

A Purposeful Music Program for Traumatized Youth

by

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## **Abstract**

The need to build communities of empowered and socially responsible youth is becoming increasingly important among all levels of government across Canada and globally. This qualitative study examined how traumatized youth with high-risk conditions (e.g., mental health disorders, poverty, homelessness) and high-risk behaviours (e.g., gang involvement, substance misuse, suicidal attempt) use music-making within a purposefully designed program to become agents of their own personal development. The research was a collaborative effort with an arts-based community youth organization in Edmonton, Alberta that works with traumatized youth 12 to 24 years old who displayed high-risk conditions and high-risk behaviours. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected staff from the organization and a series of focus groups were conducted with youths involved in the music program.

Two theoretical frameworks, Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD), guided the study question and analysis. These approaches highlighted the value of capitalizing on the youths' latent assets to help in their personal development. More importantly, the data revealed that highly traumatized youth need to be nurtured and healed before they can effectively participate in and contribute to broad societal changes to dismantle oppressive systems and policies that negatively affect their general well-being and ability to prosper. This study uncovered the ways in which traumatized youth find meaning in the lyrics and music they make and perform through the program, and how their engagement in this activity inspire them to be reflective and commence their healing journey. An interpretivist approach aided by critical collaborative work with the community organization enhanced the understanding of how the traumatized youth experienced music-making and how it helps them to prepare for Positive Youth Development and Social Justice Youth Development.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Edrick A. Andrews. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “A Purposeful Music Program for Traumatized Youth”, No. Pro00085518 January 28, 2019.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife, Monica, who consistently demonstrated her patience, understanding, and support as I committed many hours to reading and writing, sacrificing precious time we would normally have spent together doing things that we both enjoy.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the support and guidance I received from every member of my academic committee. I am grateful to Dr. Kevin Jones, my academic supervisor, for his steadfast support during the research process, his review of my drafts, and helpful comments and suggestions that piloted me through this project.

To Dr. Yoshitaka Iwasaki, my original supervisor, who departed the University of Alberta to assume the position of Professor and Chair of the Department of Public Health and Recreation at San Jose State University in California, I say thank you. Dr. Iwasaki's experience in community-engaged research and his expertise in participatory action research engaging and mobilizing traumatized and impoverished youth were invaluable to this study. Dr. Iwasaki was instrumental in connecting me with the community organization that collaborated on this research. He also helped set the tone for building the critical relationship needed to undertake the study. His comments and suggestions during the writing of this thesis helped me navigate the intricate task of academic writing.

I would also like to thank Dr. Mary Beckie, Professor and Director of the Master of Arts in Community Engagement Studies for her encouragement and support. Dr. Beckie was always willing to listen to my concerns, offer helpful advice, and cheer me on when the task seemed overwhelming.

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## **Glossary of Terms**

### **Engagement**

In the context of this study, *engagement* is defined as an interconnected three-dimensional phenomenon (relational, behavioral, and cognitive) in which relational refers to the individual's interactions in his/her environment; behavioral refers to the quality of participation in an activity; and cognitive refers to the quality of psychological involvement in the activity (Davis, Summers, & Miller, 2012).

### **Highly Traumatized Youth (HTY)**

The term HTY underscores the complex trauma that often results in high-risk conditions and high-risk behaviours (see below for definitions of these two terms).

### **High-Risk Behaviours**

Involvement in activities (substance misuse, unprotected sex, self-harm, suicidal attempt, violence, etc.) that have a negative impact on the wellbeing of an individual (Iwasaki, Hopper, & Whelan, 2017).

### **High-Risk Conditions**

Conditions (mental health disorders, poverty, homelessness, etc.), experienced by many urban youth (Iwasaki, Hopper, & Whelan, 2017) often the outcomes of recent or intergenerational traumatic experiences.

### **Positive Youth Development (PYD)**

PYD in this study can be perceived as an approach that focuses on youth strength to help them develop critical skills and behaviours that serve to enhance their opportunities to strive and succeed in life (Snyder & Flay, 2012). The PYD framework consists of five indicators: (1) competence, (2) confidence, (3) connection, (4) character, and (5) caring/compassion.

### **Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD)**

SJYD is a concept conceived to enable and develop consciousness among urban youth (particularly those who are impoverished and marginalized) of their latent strength, and their community and broader societal responsibility to become agents of social change (Cammarota, 2011). The SJYD framework consists of five constructs/components: (1) Identifying power in social relationships, (2) protecting identity, (3) promoting systems and social changes, (4) encouraging collective action, and (5) embracing culture.

**Trauma**

“Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that are experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that have lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7). The experience may be recent or intergenerational in nature.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This thesis examined how a group of highly traumatized youth in Edmonton, Alberta who engaged in a purposefully designed music program experienced positive changes in their lives. In this chapter I will describe why I chose to do this study, state the problem, describe the purpose of the study and the research question, and conclude with my positionality.

### **The Motivation for this Study**

I was driven to do this study because I was searching for a solution to a problem that has lain heavily on my heart as far back as I can remember. Let me start with a story—a true story. One summer day I was strolling through the river valley below downtown Edmonton, Alberta during my lunch break. As I approached a footbridge to cross from the north side to the south side of the river, I witnessed an incident that troubled me deeply. Three or four male youth on the bank of the river were engaged in a heated discussion/argument; their loud voices drew my attention. I paused to gaze and I noticed they were poised to start a brawl. Soon one of the youth was punched and kicked several times by the others and then thrown into the river. He was thrown several times into the water, returning each time to the safety of the bank. With a few others, I watched the brawl from the footbridge and wondered if we should call the police. The scuffle ended a few minutes after it started, however, and the youth resumed their heated discussion/argument.

I frequently recall that incident and wonder what motivated these young people to behave as they did. I also wonder what meaningful/relevant engagement might ignite their latent talent/strength and empower them to achieve the positive personal development needed to successfully transition into adulthood.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Traumatized youth need community support to help them address and overcome their oppressive realities and achieve personal development and social advancement. Creating appropriate and supportive systems and instruments that build communities of empowered and socially responsible youth is not without challenge—particularly when serving traumatized youth, given the complexity of their lives. To foster positive youth development (PYD) and build safe communities, most jurisdictions focus on providing youth programs and services to address critical issues such as homelessness, substance abuse, and criminality (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006). But these programs are often uninspiring and lack the innovation and creativity necessary to address complex needs and enable traumatized youth to successfully transform into agents of their own personal development.

Connecting the concepts of PYD and social justice youth development (SJYD) may provide an effective framework for achieving youth empowerment and preparing traumatized youth for the transition to adulthood. These two conceptual approaches emphasize asset-based youth engagement by focusing on talents and abilities as opposed to shortcomings and by offering youth opportunities to be heard in matters that concern them (Iwasaki, 2016). The SJYD framework highlights the significance of youth consciousness of their capabilities, their community and wider humanity obligations, and their engagement in social justice action to address and transform oppressive conditions (Cammarota, 2011; Ginwright & James, 2002). On the other hand, the PYD framework explains how supporting the development of skills in youth at the personal level (e.g., education, social, and vocational skills) can lead to positive and desirable youth development (Snyder & Flay, 2012).

PYD appears to be the more dominant of the two frameworks because traumatized youth are generally more focussed on their personal development than on broader community obligations and societal changes. This is not surprising given that traumatized youth are absorbed in matters more urgent in their daily lives, such as coping with their high-risk conditions (e.g., mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and homelessness), making the connections, achieving the competencies, and gaining the confidence necessary to thrive and move forward in life. Therefore, PYD should be regarded as a precursor to SJYD because it provides the tools (e.g., competence, confidence, compassion—conceptual elements of PYD) to effectively engage in social justice actions. These tools help to advance foundational education and promote understanding and awareness of the complexities of political power and unjust social systems. It is only with this awareness and understanding that youth can act to positively change oppressive policies and systems and help build a just society for the powerless and voiceless—outcomes SJYD is intended to achieve. So while the concepts of PYD and SJYD work together to achieve the desired goal of a just and fair society for the marginalized, voiceless, and powerless of our society (in this case traumatized youth), PYD serves to prepare the youth for effective SJYD.

Although several studies (some of which are discussed in my review of the literature) identify programs that have helped youth deal with their traumatic experiences, there is a paucity of studies about purposeful engagement with highly traumatized youth (Prior & Mason, 2010; Mason & Prior, 2008) that consider the enormous complexity of their life experiences (Case & Haines, 2015) and offer effective programs for their personal development. These youth may have experienced intergenerational trauma, poverty, racism, substance use disorder, gang involvement, sexual violence, and other traumas (White & Stoneman, 2012) that make life and positive development very challenging. One community organization in Edmonton, Alberta, has

recognized this gap and is seriously addressing the issue of youth empowerment and positive development by providing an innovative, purposefully designed music program to help traumatized youth heal from their psychological wounds and move forward. This organization provides a safe space where participants can create the music they want to make. The program inspires them to be reflective, to self-identify, to build confidence and competence, and to positively transform their lives.

For the purpose of this study, the terms “*trauma*” and “*engagement*” take on the following meanings: “Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that are experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that have lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7). The concept of engagement is complex and there is no standard definition among scholars. Borrowing from the notion of school engagement, engagement here is defined as an interconnected three-dimensional phenomenon (relational, behavioral, and cognitive) where relational refers to the individual’s interactions in his/her environment; behavioral refers to the quality of participation in an activity; and cognitive refers to the quality of psychological involvement in the activity (Davis, Summers, & Miller, 2012). At times I will refer to the young people in this study as highly traumatized youth [HTY] to underscore the complex trauma most of them have experienced and continue to experience in their lives.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Question**

In Edmonton, Alberta, as in many other cities across Canada, symptoms of a difficult life are evident among many urbanized youth. This is particularly true for Aboriginal youth, many of whom are affected by intergenerational trauma. Often, these youth turn to community

organizations to seek support and to meet other young people in similar situations. This qualitative study examined how traumatized youth in Edmonton, Alberta use music-making within a purposefully designed music program to facilitate their empowerment to become agents of their personal development. Many traumatized youth in Edmonton struggle with high-risk conditions such as homelessness, poverty, mental health disorders, and high-risk behaviours (e.g., substance misuse, gang involvement, theft). Unless these young people are effectively helped to address these challenges, they will not experience the personal development needed to thrive and successfully transition into adulthood. In addition, the youth will lack the preparation to become contributing citizens and to participate in positive societal changes. The lack of effective help for these youth will only serve to create social crisis among traumatized youth in the city.

