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Final Report

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

2018

Prairie Research Centre

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

Overview of project & report on

Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network

Prairie Research Centre Call for Proposals 2018

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CIRCLE OF VOICES
2018

1. Introduction:

Gordon Tootoosis Nīkānīwin Theatre (GTNT) was born as a dream among artists Gordon Tootoosis, Tantoo Cardinal, Kenneth Charlette and Dave Pratt while on the set of the movie Big Bear. It was their intent to provide artistic opportunities for Saskatchewan First Nations youth through cultural arts programming. Three years later that dream became reality as the Circle of Voices (COV) program was initiated in 1999 with the primary goal is to increase the self-esteem of Indigenous youth through their engagement in cultural and theatre activities.

The inaugural production was titled, “Truth Hurts,” incorporating themes of cultural identity, the intergenerational impacts of residential schools and family. Since then over 15 program productions have followed, resulting in provincial and national tours, and serving approximately 150 youth. Some of the themes incorporated in COV stories to date include the intergenerational impacts of the residential school experience, racism, parenting, homelessness, crystal meth, gangs, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and abuse. The stories always include a connection to traditional First Nations culture, language and history, and are told in a culturally appropriate and respectful manner that creates cultural understandings and that strengthens community spirit.



The vision of the program is that participating youth build capacity to take responsibility for each production, by mentoring in acting, stage management, design and production assistance; essentially learning all aspects of theatre in the development process. A COV project coordinator, assistant coordinator, elder, theatre professionals, mentors and GTNT staff guide them through this process.

The skills and knowledge that they gain in this project support them in overcoming their unique challenges to achieving their personal and career goals and ambitions.

The primary objective of the COV project is to develop the social and cultural well-being of urban Indigenous youth through a theatrical arts work experience program involving the following:

1. Provide a cultural and artistic experience to Indigenous youth through theatre;
2. Connect Indigenous youth with cultural and artistic community leaders through workshops and mentorships;
3. Establish and maintain partnerships with various agencies, organizations and institutions;
4. Provide a safe and supportive environment for urban Indigenous youth to discover and explore their artistic and cultural identity;
5. Provide youth the opportunity to collaborate on the creation, development and presentation of a one-hour production that connects them to the Saskatoon and Saskatchewan community;
6. To make a connection for youth between the work experience skills they obtain and their own career development goals.



2. The 2017/2018 Circle of Voices Program and Activities:

Starting in September 2017 the COV program coordinator, Marcel Petit, began recruitment and advertising for the program. Initially there were 14 applications of youth interested in the program. Over the course of the next several months 5 youth had to leave for various reasons eventually ending up with 9 COV youth completing the program in March of 2018. Starting in October, the COV program also benefited from the support of Ernie Poundmaker as a Cultural Advisor, bringing a calmness and focus on cultural teachings.

The 2018 COV production was entitled *Pimātsiwin* and is a story that revolves around a young girl named Autumn, who is experiencing her berry fast and wished to learn more about her family and culture. The story involves the themes of food, land, and language. The script is part of a wonderful partnership involving three partner organizations: Gordon Tootoosis Nīkāniwin Theatre (GTNT); CHEP Good Foods and Wanuskewin Heritage Park. The play production ran between March 8th to 16th with 10 showings that the youth supported for family, friends, and community members.

The youth we encouraged to take full ownership of the *Pimātsiwin* production, and were intimately involved with many aspects of its creation. They were also the actors and technical staff of the final production which they perform over a ten-day period. A week and a half run in Saskatoon followed by a one-week tour of reserve and remote communities will teach the students a variety of important life skills including personal budgeting, nutrition, work ethic, taking responsibility and respect for themselves and others.

In addition to the main theatrical performance, the COV program includes three other areas of activity that together provide the youth with a positive and transformational experience:

Activity 1: Theatre arts and skill development. GTNT alumni and professional theatre artists share skills, knowledge and work experiences through an orientation week and a series of workshop presentations in theatre disciplines such as voice, movement, acting, set and prop design, costume design, soundscapes, lighting design, playwriting and stage management. The purpose of these activities was to allow the youth to explore all aspects of theatre arts so they can decide what their contribution will be to the COV play production. They develop group cohesion and build self-confidence as they realize the vast potential of creating their own play.

Activity 2: Cultural development. An Indigenous elder/cultural leader will share knowledge and teachings of Indigenous culture, language, events and ceremonies. Youth will also be mentored and supported in this area by GTNT and COV alumni who can relate their own experiences of re-connecting with their cultural heritage. The cultural element also informs the playwriting process through its storytelling component. Through regular weekly talking circles during the duration of



the program, the youth were also encouraged to make connections between the elder's teachings and their everyday life, and how this cultural element can be integrated into their play and also their day-to-day lives beyond the play.

Activity 3: Career and educational development. Throughout the duration of the COV program, the youth were asked to use the skills they developed in their theatre work experience to help them identify their interests in the workforce and/or in the educational systems. Through personal and career profiling, the youth gained a stronger sense of employability and what's required to set achievable short and long-term career goals. The relationships they develop in the COV project support the youth beyond end date of the project.

3. Partnerships and Community Involvement:

GTNT works in partnership with organizations, agencies and institutions that recognize and support the cultural arts as an appropriate means to develop youth and communities. The COV program has proven to be integral to empowering and motivating youth to overcome barriers to education and employment. GTNT and our current partners recognize the program's innovative means to addressing issues that are relevant to youth and the communities we serve.

Given the complexity of the Circle of Voices project and the diverse sectors the program reaches, we are able to access funding and develop partnerships with various agencies, organizations and institutions to support the delivery of the program.

The location of project activities was shared between the Studio 914 at 914 20th Street West and our partners at Core Neighbourhood Youth Co-op (CNYC). GTNT also provided office space for the COV Project Coordinator while CNYC provided space for the elder, an elder/cultural room, kitchen facilities for lunches and a classroom space. Program activities were carried out Monday to Friday from 4pm to 9pm daily, mainly at either E.D. Feehan or Oskayak High Schools, with mentorships occurring at the U of S drama department. The youth also spent at least one session each week with the elder (two hours or more in the first few weeks as needed) in a circle where they can share their issues and receive cultural teachings. Time was also given at the end of each day for the youth to write in their personal journals.



When script development began, a professional dramaturge and playwright took over leading the COV program and process. When rehearsals begin the students were asked to commit to full day rehearsals on Saturdays and Sundays, and Mondays will be their day off. The time commitment was gradually increased as the workload for the participant's increases. As the creative process began, the youth became more engaged and required more time to complete their work.

4. UAKN Research Process and COV Program Evaluation:

In the winter and spring of 2017, Dr. Andrew Hatala and then Executive Director of GTNT, Oseims Isbister-Bear began having conversations about a collaborative and community-based research project looking into resilience and wellness outcomes for those youth who participated in the COV program. The early vision and intent of these conversations was to hear the stories and experiences of youth participating in the COV program and how that contributed to their health and wellness during and throughout their participation in the process. As such, the intent was to focus on strength and help to demonstrate not only the importance of arts based theater programs for inner-city Indigenous youth, but also to help counter negative stereotypes that can exist in the wider Saskatoon context about these populations and inner-city neighbourhoods. Dr. Hatala and Osemis had a working relationship over the previous 4 years and naturally worked well together based on their shared vision and care for the youth within the inner-city neighbourhoods. These conversations eventually crystallized into a successful, jointly developed, funding application to the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network UAKN in 2017 to support the aims and vision of the research opportunity.



Youth drama workshops and rehearsals for Pimatisiwin

4.1 Intended Audiences. The audiences of this research are diverse.

First, in our many conversations and consultations with local residents over the years, urban Indigenous peoples living in and around the core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon are interested in this kind of research insofar as it highlights positive strategies and stories of successful living and factors that foster resilience among youth.

