



UAKN
Urban Aboriginal
Knowledge Network

RCdU
Réseau de connaissances des
Autochtones en milieu urbain

RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY

Prairie Research Centre

Name of Project:

Food is our language - Reconnecting Youth to Culture through Indigenous Food Sovereignty: An exploration into the role of youth engaging in traditional food and cultural skills impacts cultural identity and self-esteem

Research Start-up Summary and Abstract:

Food and culture are indelibly linked. Cultural food, from growing and harvesting to preparing requires a connection to traditional culture. For inner city youth, it can be challenging to have access not only to cultural food, but to the skills and knowledge around the process of acquiring and processing it. This research will explore how prolonged participation in a variety of land based and urban activities centered around traditional food skills and grounded in principles of Indigenous Food Sovereignty impacts the self-esteem and cultural identity of Indigenous youth living in Winnipeg's inner city. Specifically, we will be exploring: the relationship that Indigenous youth in Winnipeg's inner city have with their cultural food; how participation in cultural activities centered around cultural food impacts their identity and how they value themselves as Indigenous youth in the city; and the ways organizations and schools can use principles of Indigenous Food Sovereignty as a basis for cultural identity development and subsequently positive personal development for youth.

Engagement objectives:

Winnipeg has the highest proportion of urban Indigenous people in the country, and youth are increasingly disenfranchised from their own culture and identity. Food is connected to culture, and in urban communities access to traditional food can be further challenged along with the skills associated with growing, harvesting and preparing traditional food. Food insecurity certainly exists in urban centres for Aboriginal communities. In 2013, we conducted preliminary research which found that Aboriginal people in the city experienced food insecurity, but were also working towards larger goals of what is being called "Indigenous Food Sovereignty" (IFS) with regards to cultural food specifically (Cidro et al., 2014). The second phase of our project focussed on operationalizing IFS principles to determine whether traditional food skills would result in a change in the relationship to food. Our preliminary analysis has shown indeed when urban Indigenous people are equipped with the skills and knowledge around traditional food, then how they view not only their circumstances around food security shifts, but also the relationship they have with food and their health. Participants indicated that while they appreciated learning about these skills through participating in action based research, they felt that these were skills that had they learned earlier in their life, could have (a) resulted in changes in eating behavior and subsequently improved health, and (b) reduced food insecurity for themselves and their household, and (c) had an enhanced understanding of their own traditional culture, which has its own set of positive social and spiritual benefits. Our participants encouraged us to examine the role of traditional food skills over a longer period of time with Indigenous youth in the inner-city. Food is conduit to culture. As one of our participants noted, "food is our language". When we come together to harvest, prepare and

consume cultural food, it is not merely out of a need to provide physiological sustenance, but in fact something more significant occurs. An extensive search of the literature points to a lack of discussion within an urban context, however the following concepts provide an important foundation for further exploration. This project builds on

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