To conduct this study, Dr. Yoshitaka Iwasaki introduced me to a community organization in Edmonton that served traumatized youth and engaged them in activities that facilitate their personal development. Dr. Iwasaki, was my original academic supervisor, and has had some prior community research relationship with the organization. (I will focus on the nature of my collaborative relationship with this organization later in this thesis.) The collaborative relationship afforded me the opportunity to use the organization's facility to conduct focus groups with the young people and to interview selected staff members. The organization describes the population it serves as traumatized 12- to 24-year-olds with high-risk conditions and behaviours. About 80% of these young people are of Indigenous heritage and may be homeless, in discord with the law, or facing difficulties with substance addiction and/or mental health issues. There is, therefore, a pressing demand for effective programs to help these young



people cope and heal from their trauma (Garrido, Baker, Davidson, Moore, & Wasserman, 2015).

A central element of the organization's work involves a music program that helps youth mitigate the pain and detriment of their traumatic experiences. The program is provided at no cost to the youth, and their participation is voluntary. The organization provides a safe space where the youth are able to examine their existence and express their feelings through the lyrics of their songs. Their music gives them a powerful voice, helps them rediscover their identity, and provides an escape from the grips of demeaning social stigma. The purposeful engagement offered the youth through the music program facilitates the creation of self-determined music in a semi-structured format and in a safe environment. Self-determined means that the youth decide what they want to do. They can enter the music program at any skill/knowledge level, pick an available instrument (such as the guitar or drums), and start creating music at their own pace—with help from the music program staff if they so desire. An individual might decide to concentrate on creating musical beats (most often the choice is hip hop beats), or to be involved in both playing an instrument and creating beats. The program format has very little structure; the youth can be involved as much or as little as they wish. However, if they need help from staff, they must schedule a specific time to meet.

The study focussed on trying to understand how the music the youth created and performed brought meaning to their lives and helped them to be reflective and become self-empowered to make positive lifestyle changes. Specifically, this research sought to answer this question: *How are traumatized youth able to use a music program to become agents of their own lifestyle changes and positive development?* With this understanding, I hope to contribute to the body of knowledge about what successful engagement looks like for HTYs and how this

engagement empowers them to become agents of their own positive development. I also hope this new knowledge will be useful to scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers who are interested in effective engagement for development of HTYs.

### **Positionality**

Let me describe my positionality at this point, to reinforce the reason I chose to conduct this research and also provide some context for the study. I am originally from the Caribbean and my view of the problem is somewhat influenced by my cultural background and life experiences. Because of those factors, I feel connected, in many ways, to the youth. The primary source of my view is my lingering disquiet about the impact of the slave trade and slavery in the Caribbean, and the colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, still ongoing in some sense. There are marked similarities between the traumatic impact of these events on people of African origin whose ancestors were enslaved in the Caribbean and colonized Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In the case of the slave trade, thousands of Africans were removed from their homeland and families and subjected to the lowest forms of human existence in forced labour in the Caribbean islands (Brereton, 2010). The oppressive and brutal living conditions of these slaves had painful intergenerational consequences on these displaced people including my ancestors.

Although Indigenous Peoples in Canada were not expatriated to an unfamiliar country as African slaves were, European colonizers removed them from their homes and families and placed them in environments that were quite unfamiliar to them during the period of the Indian residential school system. This action was intended to assimilate the Indigenous Peoples into the European culture, but the outcome was the denial of their identity, culture, spirituality, language, and general way of life. I will go into greater detail about these realities later in this thesis; for now, I want to indicate that in many ways I can relate to the pain, anguish, lack of voice, racism,

and marginalization endured by Indigenous Peoples, including the youth in the music program at the organization.

Having described the problem this study was intended to examine, the population I was interested in inquiring about, the reason for my interest, my collaborative approach, and how this study is expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, I have concluded this chapter with a statement of my positionality because I believe it is important that readers know who I am, why I feel connected with the study population, and why I am enthused about finding answers to the problem. In the following chapter, I will detail the background of the study and discuss what I learned from a review of the literature.

## **Chapter Two: Background and Review of the Literature**

The intent of this chapter is to show the importance of my research question and demonstrate how my study fits into the existing literature and potentially adds to the body of knowledge.

First, I will discuss the reality of traumatic experience among young people in various contexts and examine similar experiences among Indigenous youth in Canada. I will look at what it means to engage youth to address their hurts and refer to the literature to describe various strategies used in a number of studies to help them deal with their pain. Finally, I will focus on music-making as a strategic engagement for positive outcomes among traumatized youth and discuss the theoretical frameworks that guided this study.

### **Painful Realities Among Youth Who Encounter Trauma in their Lives**

Unlawful behaviours in youth are often linked to past traumatic experiences, a notion that causes concern among Canadians (Casavant, MacKay, & Valiquet, 2012). In 2014, youth aged 12 to 17 committed nearly 101,000 criminal code violations (excluding traffic), or 4,322 criminal code violations per 100,000 youth — 5,380 per 100,000 in Alberta (Allen & Superle, 2014). Across Canada, children under age 12 were involved in 118 criminal code violations per 100,000 in the same year (Allen & Superle, 2014). In a 2010 statistical snapshot, 37% of at-risk youth indicated they had committed one or more criminal offenses such as violence or the sale of drugs in their lifetime (Public Safety Canada, 2012). Thirty percent of the youth involved in delinquent behaviour were boys while 15% were girls (Public Safety Canada, 2012).

Most youth who have had traumatic experiences in their early lives will make a normal transition to adulthood (Public Safety Canada, 2012). However, others will have outcomes that negatively affect their psycho-social development and lead to high-risk behaviours, which in turn may lead to involvement with the criminal justice system (Public Safety Canada, 2012).

Childhood trauma, especially when ongoing, can have harmful effects on children's performance, including brain development, regulation of emotions, attachment, and intellectual and behavioural functioning (CFCC, 2014). "Childhood traumas may include experiences such as abuse or neglect, witnessing family or community violence, accidents, exposure to parental drug or alcohol abuse, separation from parents through parental death or divorce, parental criminal behaviours, or parental incarceration" (CFCC, 2014, p. 3). Incidence of intergenerational trauma among Aboriginal peoples in Canada is well documented (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; Goforth, 2006; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004; Bennett, Blackstock, & De La Ronde, 2005; Quinn, 2007; Partridge, 2010) and linked primarily to colonization, the residential schools system, the 1960s "scoop", and the child welfare system in many provinces.

Exposure to violence can occur on multiple levels, including family, community, and media (Osofsky, 1999). Understanding the effects of trauma on childhood development and supporting a shared view of that process is an important step in the effort to create and implement effective, harmonized systems of care for traumatized youth (Smithgall, Cusick, & Griffin, 2013). Osofsky (1999) indicates that exposure to multiple levels of violence affects the behaviour of both children and parents, which makes it difficult for the parents to provide the effective parental support that is so essential in the early years of their children's lives. Children who live in middle to upper class neighbourhoods are less likely to experience community violence than those in less affluent neighbourhoods. Highly traumatized youth are more likely to live in impoverished neighbourhoods and are therefore more likely to be exposed to community violence than youth living in higher socioeconomic neighbourhoods (Osofsky, 1999). Some children living in low-income areas witness so much violence with guns and

knives that their stories about shootings and beatings become everyday tails of normal events (Osofsky, 1999).

In U.S. homes where domestic violence occurs, children are physically abused and neglected at a rate 15 times higher than the national average (Osofsky, 1999). Fantuzzo, Boruch, Beriama, et al. found (as cited in Osofsky, 1999, p. 34) that in 60% to 75% of families in which a woman was battered, children were also battered. According to Dierkhising (2013), about 90 % of justice-involved youth in America reported exposure to some sort of traumatic experience, usually in the early stage of life. Despite this reality, young people are capable of overcoming these hurts if they can access the appropriate support from their community,

### **Youth, Trauma and Indigenous Experience in Canada**

In Canada, a significant number of traumatized youth are Indigenous young people, many of whom are homeless (Hope, Mayo, McCormack, & Rollings, 2017; National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC), 2012). The source of their traumatization can be linked, for the most part, to the intergenerational impacts of colonialism (Hope, Mayo, McCormack, & Rollings, 2017), the notorious Indian residential schools programs, and the '60s scoop (OCYA Alberta, 2016).

When Europeans first settled in Canada, they attempted to colonize and assimilate the Aboriginal peoples into European culture, worldview, norms, values, and beliefs—a way of living the settlers believed was superior to that of Indigenous Peoples (Rand, 2011; Schiffer, 2016). That attempt cut native people off from their established ways of self-governance, and barred from practicing their traditional culture, languages, spirituality, and economic system (Schiffer, 2016). Schiffer suggests that such treatment resulted in the demise of significant aspects of Aboriginal people's identity.

Canada's legacy of social policies and legislations also had negative impacts on the lives of Aboriginal peoples (Hope, Mayo, McCormack, & Rollings, 2017). The *Indian Act* of 1876 gave non-Aboriginals jurisdiction over the daily lives of Aboriginal peoples. This control was used to manage First Nations people, their lands, and their resources, in part by creating segregated settlements or reserves for Indigenous Peoples (Hope, Mayo, McCormack, & Rollings, 2017). In addition, the *Indian Act* enabled the creation of residential schools as a means of eradicating the language and culture of First Nations Peoples (OCYA Alberta, 2016). The misguided rationale was to assimilate First Nations peoples into the Canadian population and by so doing extend a settler definition of civilization to First Nations communities.