Second, positive stories of youth resilience generated from the qualitative interviews will also help to shape and contribute to positive discourses about the inner-city neighbourhoods and Indigenous youth that will be relevant to the general public of Saskatoon. By highlighting positive stories of resilience and strength we intend to counter negative stereotypes to some extent by providing examples of positive Indigenous youth development, achievement, and adaptation.

Third, academic scholars and researchers interested in the factors that contribute to positive developmental outcomes and resilience among adolescent populations will also be an audience of this research. Particularly, the Resilience Research Centre (RRC) is partnered with us in this project and interested in the research results.

Finally, civic or community based organizations offering youth programs, such as the CNYC and GTNT, are interested in learning how to shape their programming around factors known to foster processes of resilience in or among inner-city Indigenous youth. As such, the results of this research aims to identify sources of resilience and positive mental or community health strategies that can inform early intervention theory and policy to promote the mental or community health and wellness of Indigenous youth in Saskatoon, and other Canadian urban contexts.

4.2 Background Literature Review and Research Rational. There is considerable evidence that the health of Indigenous peoples—First Nations, Inuit, and Métis—living in Canada is disproportionately worse than the general Canadian population, both across the lifespan and most notably among youth (ages 16-25) [1-2]. Indigenous youth populations in Canada are one of the fastest growing, with 50% of Indigenous peoples being under the age of 25 years and are increasingly relocating to urban centers where they directly confront continued systemic inequities (i.e., social, economic, environmental, etc.) that undermine their health. Canadian Indigenous youth also bear the brunt of the intergenerational effects of the collective traumas experienced by previous generations of family and communities [3-4]. Indeed, a large body of health research indicates a link between the historical and contemporary impacts of colonization and the residential schools systems in Canada, and the high rates of alcohol and substance abuse, interpersonal violence, suicides, and mental illness and disorder experienced by Indigenous youth today [5-6].

Although not without its toll, it is a testament to the strength and resilience of Canadian Indigenous peoples that they endured the difficult history of colonization. As a process that supports health outcomes, resilience is generally defined as an ability, both at individual and community levels, to do well or even thrive in contexts of difficulty [7-9]. Much of the research on resilience in Indigenous communities recognizes that traditional forms of Indigenous culture can support goals of healing, decolonization, and resilience [10, 11]. Our own previous work looking into the relationships between resilience and Indigenous youth health and wellness testifies to the importance of culture and spirituality in aspects of and programs for health promotion [12-14]. Health Canada similarly states that “A stronger emphasis on prevention and the promotion of culture-based strengths (e.g., activities that facilitate an understanding of a First Nations worldview, language, and culture) can enhance the skills and knowledge of individuals, families, and communities, thereby improving wellness at all levels” [15, p. 15]. In these contexts, suicide rates fall, fewer children are taken into care, school completion rates rise, and rates of intentional and unintentional injury decrease [16].

Previous research involving arts-based research methodologies with Indigenous youth also supports resilience by building and re-establishing positive social networks, developing capabilities and sense of self-efficacy, addressing and make sense of issues of social marginalization and racism, and forming connections to traditional modes of identity and cultural ways of living [17, 18]. Dramatizations, storytelling, and community theatre, are a few of the creative activities that have been employed to facilitate Indigenous youth storying of their experiences, social protagonism, and resilience [19]. In addition to offering youth an opportunity for self-expression and self-exploration, arts-based methodologies can foster creative spaces of decolonization, where Indigenous youth can practice making decisions to determine their own actions and the actions they take as part of a collective. Youth involvement in theatre performances and workshops, for example, has proven effective in giving youth a place to depart from the normal day-to-day interactions where they can be subject to strong pressure from their peers to conform to certain behavioural norms and at the same time practice new ways of being and interacting [17]. This form of safe practice allows youth to become consciously aware of the consequences of their actions, both to themselves and to others [18].

The processes of social marginalization, racism, and discrimination associated with centuries of colonization affect not only the mind of Indigenous youth but their body as well. As Goulet et al., observe, “There is a gradual process of atrophy as well as wounding, or scarring, of the body compounded by the current and historical traumas that Indigenous youth face” [17, p. 94]. Thus, decolonization and arts-based methodologies drawing on insights from drama and theatre can help to engage the body directly in the process of healing, health promotion, and decolonization [20], and as such there is evidence to suggest that arts-based and culturally informed theatre programs with Indigenous youth can foster greater resilience and well-being [21].

4.3 Research Questions. Since there are extensive data detailing the health inequities experienced by Canadian Indigenous populations, the goal of our research was to move beyond descriptions of Indigenous health inequities towards examinations of the GTNT COV theatre program and its impact on the resilience and well-being of Indigenous youth in the Saskatoon 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 well-being 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.

4.4 Research Themes. The proposed research questions fall within the identified UAKN themes of Social Cohesion, and particularly community well-being, and to some extent around the related theme of Human Development, and the needs and outcomes of individuals and families. Resilience is commonly defined as a pattern of positive adaptation in the midst of or following significant stress, adversity or risk [1-2]. Resilient individuals, then, are those who do not simply avoid negative outcomes associated with life difficulties, but also, and more importantly, are characterized with a sense of flexibility that allows them to demonstrate adequate or more than adequate developmental outcomes in the face of distress or difficulty. Perspectives of resilience emerging from research with Indigenous populations also considers the whole state of the person when describing well-being—a balance among physical, cultural, emotional and spiritual domains as well as seeing the individual in relation to community, cultural or ecological contexts [3]. Indigenous perspectives of resilience move beyond a focus on the process of returning to a previous state (i.e., springing back), and instead are embracing the idea of transformation and adaptation into something new. From these perspectives resilience is not only welcomed in Indigenous communities as a focus on strength as opposed to deficit and disorder, but also because it moves attention away from an exceptional quality of some fortunate individuals, toward the natural, human capacity to navigate life well [3-4]. The proposed research builds on these perspectives and questions what strategies or practices of resilience that are developed through participation in a 6 month long Indigenous focused theatre program. The knowledge generated from this project can be used to foster social cohesion and community well-being among these populations and contexts, while also adding strength and support to existing community programs and capacities for promoting positive youth development and healthy outcomes.

4.5 Research Contributions. The primary research questions will be addressed within the inner-city core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan where there are high proportions of First Nations and Métis populations. Resilience science generates learning about what positive adaptive processes exist among different populations and contexts and how they can be applied to diverse situations of social distress and difficulty. The knowledge generated from resilience science can be used to help support and design protective implementation programs for inner-city youth [2]. In this way, resilience science is also transformatory in nature, since it is about learning what kinds of community or social environments and individual characteristics bring about resilience and on learning how to

implement these characteristics on a wider scale by impacting change in social structures and policies. Importantly, this is how resilience research can align with Indigenous research paradigms and objectives [3, 4-5] as it is focused on action research or learning about how the knowledge generated from the research can promote societal change and implement positive social structures and supports [6].

Much has been learned about improving the health of Indigenous youth by exploring strategies of resilience [7-10]. Research on resilience in Indigenous communities recognizes that traditional forms of culture can support goals of healing, decolonization, and wellness [11, 12]. Our own previous work looking into the relationships



between resilience and Indigenous youth health testifies to the importance of culture and spirituality in health promotion [13-14]. Although important, the evidence base of resilience is limited to assisting youth cope with existing health inequities that are perpetuated by distal and intermediate social determinants of health [15]. It is for this reason that the current project builds on previous resilience science by examining the relationship between resilience and arts-based theatre projects.

4.6 Research Approach. The health inequities experienced by Indigenous youth in Canada are connected to a political, societal, and historical legacy of colonialism and therefore needs to be addressed within a transformative framework emphasizing social justice and the progress of health equity for all people as a universal human right [22-23]. 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 [24]. 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 [24]. 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 [25-26]. 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 [13, 22, 27].

