

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Evaluation of a Leadership program for First Nations, Metis and Inuit Youth: Stories of positive youth development and community engagement

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Positive youth development, program evaluation, youth leadership, health, First Nations, Metis, Inuit, sport, mentorship, community development, cultural continuity

POPULATION GROUP

Aboriginal youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety
Health and Wellness
Civic Engagement and Youth Leadership

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

SOURCE

Academic

“Research has identified that cultural continuity or community empowerment is associated with decreased incidence of youth suicide in FNMI communities” (p. 11).

1. What is the research about?

This research focuses on an initiative by Right to Play called the Youth Leadership Program (YLP). This program was designed to “enhance community relationships, increase positive healthy behaviours and to decrease risk-taking behaviours in youth” (p.3). Elements of the program included youth mentorship, community event planning and execution, youth-led skill-building activities, and on-going assessment from frontline staff/mentors.

Initiatives like the YLP, which are grounded in strengths-based approaches, have been shown to support positive outcomes for youth. Interventions that address negative outcomes for Indigenous youth are important, because colonial and racist policies have created sizeable health disparities between First Nation, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) individuals and non-Indigenous Canadians.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in Canada.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about the experiences of Indigenous youth and Community Mentors (CM) who participated in the Youth Leadership Program.

4. How was the research done?

This research is a formative evaluation of the YLP program, with the aim of understanding the experiences program participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 individuals: 12 CMs and 10 youth.

The interviews included questions about the overall experience, program satisfaction, and perceived program impact of the program participants. Interviews were coded and organized into larger themes.

The research adhered to the OCAP principles of ownership, control, access and possession. True to these principles, a research advisory group was created which consisted of researchers, program staff and Indigenous knowledge keepers. This advisory group provided feedback and guidance on research practices and data analysis.

5. What are the key findings?

The researchers found that participating in the YLP program resulted in many positive outcomes for program participants, which can be categorized into three themes:

a) progressive leadership development; b) enhanced relationships; and, c) increased community participation.

Both youth and mentors reported increased community participation; they also valued creating spaces for community members to come together and share experiences. Youth reported that they built mutual trust with program staff and experienced opportunities for taking responsibility and contributing to the wellbeing of others.

Youth and mentors improved their public speaking skills and increased their stress reduction and coping skills. They reported increased confidence. When youth were asked for input into programming and the suggestions were ultimately implemented, the youth learned that their opinions and input mattered. Youth also expressed pride in completing activities or organizing events.

Both mentors and youth reported relationship building as an important outcome, as well as increased support networks. The community in general benefited, as they were able to participate in activities organized by the youth, which demonstrated to community members the good work and difference youth can make in the community.

For both Caucasian and Aboriginal young offenders, unhealthy family situations were common. 77% of Aboriginal offenders compared to 66% of Caucasian offenders came from families where at least one member had a criminal history. Aboriginal youth were significantly more likely to have a parent with a criminal record and to have experienced physical violence. Physical and sexual violence was common for both groups. Aboriginal youth were far more likely to have substance use, mental health issues and criminal histories in their families. They are also more likely to have been in foster care.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth had similar criminal histories, disproving the suggestion that Aboriginal youth are incarcerated at higher rates due to more complex and serious criminal backgrounds.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The Youth Leadership Program impacted youth and their community in a number of positive ways, including increased positive youth behaviours, enhanced knowledge and skills, and enhanced community relationships. This program could be used as a guide for other Indigenous communities to replicate.

Community and youth leadership development approaches, such as the YLP program, have had considerable success in increasing health and wellbeing outcomes for FNMI communities. This approach is particularly suitable for Indigenous youth as it focuses on deepening relationships within communities, which has been identified as an effective intervention strategy particularly with Indigenous youth. It is important in Indigenous contexts that program staff and mentors are Indigenous. Opportunities to strengthen intergenerational Indigenous relationships can contribute to cultural continuity, which increases community resilience and wellness.



Halsall, T. & Forneris, T. (2016). Evaluation of a leadership program for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Youth: Stories of positive youth development and community engagement. *Applied Developmental Science*, 1-13.