It is estimated that between 1883 and 1996, more than 100,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children were taken from their families and placed in Indian residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Housed in unfamiliar and unfriendly environments that fostered inhumane treatment (Schiffer, 2016), the children faced appalling conditions in the schools and were usually subjected to abuse, neglect, and in many cases death at the hands of the school operators (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In 1907 a government medical inspector reported that 24% of previously healthy Aboriginal children were dying in residential schools, and that about 47% (on the Peigan Reserve in Alberta) to 75% (at the File Hills Boarding School in Saskatchewan) of students died shortly after they were released from the schools to their families (Fournier & Crey, and Milloy, as cited in (OCYA Alberta, 2016, p. 9).

These ill-devised and perverse policies, aimed at subjugating Aboriginal peoples and eradicating their identity, have had a long-lasting negative impact (Schiffer, 2016; (OCYA Alberta, 2016)). This impact includes memories of traumatic events that affect the health and

well-being of thousands of individuals, families, and their communities over many generations (Schiffer, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Hope, Mayo, McCormack, & Rollings, 2017). Schiffer (2016) found that numerous residential schools survivors who returned to their communities were emotionally ruined. Many reported that they returned with considerable trauma but found few resources available to help them deal with their traumatic experiences (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). They were deprived of their traditional ways of coping, healing, and parenting—and then returned to communities whose health depends on those ways. The frustration felt by so many Aboriginal Peoples as a result of colonization was succinctly expressed by an Aboriginal mother who said, “They [the government] make us live on a reserve where poverty is horrible and there is no help, and then judge us for the conditions we live in. They cause trauma in our communities, and then judge us for being alcoholics and bad parents. How does that make any sense?” (OCYA Alberta, 2016, p. 8). The lack of help was highlighted by a lawsuit brought before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in 2007 by Cindy Blackstock, head of the First Nations Family Caring Society, with the support of the Assembly of First Nations. The suit sought compensation to First Nations children who suffered harm because of chronic underfunding and social services inequities of the on-reserve child welfare system (CBC News, 2019). The tribunal ruled in 2016 that the government of Canada was inadequately funding the on-reserve child welfare system, and in September 2019 ordered the Canadian Government to pay \$40,000 to each First Nations child affected since 2006. The government applied for a judicial review of the order, which it estimated would cost about \$8 billion, and asked the tribunal to stay or pause the order until a decision is made on that application (CBC News, 2019).



The disruption of Aboriginal families and communities caused by colonization was exacerbated in the 1960s, when many non-Aboriginal Canadians became conscious of the poor living conditions on reserves (OCYA Alberta, 2016). Instead of providing the resources needed to improve on-reserve living conditions, the government chose to “scoop” up Aboriginal children and remove them from what they regarded as poor parenting situations (Bennett, Blackstock, & De La Ronde, 2005). Successive generations of Aboriginal children were placed in foster care under the auspices of the child welfare system (Schiffer, 2016; (OCYA Alberta, 2016). It is unfortunate but not surprising that the placement of many of these children in foster homes led to poor outcomes such as poor mental health, low vocational achievement, and unstable relationships (Bennett, Blackstock, & De La Ronde, 2005). Intergenerational trauma continues to affect Aboriginal youth on and off reserves, and experiences of poverty, racism, discrimination, prejudice, marginalization, and homelessness are common.

In June, 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada issued an apology to former residential schools students and their families for the role the government played in the residential schools system in Canada. Following the government’s apology, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was created to look at historical accounts of the Indian Residential School System, to recommend ways to remedy the harm caused to Aboriginal Peoples, and to foster positive relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, n.d.). In December of 2015 the TRC released its report with a call for action in crucial areas, including child welfare, education, language and culture, and health (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Reconciliation is expected to be an on-going process that ideally involves all Canadians with the hope of advancing relationships through understanding and respect.

## **Engaging Traumatized Youth to Address their Hurts**

The extent and severity of the negative effects of traumatic experiences on youth demands that effective measures be developed to address the problem and help these young people heal from their emotional wounds. Several previous studies demonstrate positive outcomes in helping young people cope with the pains of trauma. I reviewed these approaches with the intent of investigating how purposefully designed engagement activities, especially those that encourage positive self-thoughts, prepares the youth involved to become agents of positive youth development. I was particularly interested in exploring arts-based activities such as music-making, to learn how youths experienced these engagements.

The following examples of engagement activities presented in the literature provide some interesting insights into how traumatized young people have been helped to cope with their painful experiences in different contexts.

**Cognitive and behavioural coping strategies.** This approach is intended to help youth reframe their thoughts (in this case negative thinking as a result of painful experiences) to mitigate the pain they are feeling and develop the skills to cope with their pain. Cherewick, et al. (2015) conducted a study using a cognitive and behavioural approach to engage youth in a region experiencing conflict. The traumatic experience of the youth in this particular case involved decades of pervasive conflict in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The conflict destroyed the health and social infrastructure of the region and exposed the youth to continuous regional or community violence over many years. Cherewick, et al. (2015) intended to determine youths' preferred strategy for coping with traumatic events, examined how these choices influenced their adjustment path over time, and then used the knowledge gained to facilitate coping strategies to promote health and well-being. The study's theoretical framework was based

on the constructivist epistemology that meaning is co-created in dialogue between people. This theoretical approach was appropriate because there was a tacit emphasis on honouring the youth's voices as expressions of their true feelings about trauma and coping.

The study used interviews with 30 youth aged 10 to 15 years to generate discussion and invite dialogue. Important lessons were learned about the ways youth cope with traumatic experiences. The youth employed a number of cognitive strategies, including “trying to forget.” That is, they involved themselves in activities that engaged their minds with positive thoughts that helped them to forget their painful experiences.

Another cognitive behaviour involved praying, an important Congolese spiritual and cultural engagement, intended to bring peace and strength to those who engage in this practice. In like manner, Aboriginal peoples also place significant importance on spirituality in their cultural context and engage in prayer and other traditional ceremonies for their health and well-being (Quinn, 2007; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Behavioural coping strategies used by the youth often involved seeking support from friends, family, and the community — opportunities to talk about their feelings, play games, sing, and do the things that involve interaction with people they trust.

The study's engagement approach was particularly effective, making the participants integral to the exercise and encouraging them to describe their own trauma and the strategies they use to cope. That said, their coping strategies were highly contextualized, defined by the regional culture, customs, and beliefs of youth in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. For this reason, the results of the study may not be applicable/generalizable to other locations. Despite that limitation, the study demonstrates the merit of using an engagement approach to address the negative impact of exposure to violence in the youth population. In addition, the

results of the study may inform the design of policies and programs to support youth empowerment and positive development, taking the existing context into account.

**Arts-based mindfulness activities.** Mindfulness can be described as a psychological process whereby one purposefully brings into focus thoughts, experiences, and feelings- accepting these as they are, without being judgemental (Bishop, et al., 2004). Arts-based mindfulness activities (Greenberg & Harris, 2011) such as music-making and expressive writing (e.g., poetry) clearly help youth deal with difficult situations. This engagement approach was used with vulnerable 8- to 12-years who were involved in a child welfare or mental health program. The study illustrates how an arts-based mindfulness (Holistic Art-Based Program [HAP]) engagement program, coupled with a strength-based social group-work methodology, can have a holistic impact on the lives of vulnerable young people (Coholic, Oystriick, Posteraro, & Lougheed, 2016). The children had experienced unstable living situations involving abuse, and expressed feelings of anxiety. They also struggled with self-confidence, self-esteem, and poor performance at school. The HAP consisted of a range of non-deliberative group activities such as creative writing, drawing, painting, making collages, music, listening to guided imageries, and Tai Chi. These non-deliberative forms of engagement provided a range of benefits that helped the children develop self-awareness, build self-esteem, improve their mood and confidence, and enhance their coping and social skills. The children and their guardians agreed the program had a positive influence on the children's lives.

The prime reason for the effectiveness of this engagement was its strength-based approach. The engagement avoided focussing on participants' shortcomings and instead appealed to their innate talents, interests, and abilities in order to promote positive outcomes. The approach reduced feelings of isolation and promoted a feeling of belonging, which in turn helped

build social skills and enhance self-esteem. Non-deliberative activities are essential elements of any coping strategy designed to address the negative behaviours that result from traumatic experiences. The results of this study demonstrated that facilitating the growth of innate capabilities in a space where participants feel safe may promote self-confidence, improve mood and hone coping skills.

**Trauma-informed musical theatre.** Trauma-informed musical theatre was an innovative engagement method employed to help incarcerated teenage girls address the effects of traumatic life experiences (Palidofsky & Stolbach, 2012). The program engaged the youth in collaborative work with theatre professionals to create, develop, and perform musicals based on their own experiences. As the girls wrote the lyrics of their songs Palidofsky and Stolbach (2012) investigated the link between trauma and incarceration through their voices.

Although the program was neither designed by mental health professionals nor intended to be a clinical intervention, anecdotal evidence indicates it may have had therapeutic value. Palidofsky and Stolbach (2012) argue that the theatre program succeeded in engaging incarcerated youth and facilitating healing because it offered factors that did not exist in the juvenile justice system. These factors include opportunities to voluntarily engage with others to create community and do something for others that is interesting and fun. In other words, the investigators believe the success of the theatre program hinged on the fact that it was voluntary, it was not conducted by those with authority over the participants, it created community, and it was fun. The program had substantial benefits, thanks to a model of engagement that effectively facilitated personal development for transition to adulthood.

**Collaboration across public systems.** Trauma impacts children across the child welfare, justice, and education systems. These three public systems serve different purposes and may not

necessarily provide the coordinated services the children need to cope and develop holistically. That reality underscores the importance of both a trauma-informed perspective and a collaborative approach when tackling the challenges presented by children involved in these systems (Smithgall, Cusick, & Griffin, 2013).

The multiple complexities involved in helping children across systems create dilemmas for researchers and practitioners. For example, a child may be both vulnerable because of traumatic experiences and dangerous to him or herself and others. As Smithgall, Cusick, and Griffin (2013) point out, difficult questions arise: How does the state handle this situation? Which system takes priority? Does the state punish or rehabilitate such a child? To answer these questions, the authors propose involving and engaging not just the children but also the families in trauma-focused assessment and intervention, with the aim of helping the children achieve behavioural health and academic success so they can become contributive citizens in their communities.

