

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Evaluation of the Kots'ii`htla (“We Light the Fire”) Project: Building Resiliency and Connections through Strengths-Based Creative Arts Programming for Indigenous Youth

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Indigenous, evaluation, creative arts, resiliency, suicide prevention, health promotion, mixed methods, community-based research

POPULATION GROUP

Aboriginal youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

SOURCE

Academic Article (peer reviewed)

“These initiatives have highlighted all the ways in which the arts can promote dialogue and raise awareness on various health issues, facilitate healing, build capacity, skills and confidence among youth, and strengthen connections between youth and their communities at large.”

1. What is the research about?

This study evaluates an arts-based health promotion program called **Kots'ii`htla** (“We Light the Fire”) intended to increase the resiliency of Tlicho Indigenous youth. The program came out of need for youth suicide prevention programming. Through a series of strength-based mental health workshops led by creative mentors, youth examined and problem-solved important issues in their lives and community using arts-based methods. The program celebrated Tlicho traditions and culture, and created a safe space for youth. Program participants created: “a mural, music video and short film, each representing different themes, challenges and hopes discussed by the youth”.

This study contributes to the literature on resiliency by providing an empirical link between arts-based programming with Indigenous youth and resilience.

2. Where did the research take place?

Behchoko, Northwest Territories, Canada.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about Indigenous Tlicho youth age 13-22. There were four females and 5 males in the study.

4. How was the research done?

This study was a collaborative community-based research project, grounded in Tlicho community values, that used mixed-methods, including observation field notes, questionnaires, focus groups, and reflective practice. The Tlicho Community Action Research Team (CART) partnered with the Institute for Circumpolar Health (ICHR) to develop evaluation framework, tools and analysis plan.

The goal was to evaluate **Kots'ii`htla** and identify successes, challenges and unexpected outcomes. Youth were recruited by word of mouth, radio, social media, staff, in-person presentations and promotional posters. An evaluation framework was developed to understand how program processes, outcomes, and impacts can be improved, and to understand the successes and challenges the participants experienced being involved in the creative arts.

Observational data was collected and focus groups were conducted at the end of each day. Field notes were also taken by facilitators and two questionnaires were administered,

one for the youth participants and one for the artist facilitators. Both qualitative thematic analysis was used to analysis the data and identify the themes that emerged from each data source.

5. What are the key findings?

This study suggests that youth had a positive experience participating in **Kots'ii`htla** because of four main factors:

1. They develop new skills
2. They had positive interactions with facilitators
3. The workshop was culturally relevant and enjoyable
4. Art was used to talk about community issues and visions for change

Facilitators observed noticeable increases in confidence among youth over the course of the week, and all the youth expressed an interest in continuing to build on the artistic skills developed in the workshops. Participants also enjoyed using the arts as a catalyst to talk about broader issues of concern. Additionally, both youth and facilitators identified that positive relationships formed among the youth and between the youth and the program facilitators.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

This research is important to youth work because it demonstrates the potential for arts-based approaches to build resiliency and support the formation of positive relationships. Additionally, it shows that because art was successfully used to facilitate discussion among Tlicho youth about community change, it can potentially produce similar results in other Indigenous communities.

The researchers in this study recommend that other programs provide opportunities for youth to collaborate and engage in new art forms, in a safe, culturally relevant and creative environment. Art activities can be integrated into existing community initiatives to help enhance program strengths, promote group cohesions, and to provide alternative forms of expressions for youth.

The arts can be a powerful tool and particularly successful within the youth population when working towards enhancing engagement and overcoming challenges. Research about art as a potential strategy for the promotion of youth wellbeing can lend to the sustainability and success of youth programs.



Fanian, S., Young, S. K., Mantla, M., Daniels, A., & Chatwood, S. (2015). Evaluation of the Kots'ii`htla ("We Light the Fire") Project: building resiliency and connections through strengths-based creative arts programming for Indigenous youth. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 74, 10.3402/ijch.v74.27672. <http://doi.org/10.3402/ijch>.

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