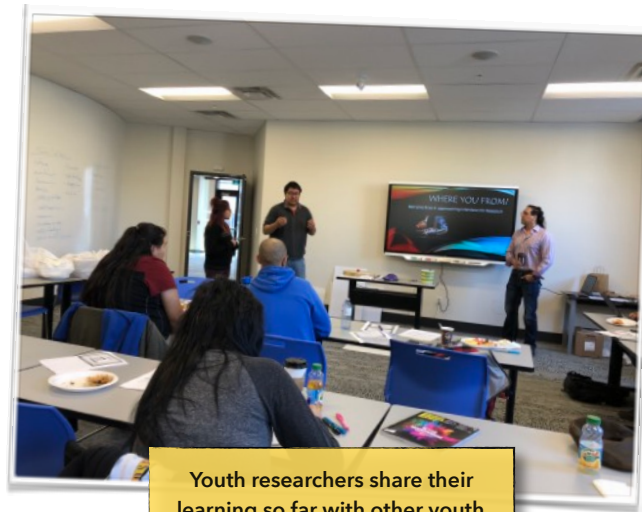
4.7 Ethical Principles. The lead researcher (Dr. Hatala) has previously lived in Pleasant Hill, one of the five core neighbourhoods in Saskatoon, for a period of over eight years. During that time, he has become involved in the community and gained volunteer experience in activities with local schools and organizations. After the completion of his CIHR post-doctorate project at the University of Saskatchewan, that also involved funding from UAKN, Dr. Hatala since moved to Winnipeg to assume an Assistant Professor position in the Community Health Sciences Department at the University of Manitoba. There in Winnipeg, Dr. Hatala continues to develop relationships with Indigenous individuals and community organizations.

This project therefore builds on positive relationships with Indigenous individuals, communities and organizations, and has been identified through years of experience and volunteerism within the core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon. To further ensure the specific aspects of the research process are guided by Indigenous values and protocols, and Indigenous elders from Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods. GTNT were partners at the conception of this research and continued to guide and inform the process throughout its duration. The principles of OCAP were discussed with and approved by GTNT and this organization will serve as the holders of all data generated in this research process.



In terms of the narrative interviews with COV youth, there were no anticipated physical, or economic risks posed to the participants and few expected emotional and social risks. The nature of the research is on resilience and positive coping abilities and strategies. Therefore, most of the interview topics (questions attached) focus on strengths and positive aspects in the lives of Indigenous youth. During in-depth interviews, however, participants may recall stressful life situations, which may trigger uncomfortable memories. To protect and support the mental well-being of youth participants, a mental health support team already working at GTNT will be referred to youth who participate in the project. In addition to this mental health support team, the Indigenous elders at GTNT will also be available to respond to mental health and social wellness needs that emerge throughout the research process. Part of the funds from this grant application will go towards paying these individuals a regular monthly wage to be available throughout the duration of the research project. Where GTNT staff members, family, or schoolteachers determine that risk is heightened through participation in this research, youth will not be invited to participate in the research. In all aspects of this research we will follow TCPS-II—Chapter 9, the principles of Indigenous Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) of research products, UAKN ethical principles, and local guidance from our Indigenous elders, community partners.

4.8 Capacity Building. Capacity building opportunities will be specifically provided to two older Indigenous youth and former graduates of the COV program at GTNT who will assist in the generation of qualitative interviews. These two youth, in turn, were supported by another local Indigenous Research Associate, Kelley Bird-Naytowhow, who has extensive experience and knowledge of community-based research methods with Indigenous peoples. One goal of this project, therefore, was to build capacity in local youth to be the leaders of the research process and also to provide economic and career advancement opportunities. The design of this project incorporates a “train the trainer” approach. This means that the youth research assistants received hands-on training for qualitative research methods and body mapping techniques. Collaborating youth will gain field training research experience that will allow them to experience the multi-faceted nature of social research and research methods, and explore how field-based or community research demands constant flexibility and awareness of context. This hands-on experience will provide youth research assistants with the opportunity to interact with a variety of research participants, assume leadership roles in various aspects of the project, while simultaneously being open to the guidance of “the trainer”, further enhancing their research skills. All transcriptions of interviews will be completed by youth research assistants further enhancing their skills and knowledge of research processes. Learning about the processes of community accompaniment, about how to develop research capacity in younger generations to generate local knowledge and how to create spaces where youth can contribute to research objectives, goals, and outcomes, is a central part of the research project and its ethical parameters. At the same time, our working relationships with youth and our Indigenous community partners, afford equal opportunities of capacity building in community engagement for the lead researchers (Dr. Hatala & Bird-Naytowhow) and collaborators.



This research is also designed to ensure skill development of all Indigenous youth participants. Specifically, participants will receive introductory training and gain skills in community and body-mapping as an arts-based research tool in the data-gathering phases of this project. By participating in this research, Indigenous youth were exposed to and received training in social science research. It is anticipated that this exposure may result in increased enrolment in undergraduate studies in related fields. In the knowledge translation and dissemination component, youth participants had the opportunity to contribute to social change within their communities and will learn about translating their data (i.e., stories) to matters of interest in the community. Specifically, through their knowledge dissemination and exchange activities, Indigenous youth participants will gain skills for public speaking, take the lead in “telling their story,” civic engagement, and community advocacy. Three of these young people have also now been hired on with Dr. Hatala on newly CIHR funded projects continuing to explore the processes of resilience and wellness within inner-city neighbourhoods of Saskatoon.

4.9 Research Methods. During the first weeks of the COV program, all 11 youth were invited to collaborate in this research process. Eight youth ended up participating in the end. The lead researcher (Bird-Naytowhow) and youth research assistants met with the youth participants to explain the nature of the research prior to the first interviews. Consent was obtained by the legal guardian and youth themselves. There is enough research evidence present to reasonably assume that youth ages 14-24 have the cognitive ability to provide consent for their own participation in the research process. If

it is deemed appropriate or more useful, the researchers will take time to carefully read the consent form to each participant and parent or legal guardian. All aspects of this research will be approved by the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board.

After the completion of each interview (16 interviews in total), the lead researcher and the youth research assistants described in more detail the nature of the research and potential benefits. These sessions will also be audio tapped and transcribed with the help of local youth. A debriefing form was also handed out to each participant with contact information for the research and additional information about resilience and the research topic.



After the first round of interviews (8 interviews in total), youth were invited to a workshop session to create arts-based body maps [28]. This process involves the youth drawing a map of their body to help them reflect on their embodied experiences of living as an Indigenous youth in an urban context. The individual body asset maps will also form part of the artistic products of the project that can be used in later Knowledge Translation / Exchange (KT/E) activities. The body map exercise was done to help the youth to develop a greater awareness of Indigenous identity in relation to their environment, including critical reflections on the forces that operate in their social environments and how those forces might impact them.

After the production of the individual body maps, the youth research assistants and coordinators of the project will meet with the youth for a second round of one-on-one interviews related to the body-maps (8 interviews in total). These interviews and focus groups will occur at the beginning of the youths' engagement with the COV program and then at the end as well in order to examine changes over time based on their experience in the program.

4.10 Qualitative Analysis: All project qualitative data underwent a hybrid inductive and deductive thematic analysis strategy that will assess differences between the beginning and end points of the program looking for changes and comparisons across time. Individual case studies will also be produced to examine changes over time for each youth participant [29]. Academic and Indigenous community members will together be involved in all stages of analysis.