**Engaging court-involved youth.** The traumatic experiences of court-involved youth impact their learning and school culture; one recent study indicates that engagement can counter those impacts and contribute to their educational well-being (West, Day, Somers, & Baroni, 2014). The authors examined how engaging court-involved youth can help create a trauma-informed intervention to enhance their educational success. Thirty-nine female students aged 14 to 18 who were involved in the court system participated in the engagement exercise. Forty-four percent of the participants were court-involved due to juvenile delinquency and 56% were in the system because of abuse and neglect petitions. The study examined the students' perspectives of educational well-being and addressed the absence of voice of court-involved students living in residential care. The students took part in focus groups where they discussed internalizing

behaviours that they saw in others and that they displayed in the classroom. They also explained the likely cause of these behaviours and suggested strategies to combat them. The two common strategies offered to address internalizing behaviours were respect for others and improved student engagement.

Learnings from this investigation include the fact that traumatic experiences have serious impact on youths' educational performance and that giving students a voice in the design of measures to assist in their own healing signals that their innate talents are recognized and their contribution valued. This approach helps build confidence and self-esteem, which in turn enhances well-being. Participants also generally believed that enhanced education helps traumatized young people gain self-awareness and place themselves on a trajectory for positive development.

**Music-making as an effective engagement tool.** Numerous observers see music-making, with its complex play of physical and emotional expressions, as an excellent way to engage and equip traumatized youth. Music is an artistic form that helps to create community and provides a platform for people, whoever they are, to declare their identity, express their aspirations, and to present a plan for achieving their goals.

In the last twenty to thirty years, the hip hop aesthetic has created a unique opportunity for young people, particularly those without advantage, to narrate their stories to the world using their innate talents in music or other art forms (Rodriguez, 2009; Travis & Deepak, 2011). Youth are easily drawn to the hip-hop culture because of the popularity of rap music, the visibility of breakdancing, and the notoriety of rappers (Morgan & Warren, 2011). They connect with the language of rap, and the lyrics resonate with them. Youth relate to the message of that genre of music, which often speaks to the struggles marginalized, impoverished young people encounter

in their daily lives. Racism, police brutality, drug addiction, and the oppression of those without voice are often the key message in the musical discourse (Karvelis, 2018), often in response to the injustices young people face, and as pushback against the authorities perpetuating those injustices (Morgan & Warren, 2011).

Rap music seems an appropriate vehicle for social and political activism. Through rap, traumatized youth are able to educate the world using a pedagogic approach created by them and uniquely delivered as only the sufferers can. Participants in the hip hop culture feel connected to each other, have a sense of belonging, and enjoy a boost in self-esteem. Hip-hop enthusiasts who are less inclined to rap use breakdancing as another effective tool of expression (González, 2016; Buffam, 2011). They become very creative and try to outdo their peers with unique and mind-boggling moves. Breakdancing is a non-verbal form of expression, which several youth participants in one study referred to as “body language.” When these young people get together to rap and dance they encourage and motivate each other, build solidarity, and create community (Morgan & Warren, 2011).

Engaging in hip hop certainly builds communication skills through writing lyrics and rapping. Morgan and Warren (2011) argue that these achievements create a sense of accomplishment that builds the confidence the youth need to achieve personal positive development. According to Karvelis (2018), the beauty of hip hop is that it is available to anyone, easy to learn, and doable almost anywhere. It can also be used to express genuine feelings about experiences and life challenges in a way that can inform others, including educators (Porfilio & Malott, 2011). Once this awareness is realized and the youth better understand themselves and the world in which they live, they place themselves in a good position



to adjust the systems and institutions that obstruct their liberation and positive development (Freire, 2005).

### **Purposeful Engagement through Music-Making**

*“One good thing about music, when it hits you feel no pain” (Marley, n.d.)*

A number of studies have demonstrated that purposeful engagement is an effective strategy for helping youth cope with or heal from their life ills (Iwasaki, 2016; Kisiel, et al., 2006; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Rice, Girvin, & Primak, 2014). An important factor in purposeful engagement is that youth become active leaders or participants in their healing process (Case & Haines, 2015; Zaff, Ginsberg, & Boyd, 2014; Naccarato, Brophy, & LaClair, 2013). According to Iwasaki (2016), it is important that youth voices are encouraged and heard; when heard, youth feel respected, build confidence and self-esteem, and develop leadership skills. In effect, youth can become key instruments of their own healing by bringing to light needed policy changes (Iwasaki, The Role of Youth Engagement in Positive Youth Development and Social Justice Youth Development for High Risk, Marginalized Youth, 2016) and appropriate programs and services that support their efforts to overcome the negative impacts of their traumatic experiences (Cammarota, 2011).

It is critical that any purposeful engagement employed to help traumatized youth is contextually (National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC), 2012) and culturally sensitive to their specific needs (Albright, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017). Activities such as visual and performing arts, music-making, and fashion design that engage the youth themselves (Iwasaki, The Role of Youth Engagement in Positive Youth Development and Social Justice Youth Development for High Risk, Marginalized Youth, 2016) and foster authentic expression of their creative talents may have greater success than programs developed and implemented without direct youth involvement. Participating in the development of these programs can promote self-empowerment

and ownership, so that youth may experience the confidence and encouragement they need to capitalize on their strengths and make positive life changes (Cammarota, 2011; Iwasaki, 2016).

Relatively few violence intervention measures have been systematically assessed (Kisiel, et al., 2006), and measures to deal with the impact of trauma are unavailable to most youth involved in the justice system (Palidofsky & Stolbach, 2012). By understanding what purposeful engagement is or means for HTYs and how such engagement helps them pursue a meaningful life (Zaff, Ginsberg, Boyd, & Kakli, 2014), our community can more effectively work with them to provide support systems needed for successful outcomes. These support systems are best designed to help those youth deal with the difficult challenges they face and assist them in making a triumphant transition into the confident and empowered adults they want to become (Cammarota, 2011).

In general, the preferred strategy for helping youth cope with traumatic events is one that mobilizes youth (Iwasaki, 2016) to express their true feelings of trauma and coping (Cherewick, et al., 2015). Coholic et al. found that art-based mindfulness activities coupled with a strength-based social group-work methodology had a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable 8- to 12-year-old children. The authors believe the two-pronged engagement approach was successful because it was strength-based and removed the perception of separation and promoted a feeling of social bond, which in turn helped build social skills and self-esteem in the youth.

Recent research regarding youth trauma and development suggests that arts-base interventions (Coholic, Oystnick, Posteraro, & Loughheed, 2016; Kisiel, et al., 2006), including personal music listening and community music-making programs, can effectively help young people cope with trauma and achieve positive development and well-being (Garrido, Baker, Davidson, Moore, & Wasserman, 2015). Garrido et al. (2015) report that after a traumatic

experience (tornado) a group of children created a musical composition that helped them recognize and process their emotions in a wholesome and therapeutic manner. Akombo (as cited in Garrido, 2015) notes that music was used as a healing agent amid post-election violence in Kenya in 2007 to help survivors recall and deal with the displacement that followed and the distress resulting from the violence. The American Music Therapy Association (as cited in Garrido, 2015) reports that music therapists used music improvisation, song writing, and singing to help survivors of the deadly attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 process the traumatic experience, reduce stress, and help cope with the shocking encounter.

Several studies on the impact of music on traumatized individuals have been conducted in the context of music therapy (Garrido, Baker, Davidson, Moore, & Wasserman, 2015; Saarikallio S, 2010; Saarikallio & Erkkila, 2007). The literature suggests that individuals frequently use self-created musical activities such as music composition, singing, playing, dancing, and listening to help cope and with their traumatic experiences and manage their moods (Garrido, Baker, Davidson, Moore, & Wasserman, 2015; Travis Jr, 2013). Although most extant research deals with the positive impacts of music therapy on traumatized individuals, the literature suggests that diverse individual musical undertakings such as song writing, singing, dancing, and listening are often used to manage youths' emotional states (Saarikallio S, 2010; Saarikallio & Erkkila, 2007; Shields, 2001; Miranda & Claes, 2009; Monteiro & Wall, 2011; Mayers, 1995). The expectation is that through music engagement at the community organization, youth will be empowered to use their latent talent to emerge from their impoverished situation, overcome the stigma placed on them, and achieve their life dreams.

## **Adopting PYD and SJYD as a Lens for Reviewing the Literature**

The theoretical frameworks that guide this study are positive youth development (PYD) and social justice youth development (SJYD) (Arnold & Silliman, 2017; Lerner, Lerner, Urban, & Zaff, 2016; Cammarota, 2011; Lerner, 2005). The PYD framework explains how supporting the development of skills at both the youth and system levels can lead to positive and desirable outcomes in youth development (Snyder & Flay, 2012). Cammarota (2011) states that: “SJYD requires the healing of youth identities by involving them in social justice activities that counter oppressive conditions preventing healthy self-identification” (p. 828). The results of SJYD are youth who succeed at transforming their social and economic context to achieve a better life for themselves and other impoverished individuals. The framework describes the significance of youth consciousness of their capabilities, their obligations to community and wider humanity, and their engagement in social justice action to address and transform oppressive conditions (Ginwright & James, *From Assets to Agents of Change: Social Justice, Organizing, and Youth Development*, 2002). I used these frameworks as sensitising concepts to provide a context for both framing the study and helping interpret the findings from the study (Patton, 2014).

The PYD framework is based on the notion that every individual has the capacity for successful positive development; in other words, individuals are endowed with innate talents/assets that, if aligned with suitable resources in the appropriate context, promote healthy growth over time (Lerner, et al., 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Lerner et al. (2005) suggest that appropriate support such as families, schools, and communities are important to facilitate the development. Cherewick et al. (2015) description of effective coping strategies used by traumatized youth corroborates Lerner et al.’s (2005) suggestion that appropriate support, in this case community, coupled with the notion of innate talents/assets are important to facilitate

development. Lerner and colleagues argue that PYD is the culmination of the 5Cs and that empirical evidence supports the notion of the 5Cs as a development context of PYD. On the other hand, other researchers (Jones, Dunn, Holt, Sullivan, & Bloom, n.d.) posit that sport is not a significant context for developing the 5Cs and caution researchers against accepting the 5Cs as a paradigm for PYD. Jones and colleagues suggest that prosocial values and confidence/competence may be better indicators of PYD than the 5Cs.

