners build analysis and voice, journalists build stronger sociological sensitivity and connection to the community and academy” and where “academics ground themselves in the community and enhance their ability to address a democratic public and its press better” (Diamantopoulos & Usiskin, 2014, p. 85).

### **3. Community ethics**

In an effort to follow ethical protocol for Indigenous research, our team offers an overall reflection on how the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) are acknowledged and how we are committed to youth and community engagement with Indigenous peoples in the urban community contexts of Saskatoon (Baydala et al., 2007; Schnarch, 2004). 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 peoples should be conducted. In order to best understand where youth are coming from, the project had to acknowledge that the research is being conducted in Treaty 6 territory and what this meant for meeting the community as a whole. Because of this land and space, and through various consultations, it was decided that the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) would be the stewards of all “data” that emerge from this research with Indigenous youth, that is, they have ownership and control over the data and decide, through community consultations with youth and researches, the appropriate means of access and possession (see appended letter). It is

acknowledged, however, that the youth themselves, as the main contributors of this project, have the final say in what happens with and follows from their stories about resilience.

As long as the idea that there exists an exchange between any human relationship, there lies a level of respectful guidance and direction according to Indigenous Knowledge. This is to say, if cultural “ethics is not respectful of Aboriginal perspectives it will then be inherently unethical and likely damaging regardless of the character of the intent of that system” (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2002, p. 7). This is about meeting the community members where they are at and expressing that good intent that we were shown and to the fact that we carry that new knowledge from the project is important for we can no longer be ignorant of it. A part of this process comes in the forms of authenticity, as Bull, (2010) states, “Authentic research involving Aboriginal peoples requires attention to ethical conduct throughout the research process” and as such “[E]thics is not a stage of research completed at the start of a project by filling out a generic form and receiving approval from an institution” (p. 17). In this way, official processes like consent for participation in a project are seen as ongoing and are important opportunities for further relationship building and the embodiment of Indigenous Methodologies. We therefore sought to elevate the consent process to that of a “ceremony” and echo Findlay, Ray, and Basualdo, (2014) that “The ceremony of consent was a protracted social process of building relationships, of giving and receiving gifts of food, fun, and friendship long before and after signatures were secured on written consent forms (or oral assent given to readings of the forms)” (p. 40).



Youth photo showing the importance of being connected with nature

Moreover, when it comes to approaching Indigenous research methods it is stated that, “the quality of the consent, not the format, that is relevant” (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2004, p. x); this is to say that again language here is about “consent.” It has been shared to the youth engaged that their stories are seen and heard as holding a form of sacredness. As a research team we are to be diligent on our behalf in order to preserve this act of upholding Indigenous protocol. It should be noted and seen as being respectful, that it is the cultural protocol that is followed in order to make that connection between humans and a spiritual worldview. As researchers of this project, the offering of tobacco was acknowledged and expressed as cultural and ethical protocol, this was knowledge that was given from the knowledge keepers and advice from the elders involved, for it was paramount in allowing that respect and commitment to be evident. This was a prime example of why the exchange of dialogue with the knowledge keepers within a community is much valued (Hatala & Desjardins, 2010). This offering of tobacco was given to every “little elder” and to the traditional advisors or elders that were consulted for our project. This also helped to elevate processes such as consent to have a spiritual aura and become a

ceremonial process (Wilson, 2008). Tobacco offering is a universal protocol among many First Nations communities in Canada. From the Cree perspective, tobacco is understood to establish a communication link between the person and the spiritual world. Tobacco is also the key to the vehicle of traditional knowledge. This also ensures the terms of having that meaningful/respectful relationship continued with Indigenous youth and their community within an urban context (McAdam, 2009). For decades there has been the traditional offering of giving thanks as being a part of the Indigenous ways of life. In addition, the concept of food was one of the protocol measures that were used in ensuring that the intent stays of our project remain true to itself. Before every seasonal photo session, food was offered, as that expression of giving thanks was upheld. Nothing says “I choice to respect you” more than offering food and its nourishments/comfort in some cases behind the food.