5. Results and Initial themes from Youth Interviews:

The results of the 16 in-depth interviews with youth in the COV program can be seen within two broad overall themes, and then several themes related to the experiences with the COV program in particular:

Table 1: Outline of major themes

1. Broad Sociocultural factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Experiences of difficulty b) Concepts or perceptions of health and wellness c) Spiritual and cultural health and identity d) Living the “good life”
2. Aspects of the Circle of Voices (COV) program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Reasons for joining the COV program b) Primary learnings from the COV program c) General experiences of the COV program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Moving on to better things ii. Development of personal qualities and skills iii. A creative outlet iv. Opening up and practicing Indigenous Identities v. Escaping difficulties or stressors in life vi. “Feels like home” – bonding and belonging vii. Self-expression and comfort viii. “Getting it off your chest” – practice of culture

5.1 Experiences of difficulty:

In all of the interviews with youth, there are detailed descriptions of life as an Indigenous young person growing up in an inner-city neighbourhood. The main themes from these stories and experiences detail troubles with homelessness, poverty, frequent moving from home to home preventing long term friendships to develop, experiences with alcohol or drugs in the community, troubles with family life or siblings, gang activity, racism and discrimination from within and from without the Indigenous community, among others. Below are some sample quotes from the youth stories that highlight some of these main themes.

Like I grew up – my mom, she was an alcoholic. And I kind of went around and just made sure like I was okay. I could tell that it affected my older siblings and my younger siblings, but her – I mean I guess her addictions never really like affected me negatively. I mean I guess, kind of, but not as much as it affected them.

I get a lot of anxiety when, like, I'm around people that make me feel really unsafe, and then I just, like, leave wherever I am and I go, like, to my auntie's, or my two other cousins. It the drunk people. People that are on, like, drugs, like abusing drugs, yeah. So those ... those are usually the people that make me very unsafe.

And white people, they just see my skin colour, especially when I had long hair. And yeah, especially I mean I was at – I was seeing a blade team on this past Saturday and I was in a suit and I my backpack because I was going to change after. Then there was a big white guy, the security guard. He said, “Why do you need the backpack?” He’s like, “Got to do protocol.” Like just open the bag, show me what’s in it. But he gave me a hard time just because I had a backpack and I was brown. And like I had my sweater, a shirt, and papers. That was about it. Like school papers. And he goes, “Why do you need the backpack?” “Like I have to change. Do you see these clothes?” He’s like, “Why do you need to change?” “Because just to change.” I was like, geeez not again.



Youth body mapping exercise

For about seven years all together I was probably in Regina, but I moved all over Saskatchewan, from PA, Yorkton, Saskatoon, even Edmonton. I’ve pretty much moved all my life, so I haven’t been really into one place except for the past two – I guess I’ve been in Saskatoon for the past three years, but I’ve kind of been couch surfing for the past three years. So yeah.

I guess it was like me growing up. I’ve always had a difficulty just from me – I’ve always been like alone. I’ve never really been able to like do things with my family because I was so different from my family. All my family are like – they’re like all outgoing and like do stuff by just doing that. And I grew up kind of like excluded from that, I guess. Become, by growing up as a middle child, like I was kind of excluded from everything.

There was the education because I remember going to reserve schools and their education was like really easy. And as soon as I transferred to white schools it was like difficult. Every now again growing up I’d face discrimination mostly from white people, like being followed around at stores or just ignorant people, yeah.

I can think of a lot of times that I went through a lot of difficulty. I don’t know, I just have like ... ever since I was eighteen I think or seventeen I have been booted out, I’ve been kicked out by my ... yeah, by my parents. And then after that I’ve just been couch surfing. And a lot of the times that, you know, I thought I can rely on my, like, family members then they were, like, actually the one who disappointed me the most where ... to the point where, like, I only ask help from my friends and ... yeah, so just ... yeah.

5.2 Concepts or perceptions of health and wellness:

Despite challenges that the youth may face or may have faced growing up, all of the youth in the COV program express resilience and strong concepts of health and wellness. Most of the descriptions about health involve stories of the medicine wheel ideas where balance between

physical, mental, emotional and spiritual domains is seen as the main factors related to health and well-being. Below are a few quotes from the youth interviews on this theme.

Health is like just to find balance within yourself. So, the way I see it to have a healthy community and self, there needs to be healthy people so you need to have that balance within yourself of physical self your mental self, emotional and physical. and yeah spiritual that's the one too. Yeah, having balance in all those four aspects within yourself and then you're able to be more effective at helping the community become healthy.

Well actually I walk to school back and forth to my home, sometimes I take the stairs I guess if the elevator's too crowded. Let's see for my mental self, I don't know I like to think a lot if that's good. I guess just talking to others, just letting all the things that are in my mind out. As for the emotional self, just being present at the moment, any emotions that I go through kind of like I do like process, like a small processing exercise. It helps me deal with the emotions rather than keep holding them in. And the spiritual self, when I have time I'll go to sweat lodges and when I can I'll smudge and pray, so yeah.

Emotionally – I feel like you've got to have a balance of some things. If you're getting out of hand or something, you've just got to tell yourself, like, okay, no, just chill out. Spiritually, I feel like a lot of people around me don't really focus on that too much. There are some people that are really into it, but others just kind of let it be. Mentally, I don't know about anyone else, but me, I just tell myself, like, if I'm ever going through some – like, just having a day or something, I just tell myself – it's taken, like, years of practice, though, and most people can't do this. I really do think it's mind over matter, so it's just like, it is what it is, like, you can't change it now, it's going to happen. Just get yourself out of it, I guess.



For me healthy it's three things. So like physical health, so like you know not being dead or calling in sick all the time. Wealth and happiness are the other two. So wealth, having – like not being homeless, you know what I mean, because you could be in good physical health but if you don't have anything then you're not as in good health. And with happiness, you could be in good health, you could be super rich but if you're not happy with who you are or what you're doing or your situation, then it's the other two things are pointless. And so I think those three things are what you need, if you have – if you take any of them out, then I think you're not as healthy.

To me, healthy is the ability to find happiness and see happiness in something that is a bad situation. If you picture yourself in a bad scenario, you have to be able to find something good out of that. You can't just be in there and just hate it all – because I've done that before and it's probably the worst thing you could ever do. It makes the situation a whole lot worse. You have to think about something good to get through it.

Even if it's there are people around you that are – you might not like, just think of something like good and positive towards what will happen if you are just always thinking on the negatives.

5.3 Spiritual and cultural health and identity:

Although the youth varied in their experience or history with Indigenous spirituality, ceremony, and traditional cultural practices, most shared some positive memories of these experiences either as children growing up on and off reserves or later during their youth as their interest in the sacred began to mature. Many of the youth specifically mentioned how connections to their culture and spiritually assisted them in various ways to deal with and overcome different challenges they have faced in their life. Additionally, these experiences and connections provided a powerful source of identity and pride in one's history, family and sense of self. Many youth also discussed some of the challenges and demands that come with having to “walk between two worlds” - the Indigenous and non-indigenous or Indigenous and Christian worlds. Below are a few quotes from the youth interviews on this theme.

I feel like when I go to sweat lodges, like I feel way better. It's just like a huge weight off my shoulders. But then after a while it just gets slowly lowered down onto me. And then like I like going but they're always like really far out and I don't have any transportation and none of my family really goes to them anymore.

- well, I don't think you really have to, well you do have to tie yourself to your culture, it's something, it's like the, a privilege to do it, I feel. To say you belong to a group and what shapes you to be like a Cree woman is just taking that in pride. You can say you're a proud Cree woman. Or, yeah.

I feel ... sometimes I feel obligated to keep up with my cultural habits - well, not habits but like tradition. But I don't have the access to that easily. It's important to me though because I have outlets, I can go to, like sweats and ceremony and smudging. There's just something that ties you all to it and it's really comforting to know that.



It [ceremony] just makes me feel not so alone. I deal with a lot of things on my own and like having cultural support through sweat, through smudging, it really helps me.