The key lessons of this chapter are that many youth in Canada and around the world experience traumatic incidences such as physical and/or emotional abuse, violence, and family neglect. These experiences have had negative impacts on their lives (e.g., mental health disorders, poverty, homelessness, substance misuse, and justice system involvement), which make it very challenging for them to achieve personal development. From the literature, we learn of existing approaches (e.g., music theatre, art-based mindfulness activities, and coping strategies) that have helped traumatized youth heal from their hurts. However, as this study will demonstrate, healing from (or coping with) hurts is at best a precursor to achieving positive youth development (PYD) and social justice youth development (SJYD).

PYD has as its core specific characteristics such as competence, confidence, connectedness, character, and caring/compassion. SJYD deals with the development of social consciousness and societal obligations, which are essentials for taking action to bring about a just and fair society. Purposeful engagement should be designed as a foundational activity to achieve PYD in preparation for the broader and more far-reaching development of SJYD. In other words, PYD is a necessary but not sufficient component of SJYD. In chapter four I will demonstrate how PYD and SJYD occur among the youth participating in this study. Chapter three will discuss the methods and design used to conduct this study. I will explain in detail the

collaborative relationship developed with the community organization involved and the procedures employed to collect and analyze the data.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodological approach used in the study, including the story of my experience as a graduate student conducting community-based research in collaboration with a community partner. I will begin by describing the organization and how I developed and maintained a relationship with it. I will then discuss the tensions and challenges I encountered as a student, how I addressed them, what I learned, and how I benefited from the experience. Finally, I will discuss the discrete methods that I employed in this qualitative inquiry.

#### **A Community Partner: Building Authentic Relationship in Collaborative Research**

Perhaps the most significant phase of this study was finding an appropriate community partner and building a harmonious working relationship with it. The community organization I partnered with serves traumatized youth, the very population I was interested in working with. Several community organizations serve traumatized youth, but few provide the program that aligns with the area of interest of this study.

The crucial relationship-building process had its challenges/issues but the exercise was essential to building the trust and shared meaning-making necessary to support this research. The challenges became clear once I became aware that the organization had limited experience in collaborative research with university students and that the majority (about 80% percent) of the youth served are of Aboriginal descent. Numerous matters regarding ethical practice in community research with youth, particularly of Aboriginal origin, had to be addressed. Absolon (2011) emphasizes that responsible ethical practice requires researchers to self-declare so that stakeholders are cognizant of their backgrounds and their intentions. In fact, I needed to declare my own positionality (see below) early in the process of building relationship with the organization as a condition of receiving support to conduct the study with this particular group of

youth. The journey into this meaningful research relationship inescapably encountered several bumps and curves, but the experience was worth the effort.

In light of what the organization is trying to achieve with the youth, every effort is made to safeguard them. The leaders do everything possible to ensure that any “outsider” involved with the organization does not disrupt their undertaking of creating hope and building stability in the lives of these young people. This safeguard had to be taken into account for the data collection phase of my study, therefore, a process was established to meet the organization’s conditions. Given this scenario, it is clear that a trusting relationship was needed between me and my community partner.

As part of the relationship-building process, the executive director introduced me to key members of the staff. The executive director requested that I assume an internship/volunteer position to acquaint myself with the youth and staff and to acquire a good understanding of some of the activities and programs taking place at the facility. I did my internship/volunteer engagement once a week with the music program, since that was the focus of my study. In addition, I volunteered in other areas such as fundraising events and attended other activities arranged by the organization. The idea behind this approach was that the youth would become accustomed to seeing me around the facility so that I would not be regarded as an outsider. I would also have the opportunity to give them some background about myself, explain the reason I was there, and provide some insight about the study.

As hoped, I met a number of young people who attended the music program and was able to introduce myself, describe the study and explain what I intended to accomplish. Building relationships with these youth was an interesting exercise. The key to that exercise was establishing trust with them. They were always curious about my presence. Initially, they barely



conversed with me, but I saw their curiosity in their gaze. Their body language asked the questions: “Who are you?” “What are you doing here?” Conducting a credible study with traumatized youth means working diligently with the partner organization and the youth to build trust. Building trust takes time. Traumatized youth are often homeless, hurt from abusive experiences, affected by substance misuse, and involved with the justice system. They are typically in survival mode, and participating in a research project with little or no direct benefit to them has little appeal. Participating in a focus group to provide research data does not contribute to their survival. These youth are always looking over their shoulders, trusting no one and suspicious of just about everyone’s motives toward them. Hence, winning their trust was very important. This was accomplished by demonstrating authenticity as I got to know them and explained why I was there. It was truly an exercise that required much thought, respect, and careful planning. Engaging troubled youth requires space where they feel safe, where they are accepted for who they are, treated with respect, valued as human beings, and not judged because of their current life situation.

Dr. Yoshitaka Iwasaki, my original academic supervisor, connected me with the organization and provided enormous guidance in establishing this collaborative relationship. Dr. Iwasaki has extensive experience working with marginalized youth and with community organizations in Edmonton, Alberta that serve traumatized youth. He has conducted research with many of these young people and has established strong trusting relationships with them.

My initial contact with the organization’s director was encouraging. She provided an overview of the organization’s mission, vision, services, and core values. I explained the purpose of the study and shared my thoughts about what the research was intended to accomplish. The

organization had never participated in a similar study, and the executive director was keenly interested in learning more about it and having further discussion about the process involved.

**A rocky start.** After providing a summary of my research proposal, the executive director supported my study in principle and suggested that I focus on music-making at the organization as the engagement activity. The organization offered an intern/volunteer position to formally begin building our relationship. I continued to develop my proposal taking into account concerns with the summary of the proposal raised by the executive director. I followed the organizations research protocol together with the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB) strict requirements with respect to conducting research with high-risk youth and endeavoured to address all ethical issues that might raise concerns by either the organization or the REB to ensure that the study complied with their efforts to foster a risk-free environment for the youth. I was conscious of the core principles of ethical integrity in conducting research, particularly in the context of Indigenous populations. These principles referred to respect for participants, protection of their wellbeing, and demonstration of justice (Panel on Research Ethics, 2018).

I had intended to complete my proposal and successfully defend it before my academic committee prior to submitting to the organization. However, things moved more slowly than I had anticipated. Dissatisfied with the pace of proposal development, the organization abruptly suspended my internship/volunteer engagement, in effect barring me from continued attendance at the music studio until I submitted a proposal they felt reflected the organization's philosophy and research protocol. The notice of suspension came by email, without prior warning. Needless to say, that action was counterproductive to relationship building. Also challenging was the fact

that the organization's research protocol, still in the development stage, was revised during our relationship building based on lessons learned from the process.

Having to walk the plank was disappointing, to say the least. Nevertheless, I was determined to maintain communications with the organization and to keep everyone informed about the progress. I was "put through the wringer," as the executive director commented at a research showcase in May 2019. But she wanted to ensure that the youth and the organization were not used just for my benefit, without safeguarding all parties. It did not take long to learn that successful community research requires a researcher to be thick skinned, patient, and steadfast.

Once I defended my proposal, I submitted a copy to the organization. This proposal included language around some critical ethical issues to ensure that REB requirements were satisfied and that the community organization concerns were addressed. After reviewing the proposal, the organization expressed a desire to have significant issues such as the Indian Residential Schools in Canada, the '60s scoop, and the legacy of intergenerational trauma among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada included in the document. The organization also insisted that I provide a detailed description of my positionality so they could assess my worldview and the personal position I hold with regard to this study (Sultana, 2007). They also raised concern about dissemination of study findings. The executive director did not want the organization's social media websites to be used for dissemination of the research findings and expressed a desire to be the first place where the findings would be presented, perhaps in a "family" meeting (i.e., an informal meeting of youth, staff, and volunteers) or other gathering. The concern was that if results were perceived to be negative it might hurt the organization's reputation and ability to raise funds. To address this concern, the identity of organization was removed. I intend to present

the study to the organization after successfully defending the thesis. If there is reasonable risk that the organization could be identified, the study will not be published without the consent of the executive director or appropriate authority.

The organization also contended that the study could not be regarded as a traditional community-based participatory research (CBPR) because the youth were not involved in the planning process. Although a CBPR is a well-recognized approach for conducting research in a community setting (Darroch & Giles, 2014; Wright, et. al, 2011; Viswanathan, et. al., 2004; Ochocka and Janzen, 2014), involving the youth in the planning process would have required much more time and effort for obtaining resources, planning (Darroch & Giles, 2014), and getting the youth fully involved than was practical for this particular study. To address this contention, we implicitly agreed to work collaboratively with the expectation that both the organization and the researcher would benefit from the knowledge created, and the youth would benefit from the opportunity to share and learn as they participated in the focus groups.

**My positionality.** Declaring my positionality was an imperative, a condition of receiving support to conduct the study with the youth. As I explained in chapter one, my view of the problem in this study is somewhat influenced by my culture, values, and life experiences. Because of those factors, I feel connected, in a general way, to the youth. The primary source of my view is lingering disquiet about the impact of the slave trade and slavery in the Caribbean (between 1650 and 1838) and the colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, still ongoing in some sense. There are marked similarities between the traumatic impact of these events on people of African origin whose ancestors were enslaved in the Caribbean and colonized Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In the case of the slave trade, thousands of Africans were removed from their homeland and families and subjected to the lowest forms of human existence

on cotton and cane plantations in the Caribbean islands. The oppressive and brutal living conditions of these slaves had painful intergenerational consequences on these displaced people, including my ancestors.