The medicine element of smudge was also present before every meal and individual talking circle interview. The Cree smudge ceremony is an act of prayer and of purifying the mind and physical surroundings. It is utilized as a preparation for the individual to enter into a sacred communication or to receive spiritual knowledge and enter into a process of learning. In most Cree cultural ceremonies smudging precedes any activity so that people are prepared to pray in a clean manner and ready for their communication with the Creator and all the relatives (McAdam, 2009). By observing Indigenous cultural and ethical protocol, we offer the youth a choice to engage in spiritual ceremony, such as smudging, if they so choose. As this intent was expressed, the factor of having the power of choice was also shared with the youth for not all youth acknowledged this aspect of smudge. Again, the rationale behind the medicine of smudge comes from the idea that in order to conduct research, one must first see it as being ceremony (Wilson, 2008). The medicines allow for that safe ethical space that provides a haven where Western science and Indigenous knowledge meet and exchange methodologies. This is to say that each individual youth engaged in the research process is free to exchange ideas and thoughts on their distinct worldviews with the opportunity to understand the voice and intellect of the other (Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffrey, 2004). Again, the choice to not engage with the smudge or other forms of Indigenous Knowledge was respected; this was optional yet we acknowledged that it was important to share this aspect of Cree culture openly. Overall, this was a positive and important aspect of our project as the youth identities as Indigenous peoples were recognized and honoured throughout the research process.



#### **4. Indigenous knowledge's (IK)**

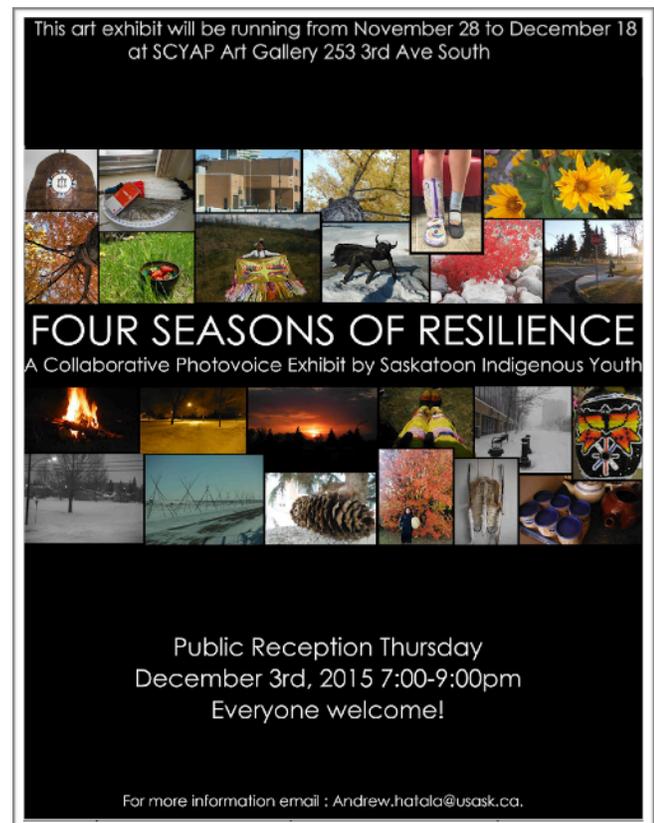
Working with Indigenous knowledge and understanding that it is circular in nature, we felt the need to acknowledge the offering of giving thanks that has been expressed within Canadian Indigenous culture for hundreds of years. This is to state that within an Indigenous perspective,

our dually responsibility/accountability is to see research and relationship as a ceremony and what is accompanied with this. This is to acknowledge the relationship of “Mino-Pimatisiwin” or “The good way of life” and how this may look, smell, feel or tastes from the youths stories of their experience (Hart, 2002). Healthy relationships have always been explored and have been the focal point of First Nations existence.

Within these known relationships, such ceremony/teachings have come across as acknowledging the “Changes of Seasons”. This is where the marking of giving thanks for the gifts each season has to offer, for it is believed that there is an interconnection amongst the direction of growth within the human developmental cycles within each season. With this understanding, our project decided to capture the four seasons with the methodology of photovoice and the narrative sharing circle storytelling interviews. Thus, we ended up doing four sessions of photovoice where youth had cameras and were invited to take pictures of objects related to resilience in their lives. After each of the rounds, the youth were then invited into a talking circle interview format to share stories and experiences of their photos and what they meant to them. This allowed us to capture changes in perspectives across the seasons as well as to observe overall themes of resilience that may be specific to each season.