I'm learning from both worlds living in the western society and the Cree way. As a little kid I remember my family they would bring me to the some of those lodges there and I would learn a lot from there and moving in the city, I would learn a lot of what society goes through and because of that I'm able to learn from other people. I'd just make friends from other people, from other cultures that I would learn from, yeah.

Just learning how to - learning to have that connection with the Creator and having that connection within myself because you learn, you learn a lot from those lodges there. They really, those lodges can really teach you a lot, they can strip down your ego and just learn, you learn how to pray and learn how to just yeah, you learn how to just be thankful for the gifts that you have and all that as far as I can know, yeah.

See I find it difficult to balance between the two worlds at time. There are times where I feel - I don't feel connected in the western world and in the traditional world in some way. But I'm learning to I guess blend both of them in a way where it's just me and hoping others.

Not really. I mean, I want to know, like, just basic things, but I'm not going to religiously go to sweats or pow-wows every year. I do – like, if someone invited me, and I hadn't been in a few years, like, this year I'd like to go to a pow-wow. I really think it's a great social experience and seeing everything, but otherwise I'm not, like, very invested in it, if that makes sense.

Yes, cultural identity is important as it helped me in understanding what happened to, like, our people, and how we can change that into, like, a good thing, and probably helped me understand what to do a lot of goodness --- Well, I've been to pow-wows and sweat lodges. They usually have events around our culture at the Friendship Centre, so I usually go there, because I used to volunteer in planning events there.

I wanted to attend ceremony more but what I've learned is that like if you walk like two paths, like say like Christianity right and then there's like the culture, if you like do that and you're like taking part in that then it's just like it gets confusing.



5.4 Living the “good life”

For most of the youth the question of living the “good life” involved being happy and living a healthy life in balance and harmony. It often involved being happy with one’s self—where one is at on their stage of life—but also being in positive relations with others in the social and physical world, with partners, siblings, friends and other creates and objects in the natural world. Below are a few quotes from the youth interviews on this theme.

So what do you think it means to live a good life? Just taking care of yourself, taking care of whoever's around you but mostly yourself and thinking of what you need.

Okay. What do you think it means to live a good life? To live a good life?

Well just being happy with yourself, that's about it.

What's your definition of being happy?

Just being happy with myself, just yeah being happy with myself and how I am, knowing who I am and being willing to express it in a way where I don't feel judged, I can just be me, yeah.



Movement workshop at CNYC

The good life is that you're generally looking forward to the day. Like, you know, like, you wake up and just ... you know, you don't feel like shit, I guess, you know. You just ... you're like, okay, well, I have to do this, and this and I'm looking forward to all those things and stuff like that, you know.

Its just to be happy, just to do what you want to do in life. Work where you want to work, or have what you want to have. Like, you don't necessarily have to be, like, the richest person to have a happy life, just really do what you want to do, do what makes you happy.

Well I think living a good life is all of those things. So like being healthy so that you live for like a decent amount of time, not necessarily a long amount of time but like just long enough for whether it be that you want to accomplish something or to have – to be happy for your life. And like same with living longer, like you might live long but the last two years of your life you might be just in a hospital bed the whole time. So I think living a good life is living for like a good amount of time while keeping into consideration those three elements of staying healthy.

To live a good life, I feel like you have to be happy with yourself, whether is it – whether or not like you accomplish something that makes you happy. Like and even being able to – like when you're married and having kids, have a family, like having a good life that you're able to support them. And supporting yourself emotionally and like financially and mentally. Keeping them healthy and keeping yourself healthy.

5.5 Reasons for joining the COV program

The primary reasons for joining the COV program mentioned by youth was because of the friends they have their, the friends they were hoping to meet or because a friend who was previously in the program highly recommended it before. It was clear from the interviews that social networking among peer groups of friends was the main reason youth heard about the program and felt motivated to join. The second area that was often mentioned in the interviews was that the COV program was also a way to connect with and learn more about their cultural roots and heritage, to connect with the spiritual and cultural components of the program. Only briefly did youth mention that they were interested in pursuing a specific career in drama or theatre arts and the importance of

having a “creative outlet” of some kind, although this was of course part of the reason that youth were interested and attracted to join. Below are a few quotes from the youth interviews on this theme.

The previous year a lot of my friends who I knew went in the program. And I went and seen their play and I liked - I don't know, it seemed like they had a lot of fun and how they would - I would ask them how it goes and everything and they said it's fun but also it challenges you too. So I thought I would try it out.

So I actually ... when ... I actually had to move to Prince Albert for the year, found a job at Wal-Mart, worked as a cashier for three months, then after that worked my way up to customer service. And that was stressful for the next year. And then so ... and I made it my goal that, you know, during that year that, you know, when I go back to university I'm going to, like, you know, make time to have a creative outlet because I was just so busy, like, working long hours and everything like that, I just didn't have, like, a creative outlet and I just ... you know, I just kind of felt, like, pretty down, like, you know, if I'm just constantly working, overworking and just feel drained but, like, when I had that creative outlet, like, COV is just pretty awesome and fun, yeah.



Youth drama workshops and rehearsals for Pimātisiwin

My best friend had sent me, like, the paper, and she said, like, hey, it's here, go in this with me, and I thought, hey, why not? It's been, like, a year or two since I've been in anything like theatre-wise, and I really miss it. I used to do – like, throughout school I was in it every year, so lots of experience. It's just something you do.

That's partly why I joined COV, because I enjoy theatre but it does have that cultural aspect to it and that's something that I wanted to kind of get to know more about and become more involved in. Because it's like the Métis comes from my dad's side, but because he hasn't been around as much, it wasn't something that like I was ever really exposed to or participated in.

I kind of joined the – I joined the COV program just to – for like the acting experience and stuff like that, but also just to meet people. Because being in the program, there's like – it's all brown people. I haven't been around brown people for a while. I live in two white homes right now. So it kind of feels like home, just being there.

5.6 Primary learning from the COV program

A lot of the learning that the youth shared during the interviews was based on their skill development in theatre and also personal qualities or capacities, such as patience and organizational capacities. The youth also expressed how they were happy to learn about their culture and some aspects of Cree language that came specifically from the play they produced and performed this year. The youth also shared how the program helped them be more comfortable around people and open up with themselves and share aspects of their personal lives with others, this primarily was facilitated through the safe spaces constructed and the regular talking circles. Below are a few quotes from the youth interviews on this theme.

I learned that it's, well, I hope to learn a little bit about like our culture, I guess, like our Cree culture and [with our] play it's really helping me understand. I never knew about the berry fast.

*So what do you hope to learn like while you still have time in the COV?
More about our culture, like I want to learn some of the language that's what we're doing with the play. Like he has some Cree in there and I don't really, unless he, when he, if he didn't have the translation I wouldn't know what they were and how to say them.*



Youth drama workshops and rehearsals for Pimāṭisiwin

I learned a lot of patience and organization because during COV I was just going to school, I was working and I was volunteering in this other program. So I had to learn to really organize myself and be patient. Because there was a lot of times that I wanted to quit COV because it took a lot of time from the evenings, but yeah just stick through it.

I think they're – like with theatre there's only so much like technical stuff that you can learn, so I'm going to think the two main things that I would like to learn is more about culture, so the ways that it can – it is in your life because it hasn't really been part of my life, that as well as just opening up more. So being – feeling more okay to do crazy things whether it be like just being weird, like you can when you're acting but not so much just trying out new ideas in real life as opposed to in a theatre. said before, trying to have different parts of who I am be part of my life, so maybe not like all the way make that my life, but I think for sure implement portions of it.

I haven't really learned a lot, but I've learned how to like be comfortable with people that I never really talked to and never really met. Like I'm comfortable with them, like I'm comfortable to be myself. And I'm annoying and stuff and they accept that. Like – yeah, so.

Kind of just be like better at communicating and like maturing as an adult. And hope to learn a lot of the basics of like acting and performing, like that. I mean know the basics, but I want to learn like more and more about that stuff.