Although Indigenous Peoples in Canada were not expatriated to an unfamiliar country as African slaves were, European colonizers removed them from their homes and families and placed them in environments that were quite unfamiliar to them during the period of the Indian residential school system, between 1831 and 1996. This action was intended to assimilate the Indigenous Peoples into the European culture, but the outcome was the denial of their identity, culture, spirituality, language, and general way of life. I will go into greater detail about these realities later in this thesis; for now, I want to indicate that in many ways I can relate to the pain, anguish, lack of voice, racism, and marginalization endured by Indigenous Peoples, including the youth in the music program at the organization. Although I cannot consider myself an “insider” in the Indigenous community, I have come to know a number of individuals through my community volunteer involvement and my academic work at the University of Alberta. I am often greeted with terms such as “brother” and “friend” by Aboriginals (particularly male youth and adults) and sometimes regarded as an “elder” by Aboriginal youth. That sentiment bestows a feeling of connectedness that has provided a sense of comfort when working with Aboriginal youth. There is a feeling of camaraderie between us that was critical to the trust required to generate a genuine dialogue with the youth as they described how they use music to empower them and give them a voice.

**Building trust.** The revelation of my positionality certainly brought comfort to the organization. They were able to assess my position as an “outsider insider” relative to this study. As I continued to revise the proposal, the organization provided an updated Research Protocol,

plus a Research Scoring Form. The scoring form was a new document and the updated research protocol was an evolution of the original research guidelines. It was clear that both the organization and I were on a learning journey as they revised and updated their research processes/guidelines based on the many discussion we had and the knowledge gained by working collaboratively through uncharted waters.

During all of this, I had to seek a new academic supervisor because my supervisor at the time assumed a new position at a university outside of the country. Of course, my new supervisor needed to become familiar with my research and with the process involved with the community organization. Nevertheless, the transition from one supervisor to another went smoothly.

The revised proposal was completed and submitted to the organization with all its concerns addressed. Other documents submitted at the organization's request included a copy of the approved REB application with the letters of consent for the youth and a questionnaire guide for use with focus groups. The organization wanted to ensure that no question in the guide would pose a risk of bringing to recall any of the youths' traumatic experiences. I assured the organization that the focus groups would be carefully conducted to avoid the risk of such reoccurrence. As an added safeguard, if any youth were to experience any emotional discomfort during focus groups discussion, the individual(s) would be referred to the organization's mental health staff for appropriate support. The proposal met with the organization's approval. The executive director and staff acknowledged the accommodation of the feedback they provided throughout the process and the depth of my understanding of the Indigenous history. They pointed out that the proposal clearly reflected my positionality and its significance within the research. They were satisfied.

We were now ready to entertain a formal agreement, prepared by the organization, to be reviewed and ratified by the organization, my supervisor, and me. The agreement included four significant items: (1) the organization's right to stop the research at any time if it was deemed unsafe for the youth to participate, (2) the right to have organization staff present with the youth during the focus groups, (3) the organization's anonymity in the study report, and (4) an appropriate gift to the youth in appreciation for time and contribution. The right of anonymity was included in the agreement because the organization was concerned about possible negative impact on its operation. The organization's research protocol, the REB approval of the research project, and the collaboratively developed agreement describing the partnership together served as a solid roadmap for conducting the research. Once the agreement was ratified and signed by all parties, the logistics of data collection began.

**Summary.** The success of this research was predicated on a solid relationship built over a period of months. Volunteering at the organization provided the opportunity to build relationships and establish trust with the youth before attempting to collect data. The relationship building started early in the research process. I met several times with the executive director and caring services director to discuss the study. During this time, I was also introduced to other key staff members. I served most of the volunteer hours in the music studio with the music co-ordinator to get an understanding about how the program is delivered. I met a number of the youth in the music and other programs and attended many events, including "family" meetings. Family meetings were occasions when staff and youth met voluntarily, usually once a month, to participate in a sharing circle and talk about things that mattered to them.

Building relationships had its challenges. The organization requested that I describe my positionality in detail in the research proposal prior to supporting the study. The organization

wanted to learn how my identity influenced the purpose of the study and whether there might be any conflict between my social context and that of the youth who were the focus of the study. After reviewing my positionality, and considering the strength of our relationship, the organization was satisfied that the study posed minimum risk of negative impact on the youth in particular and the organization in general. The agreement was subsequently signed to confirm the organization's support of the research study.

## **Methods and Procedures**

A mixed qualitative methodology, which included critical relationship building, was employed in this study. Given the context of the study, as described before, it was important to demonstrate that I had established a trusting relationship, particularly among the youth, in respect of sensitivities surrounding research with traumatized youth, and my agreement with the organization. Data were compiled from three focus groups conducted with HTYs ( $N=12$ ) and one-on-one interviews conducted with selected members of the organization ( $N=4$ ).

**Participant characteristics and setting.** Participants were selected from youth who were participating in the music program offered at the community organization. This non-profit community-based organization began in 1997 and serves about 500 youth a year. Ranging in age from 12 to 24 years, the youth come from all socio-economic and demographic backgrounds, without restriction by gender, race, religion, or education level. Most of the youth served are between 16 and 24 years old.

In that context, the organization offers hope. Recognizing that these young people struggle with battered self-esteem, diminished self-worth, and depleted self-confidence, the organization engages them, without prejudice, where they are at in their reality. Cognizant of the daily struggles and negative stereotypes the youth face, the organization has designed a suite of



arts-based programs, including a music studio program, a textile studio program, and an art studio program. These programs are aimed at helping the youth transform their difficult life experiences into energy that empowers them to accomplish a sense of *belonging*, *identity*, *purpose*, and *self-esteem*. These outcomes, in many ways, mirror the concepts of PYD and SJYD as described in this study.

The study focuses on those youth who participate in the music program; that is, those engaged in composing songs, writing lyrics, creating beats, and rapping. This music-making gives voice to their daily life struggles. Although the engagement is self-determined, the organization provides the support required to help the youth in the projects they pursue.

**Sampling procedure.** For both focus groups and interviews, participant selection was purposeful to ensure that the youth had similar backgrounds (Palinkas, et al., 2015). All were 16- to 24-year-old participants in the music program who understood the purpose and process of the study. This purposeful sampling strategy enabled me to select participants who could provide the best information in response to the questions I intended to ask (Palinkas, et al., 2015; Mayan, 2009). Mayan suggests that although purposeful sampling is not controlled for bias, it offers the benefits of collecting a broad range of point of views from the sample, which is actually a strength of the technique when conducting qualitative research.

I asked the executive director to provide the names of staff members who were familiar with the music program, so I might invite them to participate in one-on-one interviews. I contacted these individuals by email and scheduled 60-minute interviews with them. Similarly, a staff member invited youth in the music program to participate in the focus groups on the scheduled days. Four focus groups were scheduled to take place over a two-day period. The intention was to have three to five participants in each of the groups and to have separate groups

for males and female participants. It turned out that I had one group of three female participants, another group of four male participants, and a third group of four male and one female participants. Securing a reasonable number of youth participants was a game of “wait and see”: issue the invite and wait to see who shows up. Nevertheless, there were always sufficient youth in the music studio willing to take the places of those who were invited but did not show up.

**Data collection.** This study employed two qualitative methods of collecting data: focus groups and interviews. Both took place at the organization’s facility. Focus groups provided valuable methodological benefits in that they allowed for open discussion of a variety of issues and facilitated easy interaction among participants for expression of differences of experiences and opinions (Kitzinger, 1994). Kitzinger also suggests that focus groups provide the critical benefit of having participants who may have poor reading and writing skills and who may feel uncomfortable participating in a one-on-one interview. By using more than one data source, I gained a better understanding of the music program, the characteristics of the youth who participate in the program, and the impact music-making has on them. This mixed approach to data collection brought greater clarity to the data and increased its validity and reliability (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995).

The four face-to-face interviews involved key staff of the organization. These professional workers have deep understanding and perspectives of the music program and the young people who participate in it. The interviews, which lasted approximately 60 minutes each, provided insight into the lives of the traumatized/troubled youth they serve. I used a semi-structured interview strategy with open-ended pre-determined questions from an interview guide (see Appendix D). The questions focused on the goals of the program, accessibility to the program, strength of the program, the program challenges, the success of the program, and

characteristics of the youth who participate. Staff members also explained their roles and responsibilities, highlighting how each one contributes to achieving the organization's goal of helping the youth achieve "a sense of self-worth, of purpose, of identity, and of belonging" (Edwin). The interviews had their disruptive moments. Everett had to pause the interview at one point to attend to what seemed to be a ruckus among some youth just outside the building. I was told such incidents occur from time to time and require careful staff intervention. The interviews provided invaluable data for analysis. This method allowed the interviewees the flexibility to relate their stories in their own vernacular and let me prod for elucidation on issues raised (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Bolderston, 2012). Additionally, I was able to use the relational skills I developed during my volunteering period to delve into issues that were central to my research question (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). I also had the opportunity to ask questions that I could not ask the youth for fear of triggering recall of traumatic experiences in their lives. Having deep discussions during the interviews was very important given that the study involved only one organization. This in-depth conversation allowed me to exploit the interviewees' knowledge and experiences, and explore issues from different angles to ensure the richest data possible (Bolderston, 2012; Schultze & Avital, 2011).

In addition, three focus groups were held at the organization's facility. The first session involved three female participants, following the executive director's suggestion that one group should consist of female participants only, reflecting the commitment to maintain a safe place for the youth at all times. Expressions that might imply prejudice, contempt, or hatred against females could occur in a focus group, particularly with traumatized males, potentially affecting the authenticity of an individual's response to questions or desire to participate in the discussion. The risk of unacceptable behaviour (e.g., misogyny or sexism) could be minimized by keeping

the two genders in separate focus groups. It was also felt that since male youth were more heavily involved in music-making, their perspectives might dominate a mixed group discussion. The staff's advice turned out to be prudent in that the female group expressed themselves without apprehension or self-consciousness. The second focus group consisted of four male participants whose high energy discussion exposed a variety of perspectives, including strongly opposing viewpoints at times. The third focus group had one female and four male participants. Discussion was lively, with no indication of discomfort on the part of the female participant, even though she was outnumbered by the male participants. In fact, the female participant attended with her baby who was less than one year old. The infant caused no distraction or disturbance and no one was uncomfortable with that situation.