The knowledge of the four seasons implies a direct impact on ones attitudes/behaviour (Kaiser et al., 1999). Indigenous knowledge have shared that the seasons have always played an important role in the lives of Indigenous peoples and the course of development more generally. As Battiste, (2002) shares, “Individual development is not predetermined or based simply on cause and effect. Rather, inherent talents and capabilities are animated when people are faced with life decisions and situations” (p.15). This process also coincides with the teachings of the Medicine Wheel (Bopp et al., 1984; Nabigon, 2010), teachings that state that each quadrant (emotional, mental, physical and spiritual) and what is enveloped within each quadrant, would be impacted over time such that the narrative aspect of an individual’s story would express changes that reflect qualities of the different seasons. This also shows to the research that it takes a strong bond between elements (seasons) in our lives in order to live a balanced life

The intention of our project was to learn about the implementation and promotion of Indigenous knowledge. From this perspective, the importance is stressed upon having participation of the community as a whole, for it ensures that those processes and protocols of how Indigenous people have operated for hundreds of years is respected and followed. By followed we mean we pay respect to our ways of doing things and our ways of including community. This emerged



within our project through the dialogue exchanged with the knowledge keepers, elders, and the community members such as the community partners involved. This alone helped influence the outcome of any decision.

### **Project Outputs & Impacts:**

The first Knowledge Translation activity for this project occurred 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 were shared during this three-week arts installation. This art installation produced several media reports on the event and the links are posted below for reference.

<http://www.thinkupstream.net/emberstoflames>

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/youth-resilience-artists-taking-over-cbc-sask-instagram-1.3343247>

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/indigenous-youth-in-saskatoon-find-strength-in-photography-project-1.3334098>

In addition to this art exhibit, there were 4 conferences that were presented at where the research team and youth participants shared some of the findings and experiences from this project with the wider community:

Hatala, A. R., Bird-Naytowhow, K., Pearl, T. (2016). *Metaphors, Meaning Making & Memory: Exploring connections with nature as a strategy of resilience among urban Indigenous youth*. Paper presentation at the 2016 Indigenous Health Symposium through the Centre for Aboriginal Health Research (CAHR) in Winnipeg, MB, Canada.

Hatala, A. R., Bird-Naytowhow, K., Pearl, T. (2016). *Resilience & Reconciliation: Building research capacity to integrate traditional knowledge into art-based research with Indigenous youth in Saskatoon*. Paper presentation at the 2016 Reconciliation through research: Fostering Mayo-Pimatisiwin / Canadian Indigenous / Native Studies Association (CINSA) & Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN), Regina, Canada.

Hatala, A. R., Bird-Naytowhow, K., & Pearl, T. (2015). *Time, Trauma and Resilience: Concepts of the Future and Well-being among inner-city Aboriginal youth*. Paper presentation at the 2015 Resilience Research Center Conference in Halifax, NS, Canada.

Hatala, A. R., Bird-Naytowhow, K., & Pearl, T. (2015). *Identifying strategies of resilience and well-being among inner-city Aboriginal youth*. Paper presentation at the Aboriginal Education Research Forum 2015 “Enacting Engaging Research methods for Capacity

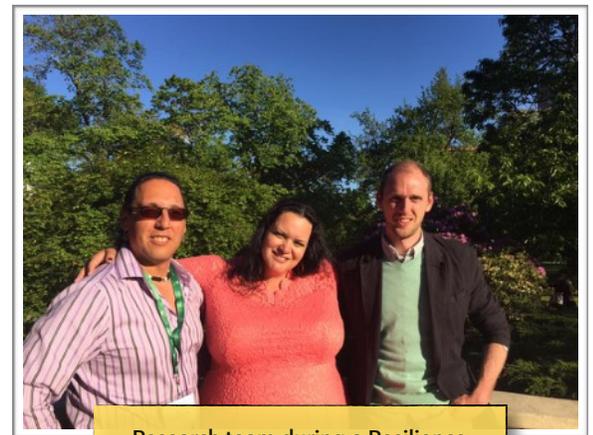
Building: Community Indigenous Environmental Wellness for Individual Strengths” in Winnipeg, MB, Canada.