Do you see a set of new skills that you can acquire, that COV can offer you? Public speaking. I mean it, but yeah, I'm getting more comfortable doing it. I used to just be like really scared to do it, and now it's like, okay a little bit, yeah. Mm-hmm, yeah. And when we talk in a lot of ... I guess, how we meet new people and talk to them in a way.

Between one and ten, where do you see your confidence before COV? A strong two. [laughter] So now, for the present, between one and ten, where do you see yourself now? A nine. Interesting.

Yeah, or you know what do you hope to learn or what have you like already kind of learned from it or starting to learn? Just expressing myself and it helps with my self esteem too and communication, yeah.

Yeah, and plus like they had people who did take the program before and then they were like telling their stories and like how this program helped them to like a positive future, and I got inspired and that's why I want to continue with the program.

5.7 General experiences from the COV program

The structure of the COV program is made up of 3 main aspects: 1) engagement with Indigenous culture (in the form of opportunities for sweats and ceremony, teachings and interaction from elders, regular sharing circles and smudging); 2) experience with theatre (theatre workshops, skill building and rehearsals, performance of a production); sociality and safety (being with other youth from similar cultural backgrounds and with similar goals in life in a similar and encouraging environment that is safe).

There are specific outcomes of the program related to each of these aspects. But cutting across all of them is the reinforcement of or a practice of a positive Indigenous identity. Circle of voices program is about finding one's voice, but also about practicing what one wants one's voice to be, putting on and trying different tones and views, seeing what character one resonates with and what one ought to be. It is a place out of time, an interruption in the normal everyday flow of lives for these Indigenous young people. It is a place that is for them and constructed, through the practice and engagement with theatre, by them.

The structure of the experience of the COV program involves the dialectic of two processes. First is a space where youth can “get it all out” or “let it off the chest.” This is facilitated primarily by the engagement with cultural practices like smudging, the sweat ceremonies and talking circles with elders present. This then created space for a second process of practicing one’s identity, of opening up and trying on different ways of being. Both of these individual processes occurred within the context of a safe and encouraging environment where one feels “at home” and a strong sense of “belonging.” Aside from these general learnings from the youth interviews, 8 other key themes emerged that were explored and articulated.

5.7.1 Moving on to better things. Central to the experience within and the outcomes of the COV program was that it helped youth move on to “better things” in life. This was, in part, felt because the program supports and creates health and wellness, primarily in the expression of a positive Indigenous identity.

It just helps kids move on to better things I feel. Like they have the opportunities to move on to a different career from that if they're choosing the theatre life.

I kept thinking that it was something - there was something positive that was going to come out of it. Yeah, just a lot of yeah I just kept thinking that if I stuck with it some good things would happen. Yeah a lot of good things did happen following through with it. I got to travel, I got to meet new people, I got to - I got a lot of people ask me I did a good job, which I felt good and I think just finishing the - just finishing what I was going to say I was going to do, yeah having an accomplishment that I finished at, COV that program.

Well, like I said, it's opened my life to a few more options. I never thought about a career in drama before, but I think about that now, like, going to university and getting maybe a minor or something in drama, drama history, something like that.

I feel like it opened more doors for more opportunities. I don't know, just, you know, like, I have something else to put on my résumé. In all honesty, that's what I really wanted to do, just because, like, I didn't want to really work while I'm in university, but, like, you know, I'm going through this program, and then when I do look for jobs, they'll see that I just didn't just go to school. I also took this program, as well. So, they can see that I can balance both things.

Keep trying and don't give up. Because COV is an opportunity, right? You finish that and there will be more opportunities, like doors will open more, like positive attitude and keep moving forward.



5.7.2 Development of personal qualities and skills. A positive Indigenous identity was also something that was forged and constructed in the context of the COV program and reflected to the youth and others in the social environment through the performance of personal qualities like time management, commitment, patience.

I learned a lot of patience and organization because during COV I was just going to school, I was working and I was volunteering in this other program. So I had to learn to really organize myself and be patient. Because there was a lot of times that I wanted to quit COV because it took a lot of time from the evenings, but yeah just stick through it.

Yeah they did. Every time we went to COV they opened up with a talking circle. I think that's where I learned a lot of patience because a lot of people had a lot of things to say,

Just showing that commitment I guess is just what keeps me going, I guess.



Youth drama workshops and rehearsals for Pimātsiwin

So if I had a bad day at school, you know failed a test or whatever, I still have COV to look – like look to after school and I think it's good to be doing it because if I wasn't doing it I probably would just be wasting time anyways.

I was never really big on, you know, authority or, you know, boss people. I wouldn't even call my boss, boss [laughs]. I lost a job for that. But yeah, I was taking orders and listening to other people. Yeah, something, taking orders and learning to hear out other people and to take in other people's advice and it's helped me understand the people that I was working with a lot more on the outside than I did on the in.

But yeah, no like I said before it was learning to understand people from the inside rather than the outside, judging a book by its cover kind of thing. I stopped doing that and I was more sympathetic to a lot and I wanted - I felt like I wanted to be a little more helpful than I was before but I had to work on myself, I had to understand myself, which doing this body map was able to help me achieve.

Mmm . . . I think it taught me how to like, not to like, overreact, I suppose. I mean, like, I guess it kind of like taught me a lot about my patience and how to kind of like, deal with my short temper, I suppose. Like, I don't know, yeah, I don't know, like, say if . .

5.7.3 A creative outlet. Throughout the stories of the youth about their experience in the COV program, was also a connection to this notion of a “creative outlet”. It was somewhere the youth could grow to be creative and express themselves in new ways.

like, a creative outlet and I just ... you know, I just kind of felt, like, pretty down, like, you know, if I'm just constantly working, overworking and just feel drained but, like, when I had that creative outlet, like, COV is just pretty awesome and fun, yeah.

Okay. I guess we'll go to six then. Do you feel that the COV program at GTNT helps with your health or feeling healthy?

Definitely. Just kind of like, you know, it's that creative outlet, you know.

So I think – and so I've just continued to do it and it's continued to be fun and exciting and challenging and different every time, because that is the thing, it really depends on who else is doing it because you can have different viewpoints, different ideas. So it's not like doing something where it's just like a sport maybe where it's the same thing and you just improve, in like this creative outlet it's completely different every time you do it.

5.7.4 Opening up and practicing Indigenous identities. Similarly, another key experience for the young people was having a space to open up about themselves to others and feel safe in doing so. This “opening up” also allowed them to feel comfortable exploring their Indigenous Identities, of course fostered by the support environment and presence of cultural and ceremonial experiences.

Its just about opening up more. So being – feeling more okay to do crazy things whether it be like just being weird, like you can when you're acting but not so much just trying out new ideas in real life as opposed to in a theatre. said before, trying to have different parts of who I am be part of my life, so maybe not like all the way make that my life, but I think for sure implement portions of it.



Youth drama workshops and rehearsals for Pimāṭisiwin

*So how do you think the COV helps you living a good life?
It helps keep me humble, I think, it helps just let me be me.*

It's just getting out of my comfort zone pretty much. I learned a lot that if you get out of our comfort zone, there's growth. So I had to learn to speak in front of a lot of people, like really project myself. Like some of the activities I had to get out of my comfort zone a lot but it was good.

Everyone has their own weird little quirks and a lot of the time it's not okay to do those things, so it's like you can't joke like that because that's whatever, but at COV it's like you – it is, just part of it is just acting so it's okay to try out new ideas or perform. Lots of the people, including

myself, will just start doing a little improv skit just as a joke and – but it's okay to do that because it is a theatre program and it is a safe space.

I would say so because I've – through doing the sharing circles, I've become a lot more positive I would say because I like to find the positives during my day. So when I come to COV, even if there have been bad things that happened during the day, I rarely say that I had a bad day because I still find the positives, and with – if I do have a bad day, I still have COV to look forward to.