In the build-up to the study, it was uncertain who and how many of the youth would attend the focus groups. The original plan was to conduct up to four focus group sessions with three to five participants per session. However, although the youth were invited beforehand, attendance always depended on which youth from the music program showed up at the facility at the time of the focus group session. Also, initial plans called for focus group sessions of 60 to 90 minutes, but on the advice of the organization's staff the sessions were limited to about 60 minutes to ensure that the groups were fully engaged, considering the participants' attention span. This turned out to be wise advice; before the end of each session some participants (in the all-male group in particular) were beginning to lose focus on the discussion.

The focus group questions (see Appendix C) were designed to encourage discussion/dialogue that generated rich and relevant data (MacDonald, 2012) by giving the youth the opportunity to share and discuss how they use music composition and singing to achieve positive youth development and social justice youth development. The discussions addressed

questions such as: Why did you chose to participate in the music program? How does your music help you develop interpersonal skills? How do you feel about yourselves, having been involved in music making? In what ways are you building positive bonds with people and their community? How have you used your music to educate others about your identity? Has your music rallied your peers and allies to take collective action for change? To obtain the richest data possible, I created an environment that fostered deep thoughts, varying perspectives, and free expression. Participants' feelings, perspectives, and manner of expressing their responses were respected; I demonstrated appreciation for participants' involvement and assured everyone that their views were important and recognized.

**Ethical issues.** Prior to collecting data, I applied for and received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB) to conduct this research. Given the characteristics of the population of interest, it was very important to follow the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and balance of power. Participants (both youth and staff) were informed about the REB's approval and were provided contact information for both me and REB for further inquiries about the research if required. Participants were also informed about the research and their rights around consent, privacy, and confidentiality, including their right to withdraw from participation at any time without facing any unfavourable repercussion (see appendices A and B). As this research was focused on youth who have likely experienced trauma at some time in their lives, there was a risk of psychological or emotional stress occurring during the focus group discussions. In planning for the focus groups, I considered the possibility that participants might feel uncomfortable talking about the lyrics of the songs they produce and sing and what these songs mean to them, particularly regarding feelings of racialization, exclusion, marginalization, and/or colonization. The intent, therefore, was to avoid discussion

about victimization, anti-social behaviour, or unlawful activities, to reduce the risk of participants recalling distressing events or experiences. Hence, the discussion/dialogue focused on how their music and singing help them cope, heal, and achieve personal development. The process also included the plan to refer participants to the organization's youth mental health workers in the event that any participant needed support because of emotional discomfort. To further ensure a safe and comfortable environment for the participants, the executive director and the music program co-ordinator were present during the focus groups as familiar, trusted adults. The names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants (see Appendix F). The name of the organization is withheld to respect the wishes of the organization.

**Data analysis.** This qualitative research used an interpretivist perspective (Mayan, 2009). The ontological/epistemological viewpoint supported the concept of subjectivity in collecting, interpreting, and reinterpreting data to obtain the richest content (Mayan, 2009). Data generated from the focus groups and interviews were analyzed simultaneously, employing an inductive and repetitious analytical approach to glean as much out of the data as possible (Knoblauch, 2005). The data from both methods of collection were recorded on an electronic device and transcribed using Express Scribe audio play software to ensure the highest level of detail for analysis. The transcribed data were read multiple times, reviewed carefully, and then coded using NVivo qualitative data analysis software to organize and classify the information into meaningful elements to develop categories and themes. The primary codes used for the focus group data analysis were PYD and SJYD indicators. Other codes such as healing and safety arose from the data and were used to support in-depth analysis. For the interviews, codes (e.g., trauma, success) emerged from the data as the analysis occurred.

Latent content analysis was used to identify and code categories and themes observed in the transcription (Mayan, 2009). An adequate number of codes was created and then grouped into main categories to identify key themes. Simultaneous analysis of the data ensured that all meaning, thoughts, and ideas were thoroughly examined and captured. The themes were created around the 5Cs of PYD and SJYD constructs. A comprehensive review and analysis of the categories and themes was conducted to extract deep meaning from the data and present the most accurate findings.

**Rigor.** The notions of validity and reliability are important facets of research and can make the difference between a poorly conduct study and a high quality research. A valid and reliable study assures readers that the research is credible and can be trusted. These two facets of research are particularly critical in qualitative research because, unlike positivist researchers, who generally conduct quantitative research, interpretivists employ a subjective approach to the interpretation of their qualitative data. This subjective approach can sometimes cloud the results and create doubt about the quality of the work. To address this concern, I used a different codification approach from that used in most quantitative studies (Brink, 1993). As Billups (n.d.) suggests, I adopted a classic codification framework generally used in qualitative studies to ensure trustworthiness of the data. This framework comprises four elements: credibility (truthful), dependability (consistency), transferability (applicability), and confirmability (neutrality).

First, to ensure credibility, I spent an adequate amount of time as a volunteer at the organization to observe and understand how it operates and how the music program is conducted. While there, I developed a sincere relationship with many of the youth who accessed the music program, to minimize personal biases (Billups, n.d.). It was also important (as

suggested by the organization staff) that I become visible to the youth and establish some acquaintance so that I would not be seen as a stranger and could invite a sense of trust before gathering the data. I also worked with my academic supervisor and other committee members, who provided feedback on the reasonableness of the data and its analysis. Using two methods of collection facilitated triangulation of the data so that credibility was assured about the phenomenon under study (Billups, n.d.).

Second, to ensure dependability, I provided a detailed description of the process and methodology used in the study, so that other researchers could repeat this work and obtain comparable results (Shenton, 2004). Readers can also evaluate the extent to which appropriate research practices have been followed (Shenton, 2004). Although the aim here was not to produce results that are generalizable, other researchers may find the results applicable for situations in similar settings (Billups, n.d.). Because context is critical in determining transferability, I provided a thick, relevant description of the setting and contextual factors in this study so that other researchers can determine how well their situation compares with the phenomenon and context described here (Shenton, 2004).

Fourth, to ensure neutrality, I utilized feedback from key informants (in the organization) and faculty advisors throughout the research process. As stated before, triangulation helped to minimize personal bias and enhance confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Furthermore, feedback from participants in the focus groups and interviews served to support the rigour in the research process.

### **Lessons Learned from the Methodology**

Conducting collaborative research with a community organization provided the opportunity for rich learning and a chance to reflect on what worked well and what can be



improved in such research with a graduate student as principal investigator. There is a paucity of information in the literature describing how collaborative research is conducted; therefore, new researchers have limited written resources from which to learn the process for that methodology (MacDonald, 2012). Nevertheless, we were committed to work through the challenges and learn as we proceeded. It became clear early in the process that we needed to fully establish a plan before embarking on the study. A description of the accepted methodology for conducting research with the organization would have helped avoid issues and tensions that arose during the planning process. For example, what approaches can a graduate student researcher take to build relationship with the youth and the organization? Given the time it takes to develop a trusting relationship with Indigenous youth, can that relationship be established within a reasonable timeframe for completion of graduate research? How do we know when the required level of trust and meaningful relationship is attained? What are the expectations around the mobilization of knowledge created by the research? While the issues of privacy and confidentiality are addressed by way of the university's REB, what level of privacy does the organization want from the research project? In the case of this research, the organization's research guidelines were evolving. Had a tried and proved protocol been in place, expectations would have been clearly laid out and some misunderstandings avoided. Concern about "using" the youth for my personal benefit with little or no consideration/respect for them or the organization could have been formally addressed very early in the process. Nevertheless, this situation provided an opportunity for me to contribute to the guidelines and for the organization to build a workable document for future research based on practical experience.

I learned that successfully conducting research with a community organization that serves Aboriginal youth requires knowledge, time, patience, commitment, trust, and a sincere

relationship from the very start of the project. I have experienced significant growth in knowledge and skills through this journey, and I hope that this analysis will assist other graduate students doing similar work to navigate the sea of complexities and help pave the way for a less bumpy path to producing high standard qualitative research.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

In this study I examined how 12 HTYs experienced music-making as an effective engagement to help overcome their traumatic experiences and achieve positive development. While the literature suggests a number of effective ways to help young people cope with the pains of trauma (Cherewick, et al., 2015; Coholic, Oystriick, Posteraro, & Loughed, 2016; Palidofsky & Stolbach, 2012), relatively little in that body of knowledge describes these engagement as the foundation of PYD and a precursor for SJYD. This study was therefore keenly interested in learning how youth whose realities are so complex are able to engage in music-making to heal in preparation for PYD and the broader developmental characteristics of SJYD.

Based on three focus groups with HTYs (N=12) and one-on-one interviews with selected members (N = 4) of a community organization serving those youth, this chapter describes how the young people experienced positive youth development (PYD) and social justice youth development (SJYD) as they engaged in music-making in a purposefully designed music program. This uniquely designed program was created by the community organization to accommodate the complex reality of these young people.

In the youth focus groups, I asked questions related to the five indicators in the PYD framework: (1) competence, (2) confidence, (3) connection, (4) character, and (5) caring/compassion. I used this line of questioning to explore how music-making helped the youth acquire individual indicators/components of the framework. I used a similar approach to investigate participants' achievement of SJYD. The questions in this case centered on five SJYD constructs/components: (1) Identifying power in social relationships, (2) protecting identity, (3) promoting systems and social changes, (4) encouraging collective action, and (5) embracing

culture. Semi-structured interviews with staff members further offered insight into the value of PYD and SJYD, and helped me draw links between the organization's mission and the frameworks.

I will begin with an introduction and discussion of the data by first describing the values and intentions of the organization in creating the music program, and the ways its strength-based approach facilitates the healing journey of the youths. I then move to present the research data and explore the music program through the lenses of PYD and SJYD.

Of note, the organization itself does not use the language of either PYD or SJYD, but often the values they express in their mission and programming reflect the strength-based attributes and challenges underscoring these academic concepts, and with PYD in particular. The organization and its staff would thus describe the music program as fostering: (1) self-worth, (2) purpose, (3) identity, and (4) belonging for each youth it serves. To be consistent and to support the analysis in Chapter Five I adopt the scholarly categories, but make explicit connections between languages when required in the presentation of the data.

