



Empowering Sexual Health:

Land-and-Art-Based Programming with Indigenous and Northern Young People in the Northwest Territories, Canada

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Background

- Indigenous peoples in Canada experience higher HIV prevalence due to historic and continuing systemic inequities;¹
- New HIV cases tend to be among younger Indigenous peoples in comparison with non-Indigenous populations;²
- Youth aged 15–29 account for 31.6% of positive HIV test results among Indigenous people;²
- Art-and-land-based HIV-prevention programming has demonstrated promise to be empowering and support wellbeing;³
- ***Further evidence is needed to understand the impact and efficacy of art-and-land based HIV-prevention approaches with Indigenous youth***

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3. Flicker S, Maley O, Ridgley A, et al. e-PAR: using technology and participatory action research to engage youth in health promotion. *Action Res* 2008;6:285–303. [doi:10.1177/1476750307083711](https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750307083711)

Method

- Fostering Open eXpression among Youth (FOXY) & Strength, Masculinities, and Sexual Health (SMASH) is an action research program to promote healthy relationships, sexual and reproductive health, and HIV prevention among Northern and Indigenous adolescents in the Northwest Territories.
- Annual Peer Leader Retreats (2017-2019), which include Indigenous teachings, arts-based methods (e.g., mask-making, beading), leadership skill development, and nature-based activities.
- 286 participants:
 - n=196 women [trans inclusive], n=84 men [trans inclusive], n=5 non-binary
 - aged 12-19 (mean 14.4, SD 1.3)
 - n=235 were Indigenous
- Quantitative:
 - Pre- and post- retreat survey
 - Wilcoxon signed-rank tests to examine pre/post-retreat changes in leadership, empowerment, and self-confidence scores
- Qualitative:
 - Focus group discussions (n=24) with 158 participants (n=69 boys, n=122 girls) post-retreat
 - Thematic analysis

Results

- Qualitatively, themes included:
 - (1) improved leadership abilities and role-modelling;
 - (2) social connectedness; and
 - (3) increased feelings of empowerment/confidence.
- Quantitatively:
 - leadership post-retreat scores were 3.5 points higher than pre-retreat ($P < 0.001$).
 - Self-confidence scores were 3 points higher post-retreat ($P < 0.001$).
 - Empowerment post-retreat scores were 4 points higher compared to pre-retreat scores ($P < 0.001$).

“... I’m not so shy and everything, and I can actually lead the group and lots of things.
(Apprentice Focus Group, FOXY, 2018)

“It was meaningful because I could relate to everyone and everyone knew how I felt...”
(Peer Leader Focus Group, FOXY, 2018)

“... it’s like you could finally feel good about yourself”
(Peer Leader Focus Group, FOXY, 2017)

“I am like a hundred times more confident in myself...”
(Peer Leader Focus Group, FOXY, 2018)

Discussion & Acknowledgements

- Land-and-art-based programming supports the empowerment of Northern and Indigenous adolescents, improving confidence, leadership, and social connectedness;
- Results provide insight into possible empowerment-related pathways to improved HIV and SRH outcomes; and
- Integrated HIV prevention and empowerment programming can apply strengths-based, peer-led, gender-transformative approaches that attend to individual, relational, and communal wellbeing and are grounded in Indigenous teachings.

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Want to learn more about FOXY and SMASH?

<https://arcticfoxy.com/>
<https://arcticsmash.ca/retreat/>

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The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.