I think it's really, really – especially because like even just with the amount of time that I've been in I've become a lot more aware and knowledgeable about culture. Like smudging regularly, doing a prayer, doing the sharing circle, that's all stuff that – it's not something that I have done regularly, but now I'm doing it regularly and I'm more knowledgeable about it. And I think that's something that is – it's good and I think I really learned about it even just being in it this short amount of time.

5.7.5 Escaping difficulties or stressors in life. The COV program also allowed youth to escape or get a break from some of the difficult stressors they face in life.

It helped me just to see escape and talk about what was bothering me in the circles. And I liked talking to the elder and other staff, they really helped me a lot.

Well, minor things it just helped me get away from the house. I have a reason to leave and it's like I must, I have to go. And then everybody understands that I can just escape when I want. Not when I want, when COV's on.

Is that, is escaping from your home is that something that you feel you need to do? Sometimes just so I'm not like kind of forced into watching kids, forced into cleaning everybody else's mess. Forced to like talk to them.

Yeah. So I always have to keep busy and that's how COV helped me out with, like, you know, keeping up with the routine during the day. Done it for, like ... for a couple months now. Yeah, just basically what I said earlier, just helped me keep, like, a routine and stuff like that.

But like I guess it's kind of like a place where, I guess, I don't show my problems. So like it's a relief, like that I don't have to focus on it, like I can focus on something else so I don't have to like, I guess my problem just goes away like that.

5.7.6 “feels like home” - bonding and belonging. The important social connections and safety that was created among the youth was also described repeatedly as being “at home.” This was particularly significant for the young people that described difficult and challenging experiences growing up and where a “home” was not necessarily a safe or supportive place.

Whoa, COV helped me - well, yeah they did. They helped me figure out like what I wanted to do with my life and health wise, I mean I got over the fact of, well I didn't get over it but I learned to accept the fact that I was, you know, depressed and messed up. But then I also felt like that was the place that I needed to be. They made me feel like home at the end of each night - I mean as soon as all of us COV people go there they're like oh my god I don't want to be here and mid sesh we're just all hyped about doing these activities that are being brought to us. I mean with improve and those activities we did in the back of the COV and we had to like just kind of come up with all these different things and different motions and be different tools, like literally it's weird.

And I believed him when I said that and it made it a lot easier to walk out of those doors knowing that I could come back which made me feel, you know, I still have a home. Not exactly my home but it feels like home. That's what COV really felt like it was a home, a weird home, my weird. It's the best thing that ever happened besides having my babies

It's the whole thing for me, honestly, because you get to learn with fellow youths, you get to experience how to become an actor with them, you get to bond with them, you get to – I don't know, you all learn the same thing, going for one big project at the end. It's like, a goal



Movement workshop at CNYC

Can you tell us more about that? What allowed you to be comfortable, to share your story with peers your age? Because it's easier, it's like, camaraderie. It's like, we're in the same boat, I guess.

What are some of the positive experiences regarding your participation in the COV program?

Just meeting new friends, I guess. People there can be welcoming and cool. And just I guess, yeah. But I guess like the talking, like the sharing circle.

I was really surprised by how ... like, how fast we bonded together, like, right off the bat. Like, the first or second week we were all just, like, you know, roasting each other and, like, teasing each other and everything, like, you know, like, we've always known each other. Like, really like that feel .

Yeah, and that was really good because like we were together in like a not theatre aspect, we were just there and I think that really – events like that really tighten our bonds because when you're acting together in a group you really do have to be very close-knit.

So I think that's really good, and then you also get the – you get the reassurance because other people they share their day and they have issues, so then you know, “Oh it's not just me who's having a bad day” and you can also help them.

Yeah, yeah. Totally understand. I think when I'm here, and at COV, at this home, I've noticed that I can just ... I don't know, just all like the relationship building, I guess, you know. You just kind of ... you know, people joining together, and laughing and having a good time and stuff. You know, that's ... yeah, that's what I've noticed between all that stuff.

It's kind of - impersonations, I guess. You're looking at somebody, they're doing something, so you copy them. It's learned. I see Marcel doing something, even if it's not relevant to COV, copy them, it's learning. Seeing how Marcel runs COV, the things he does, the techniques that he provides, how he keeps us in line, how he keeps our emotions in check. How he, like, constantly reminds us that we're all worth it. How he makes us all feel - how we all make each other feel. And those are - what Marcel is, is something that I kind of want to be in the future.

5.7.7 Self-expression and comfort. Another crucial aspect for the youth was the sense of comfort and ability to express themselves in a good way. The environment was often described as “safe” which really meant for the youth that they could “be themselves” and at the same time practice being other versions of themselves or try on new behaviours and attitudes that could further support their wellness goals and initiatives.

I haven't really learned a lot, but I've learned how to like be comfortable with people that I never really talked to and never really met. Like I'm comfortable with them, like I'm comfortable to be myself.

Yeah, or you know what do you hope to learn or what have you like already kind of learned from it or starting to learn? Just expressing myself and it helps with my self esteem too and communication, yeah.

Well, talking to someone about my troubles really helped me a lot because before COV I was having a really bad time. Like it was really bad. It's just ... I didn't like it.

so yeah. I guess it helped me to - it helped me with public speaking because in my program we had to learn to speak in front of a lot of people. We had to learn to facilitate workshops and all that. So I think that helped me with my program, yeah.

I think it just kind of built my self-confidence just a bit more

Yeah, just ... you know, like, I wasn't able to express myself before and then COV helps me out with that, I guess.

I think it was initially my mom's, but I've decided to do it because I'm typically an introverted person but I think I would have been even more closed off if I hadn't done theatre, because doing theatre I've – it's really opened me up as a person and with theatre you get to do crazy stuff that you wouldn't normally do, and so you get to try out being whatever you want in a safe space where it's okay to do that because – yeah.

I don't know, I just like, was more confident in doing a lot of things, I guess. I was more open about it. Like, I'm trying to get out of my comfort zone.

I met a lot of new people and I'm more open about doing a lot of things now. And it's – I've had more confidence in talking to other people and approaching them, yeah. Mm-hmm. During circle we would, like, talk about how – if we had a good day or a bad day, yeah. Hmm, yeah, it kind of has, but I mean – yeah, it has. I'm being more open about what I'm, like, feeling, and why I'm feeling the way I'm feeling.



It's becoming more easier for me to like open up. Yeah, it's safe. Like before I wasn't like really opening up until like I just really wanted to get it off my chest, like I wanted to like share because I'd seen what was happening with the others and it was helping for them and I wanted that too. Yeah. I don't know, I like to open up more and express how I'm feeling instead of like holding back.

5.7.8 “Getting it off your chest” - practice of culture. One of the primary goals of the COV program was to introduce and support youth in their exploration of Indigenous culture and spirituality. This included a resident elder that was present with the group most of the year, regular talking circles with smudging and prayer, and optional sweats outside of the city. As such, many youth articulate their positive experiences at the program in relation to connecting with a kind of cultural and spiritual identity. Below are a few quotes from the youth interviews on this theme.

What are some positive experiences regarding your participation in the COV program?
The smudge. like I didn't really smudge that often before this and then like now I just know the importance of it, of how you get everything off your chest and cleanse yourself of your struggles.

So how do you feel about participation in the COV program at GTNT is related to culture and cultural identity?
The circles. And just smudging and prayer, just getting it all out.

I really like how they a lot of smudging and have those talking circles in the program there. I felt like I could express myself and just say things, just get things off my shoulders,

How do you feel that participating in the COV program is related to cultural and cultural identity?

Just having those I guess having those connections to those medicines there, being able to smudge. It felt pretty good doing that every time I go there, yeah that's about it.