There are also two academic publications from this research that have submitted for publication. We expect to complete two other publications over the coming year.

Hatala, A. R., Bird-Naytowhow, K. & Pearl, T., Judge, A., Sjoblom, E., & Leibenberg, L. (submitted). “I have strong hope for the future”: Time orientations and resilience among Canadian Indigenous youth. *Child Development*.

Hatala, A. R., Bird-Naytowhow, K. & Pearl, T., Judge, A. (submitted). Ceremonies of Relationship: Engaging urban Indigenous youth in community-based research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.

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. 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.



Research team during a Resilience conference in Halifax

### **Capacity Building:**

A primary concern of our research was to affect meaningful participation in knowledge creation that is conducive to building healthy community environments, social cohesion, and well-being. As such, we specifically learned 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. In this way, the lead researcher (Hatala) provided mentorship to two youth in the community (Bird Naytowhow & Pearl) who were hired as research assistants and assisted in the photovoice project and in the detailed qualitative interviews. All of the other youth in the project were afforded similar opportunities to build research skills.

As members on the CARC, parents of youth and other community members also got to learn about the research process and help shape the decisions made along the way. Having parents of youth on the CARC was particularly important and helped us have a wider reach of participation

when it came time for the SCYAP art exhibit. Aboriginal parents from the community also helped to make soup and bannock for several research meetings that occurred with the youth and also provided transportation to-and-from different meetings and events. Several pictures that were printed were given to parents as a thanks for their involvement and support of the project.

There were also two elders that helped guide this project and were also on the CARC. Their insight and knowledge was an important sense of strength and also helped connect youth to traditional aspects of Aboriginal culture throughout the duration of the project.



Hatala and youth participant after a CBC radio interview regarding the photo exhibit

### Budget details

The overall budget for this project consisted of several areas. First, two Aboriginal youth were hired as part-time Research Assistants (Bird-Naytowhow & Pearl) to support all research activities. This worked out to about \$6000.00 each over the course of a year. Approximately \$1000.00 was used for research related costs and food for meetings and approximately \$2000.00 was used for printing costs related to the art exhibit and photo exhibition. Finally, approximately, \$5000.00 was used for travel to bring youth from the project to the four conferences listed above. This final aspect of the research was crucial so that the youth participants are able to take the lead in “telling their story” and building capacity towards these ends.

Salaries to students (including benefits)	Canadian and Permanent Resident		Foreign	
a) Bachelor's	\$ -	\$ -		\$ 12,000 -
b) Master's	\$ -	\$ -		\$ -
c) Doctorate	\$ -	\$ -		\$ -
Salaries to non-students (including benefits)				
a) Postdoctoral	\$ -	\$ -		\$ -
b) Others	\$ -	\$ -		\$ 2,000 -
Professional and technical services/contracts				\$ -
Equipment (including powered vehicles)				\$ -
Materials, supplies & other expenditures				\$ 1,000 -
Travel				\$ 5,000 -
<b>Total expenditures</b>				<b>\$20,000</b>

## **Conclusions**

The objective of this project as identified by Indigenous youth participants was to identify sources of resilience and positive health strategies that can inform early intervention theory and policy to promote mental and community health in Saskatoon and other Canadian urban contexts. In collaboration with community partners, youth, and local elders, the operating principle behind this study was that the resources, knowledge, and capabilities required to support the health and well-being of Indigenous youth are already present within inner-city contexts and young people themselves.

Throughout this entire process there were several perspectives and positions we learned about that fostered positive engagement with the urban Indigenous youth in the project. These included: 1) our relationship building with youth; 2) our wider community engagement; 3) our approach to community ethics and cultural protocols; and 4) our use and employment of Indigenous forms of knowledge. These practices and principles of engagement allowed us to foster an “ethical space” (Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffery, 2004) where the embers of youth resilience and well-being could be fanned into flames.

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