That's really good because I can not only vent anything, get anything off my chest, but I really get to reflect on the day, you know see was it a good day, was it a bad day, did I – what came out of the day, did I learn anything, did I improve myself in any ways, was it just a hanging out day.

A little bit, yeah. Because of how like – to me, I like it when we smudge. It feels nice and it just feels really good. I like smudging at the COV thing because it just feels natural, I guess. It feels like home, kind of, pretty much. Like that.

And do you feel the cultural aspects of the COV program have influenced you?

Yes, I'm more of a – I mean I consider myself to be more of a cultured person after doing it. I guess learning about yourself isn't always just sitting down and thinking.

Sometimes you have to really challenge yourself and go there. And that's what I was doing with COV. I've never been part of an official drama group or whatever and I know that I didn't really, wasn't too fond of being around other people, that I really wanted to challenge myself. Yeah, just kind of put myself through that, and even if it didn't work out too much in the end I still learnt a lot and I'm glad that I did it.

6. Dissemination & Impact:

Knowledge Translation and Exchange activities were integrated throughout the project and moving forward will draw on extensive regional and national personal and organizational networks linked to Saskatoon. Since the completion of the project, the main findings from this study will be disseminated at the community level using a number of approaches: reports and presentations to Mayor, Tribal Chiefs and Council, radio discussions and interviews, and newsletter articles, art shows, community information nights, and oral and poster presentations at community gatherings or academic conferences and settings.

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*. The qualitative data outlines 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.

7. Budget:

The overall budget for this project consists of several areas. First, two Indigenous youth who are COV alumni were hired for this project and *received approximately \$800.00 a month over the duration of the project*. Approximately \$3000.00 was spent for research related costs and food for meetings and for transcription services. Finally, approximately, \$5000.00 was spent for travel to bring two youth from among the COV youth collaborators to conferences in 2017 and 2018. This final aspect of the research is 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 -
Total expenditures			\$20,000

8. Conclusions

Canadian youth ages 16-25 are the vital future of society and their health and wellness is the concern of all Canadians. Deserving serious concern, however, the health of Indigenous youth is disproportionately worse than the general Canadian population. Indigenous youth populations are also rapidly growing, and although there are some studies documenting the resilience of these populations, there is minimal attention given to working with Indigenous youth to address the social conditions that foster the systems of inequality they face. This project addresses these gaps explores the relationships between participation in the COV arts-based theatre program and resilience and wellness outcomes for Indigenous youth living in urban contexts.

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GTNT COV theatre project:

1st round of interview questions

Instructions for youth interviewers

Familiarize yourself with the process:

- Familiarize yourself with the interview guide. You should know the guide well enough that you and the youth can have an organic conversation around the major themes in the interview guide as it relates to the youth's answers.

Before you leave for the interview, you will need:

- Interview guide, consent form, stipend sheet, stipends
- 2 audio recorders, extra batteries
- Note pad

Once you arrive:

Don't forget this is a conversation! Relax and have fun!

Introduction:

If consent was obtained from the youth at a separate meeting prior to meeting for the interview, the following points should be reviewed at the time of interview:

The consent form explained the purpose of this research. All the information you provide will be treated as confidential and will be stored in a locked cabinet. As discussed in the consent form, your involvement is entirely voluntary and please be assured you can end your involvement with the study at any time. Should you feel uneasy about what is discussed and would like to talk to a mental health counselor about issues brought up during this research, please let me know so that I can refer you to one.

The following points should definitely be discussed with the youth at the start of the interview:

We would like to understand your experiences in more detail. Please take as much time as you like to answer. There are no right or wrong answers, just answer as truthfully as you are comfortable with. Also, feel free to tell me when you do not want to answer a question.

Narrative life history:

- 1.Can you tell us a little about your life, like where you grew up? How many siblings you have? Who was your primary caregiver? And family history?
- 2.Can you think of a time when you faced a great difficulty... What did you do? Who was there for you? How did you cope? (i.e. what are your coping skills). How/where did you learn about this? How does this help?
- 3.What are some things that would benefit others who face challenging situations?

Health specific questions:

- 1.What does being healthy mean to you and others in your family and community?
- 2.What do you do, and others you know do, to keep healthy, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually?
- 3.What do you think it means to “live a good life”?
- 4.How do you think about your future? Can you picture your life 3-5 years from now? What do you hope to do in the future?

GTNT specific questions:

- 1.Why did you decide to participate in the Circle of Voices program at GTNT?
- 2.What kinds of things do you hope to learn or have learned through your participation in the COV program?
- 3.Has your participation in drama or theatre activities at GTNT helped you deal with or face difficulty in your life? How, or why, and in what ways?
- 4.What are some of your most positive experiences regarding your participation in the COV program?
- 5.What are some things you did not like about participating in the COV program?
- 6.Do you feel the COV program at GTNT ever helps with your health or feeling healthy? Helps with “Living a good life” in some way?
- 7.Can you think of a time when your participation in the COV program or the things you learned through participation has helped you overcome or move through a challenge in your life?

Community and environment specific questions:

- 1.What kinds of things are most challenging for you growing up here?
- 2.What kinds of things might make you feel unsafe? What do you or others you know do when they are not feeling safe?
- 3.What kinds of places or people can you visit when you are not feeling safe?
- 4.What would you say are some of the strengths of your community?
- 5.Are there certain individuals in your community that you look up to and admire? What kinds of strengths do those individuals have?
- 6.How do you feel that the COV program at GTNT is connected to the community?

Contexts: Connection to Culture

1.What cultural background would you say has most influenced you? What are some other cultural influences? How would you say your culture has shaped who you are?

1.Would you explain a little what it means to be _____ today? (tribe / band / language group)

2.Is your cultural identity important for you? Can you explain why this might be the case?

3.Can you speak your families' traditional language? Do friends you know speak their language? Do you feel this is important for young people to know their traditional family languages?

4.Are there cultural events that you attend? Do you enjoy participating in cultural events? Does your family support these events? Do your friends attend? What might these events be important? Are they important for everyone or only people from your background?

5.Have you ever felt discriminated because of your cultural background? How did this make you feel? What do you want to do about this? Do you talk with people about how this makes you feel?

6.Have you ever felt encouraged and supported because of your cultural background? How did this make you feel?

7.Would you say people from your cultural background are treated fairly? Can you explain why this is the case? Do you feel this is something you can change?

8.How do you feel that participation in the COV program at GTNT is related to cultural and cultural identity?

GTNT COV theatre project:

2nd round of interview questions

General questions about the process of body mapping:

- When you were doing the body map and brainstorming, what were you thinking and feeling during the process?
- Can you tell us about the process of making a body map?
- What did you learn about yourself during the process?
- Did it bring something to light about your life that you didn't know was there?
- Did you find it comfortable to open up with a peer your age?

Details and stories about the body maps:

- What are the different meanings and metaphors you drew on the body map?
- What do they mean for you?
- Take us through the story of your body map?
 - (Let them start where they want on the body)
 - Ask them why they wanted to start where they did?
- Was it easier to tell your story using images rather than words?
- Did having that visual help you see your story clearer?

Checking in about the program:

- What have you learned through your participation in the COV program so far?
- Has COV program changed (or created something new) with your perspective of your spirituality?
- Do you think the COV program has supported your health or wellness? If so, how and why might this have happened? What aspects of the program support your health? Helps with "Living a good life" in some way?
- Has anything changed about your thoughts of the future?
- What are some things you do not like about participating in the COV program or would change?
- Can you think of a time when your participation in the COV program or the things you learned through participation has helped you overcome or move through a challenge in your life?
- Do you feel the cultural aspects of the COV program influenced you? What are some other cultural influences you appreciated? What are some other cultural influences you may not have appreciated?

Would you agree to allow us to show your body maps in conferences?