### **A Community Organization and its Music Program**

As discussed in Chapter Three, the organization shares a unique background formed out of an innovative arts-based engagement with youth that has expanded into a range of service areas. This heritage has fostered a strong sense of engagement with the youth, reflected in the attention and space granted to fostering enduring and trust-based relationships, and its strength-based approach to recognizing and fostering independence and capacity in those youth. In this section, I explore how these values are expressed in its programming and the innovations and challenges of this approach, many of which would be unique when compared to more traditional service models.

Addressing the needs of traumatized youth requires a serious overhaul of current systems, policies, and programs, which barely consider the youth's daily realities. Failing to provide relevant programs may result in significant economic, civic, and human harm to society. The organization employs a working culture and set of values which consciously seek to be compassionate, understanding, and flexible. The difficult but essential task of building strong trusting relationships requires the organization to be able to connect with the youth in their reality and in their moment. This is a unique strength of the organization and its programming and is fundamental to achieving its goals.

To experience PYD, these young people must connect with the appropriate people at the appropriate organization in their community. The safe place they seek must be conveniently located, close to public transportation. Additionally, the services must be offered to them at no cost. The organization is well positioned to serve these youth with its central location near public transportation. Its authentic and non-judgemental staff foster positive relationships and provide a space where the youth feel accepted for who they are. Staff regard the youth respectfully, as human beings with strengths, value, and potential. In addition, the organization's music program is relevant to the youths' because it offers an opportunity for expression.

The uniqueness of this music program is its sheer ability to attract youth whose voices go unheard and whose hopes are dim. The mere fact that they participate in the music program is a sign that all is not lost. The organization's leaders believe that, in the right environment and with the appropriate support, the youth can be energized to channel their natural gifts, heal from their wounds, and empower themselves to achieve positive development and contribute to changes in society. Hence, a key strategy of the music program, as with all the other programs, is to create a space where the youth are not preoccupied with surviving, but can focus on thriving.

In relation to the music program at the centre of this study I see the foundational values of the organization expressed in the way in which youth are enrolled in the activity, as well as within other areas of programming. The organization does not direct the youth to any particular choice of engagement; the youth make that choice themselves. The overarching goal of the organization is to reach out to facilitate their personal development. A staff member describes their approach this way:

“In terms of purpose or engagement, that is a key strategy of [the organization]: how do we have purposeful engagement towards those outcomes of ‘belonging,’ ‘identity,’ ‘purpose,’ and ‘self-worth?’ So we have a harm reduction approach. It’s very relational, it is very much from a strength-based position, . . . We also recognize that it’s a journey, so that journey of every young person is very individualized, and that means that some young people will come to [the organization] to access the creative studios and not the other areas of the building, but over time they might identify that they could use those areas, the other areas. Other young people will come just to engage with the social services side, others will come for the authenticity, or the cultural, or the youth-led programs, and they may not engage in creativity. So it really is a journey for each young person. And then we’re trying to give that journey a focus or a purpose towards those four outcomes. But it’s determined by the young person, it’s not determined by [the organization] what they need to do here” (Edwin).

Engaging traumatized youth in meaningful activities is often a challenging endeavour. Psychological wounds and emotional pain manifest in daily behaviour. Edwin reflected on that reality in her interview:

“When someone is perhaps in psychosis, perhaps not had any sleep or food for a couple of days, has just been arrested or assaulted or been a victim, or they have had to resort to criminality for survival, how do you just go about like well, this is all normal, it’s not normal. So that’s the challenge, is to treat a young person as a whole being but also a whole being that isn’t actually whole.”

As Edith suggested, these young people are constantly preoccupied with complex issues such as homelessness, poverty, substance use disorder, community violence, family violence, neglect, and involvement in the court system. For these and other reasons it is difficult for them to trust existing systems or society as a whole, which seem designed to keep them in an oppressed state, so they detach themselves from their environment and adopt a survival mode of existence. The organization recognizes this reality and offers social and community services (in addition to the art-based programs) to address their challenges. As Edwin described it:

“Because of that trauma there is a lot of challenge, a lot of deficit, a lot of compromises perhaps to that young person’s mental capacity, or if they’ve been using substances to self-medicate, if they are, if they have a mental illness as a result of PTSD related to trauma. So because trauma is so complex and it is so invasive to that young person, you can’t necessarily make it better—it is up to that young person.”

What’s more, traumatic experiences differ for each young person; no two situations are ever the same. To ensure engagement is meaningful, individual needs have to be considered. One size does not fit all, and each day has its own challenges so the organization observes and listens, and shows care and compassion to each individual. Meaningful engagement requires some understanding of their realities—and a compassionate heart. But successful engagement can sometimes appear to be uncertain and fleeting, as Hector caringly explained:

“I’ve seen people who have been a part of the music program fall completely off, like to a pitiable state. And it’s hard not to take that on and be like, would they have been better if they had just never come to [the organization]?”

As Everett observed, “Sometimes they need to have a place to fall apart a little bit or to coast and to be inactive.” The important idea is that when they are participating in the program “they get to not be in survival mode... and be other than what they’re being told they are” (Hector).

### **Delivery of the Music Program**

The music program is designed to stimulate the creative capacity of the youth while acknowledging their individual emotional idiosyncrasies. Though the program is not explicitly designed to achieve PYD or SJYD Edwin said that: “we are looking for young people that come to us to leave [the organization] with a sense of self-worth, of purpose, of identity, and of belonging. So all of the activities that we’re doing, whether that be programing, services, the relationship building, it is ideally tied to these four outcomes that we are aiming for.” The youth may come to the organization for different reasons (e.g., to access the creative studios, social services, the culture, authenticity). Regardless of their choosing, Edwin explains that “it really is a journey for each young person. And then we’re trying to give that journey a focus or a purpose towards those four outcomes goals.” Everett reiterated that “it’s like treat each individual that walks through the door as unique.” While this delivery approach facilitates achievement of the organization’s goals, it also serves to encourage the youth to achieve autonomy and develop decision-making skills, which in turn helps them to develop competence and confidence, key facets of PYD.

The music program is accessible and thoughtfully planned to accommodate impoverished and marginalized youth no matter who they are or from whence they come. No fee is charged



and no formal education is required. Pearrow (2008) posits that to facilitate youth enfranchisement, engagement must take place in a setting where the youth feel safe to be themselves and feel supported to pursue their dreams. Jennings et al. (2006) describes that space as “A welcoming and safe environment... in which young people have freedom to be themselves, express their own creativity, voice their opinions in decision-making processes, try out new skills and roles, rise to challenges, and have fun in the process” (p. 41). Cognizant of the value of safety for traumatized youth, the organization has made safety a key element in the design of its music program, to protect the youth from reopening old wounds that cause emotional and psychological pain.

The organization believes authenticity (Iwasaki, Hopper, & Whelan, 2017; Mason & Prior, 2008; Travis Jr, 2013; Zaff, Ginsberg, Boyd & Kakli, 2014) is so important for successful youth engagement that it has an authenticity director on staff to ensure that the concept is embedded in all its programs. In Edwin’s words, “We are building trust and developing relationships through the use of the arts and then also the human services or the social services side of what we provide in terms of programing and services.” The music program occurs in an authentic environment where the youth feel welcomed and valued and where they are not judged or ridiculed because of who they are. The organization makes it clear that youth participating in the music program have something valuable to offer, and that their contribution is appreciated. For example, Edwin explained that:

“we are a youth-led, youth-driven organization so the youth provide me, or provide through their feedback, direction on what [the organization] should offer for programing. They can be involved in the hiring of staff, they can be involved in contributing to the policy development and the practice that we operate under. So we get feedback in

informal ways and formal ways so those informal conversations and suggestions that come from young people through staff, filter their way to me.”

In settings where authenticity exists, adults engage respectfully with youth (Iwasaki, Hopper, & Whelan, Insights on Inspirational Education for—"High-Risk" Youth Informed by Participatory Action Research (PAR) on Youth Engagement: Short Communication, 2017) and encourage their full involvement and equitable sharing of power (Pearrow, 2008) in matters that affect them. It is not surprising, then, that the organization required a positionality statement demonstrating my authentic intention to build a trusting relationship with the youth before involving them in this study.

### **Music-Making and PYD**

Following is a discussion of how the youth expressed their experience with the constructs of PYD in the music program.

**Connection.** Aside from the opportunity to activate their voices and express their feelings creatively, most of the youth attend the music program to connect with other young people they can identify with. Connection is very important for their personal growth because it helps to promote and protect their identity, which in turn supports the development of self-esteem and a sense of belonging. As Iwasaki, Hoper, and Whelan (2017), and Zaff, Ginsberg, Boyd, and Kakli (2014) argue, support from one’s peers is an effective mode of cultivating meaningful engagement with youth and encouraging PYD. One participant in the focus group reinforced that idea:

“I found myself more expressive lately because I have a pretty good set of friends that listen and relate to me. So having them around and having them be like a listening ear

and like have similar experiences I find has helped me and has made me have a little more confidence in myself, I guess, and what I do and say and express.”

Israel explained how he got connected:

“I was talking to Sam, and then Sam told me that they had a program here at [the organization], and then I linked him and Josh. I linked Josh first and then I found out he was a singer too. Then I just kept coming back—got addicted.”

Once Israel connected with Josh, with whom he had something in common (music-making), he stayed engaged. This is how engagement is initiated, developed, and sustained.

Trevor, who was having some issues at school was pleased when an adult at his school suggested he get involved at the organization. He recalled how it all began:

“I came the first time and then participated in an after-hour circle with everyone. Being the first, they just asked me, “Hey, you want to do this?” I was like sure. I got registered, came around and then after I hang out with everyone in the circle. We went to the Subway because we all got Subway cards so we all went to Subway and we ate.”

For Trevor, making that initial connection was a diversion from the issues he was having at his school. Following his initial connection with the organization, however, Trevor went on a six-month hiatus before coming back. His return demonstrates that once a young person finds a safe place where he or she feels welcome and valued there is a good chance they will reengage. He said:

“Then finally I was bored after school one day, I was like “I’ll go and check it out.” So I came back to [the organization] and immediately, soon as I walked in, everyone reached out to me, everyone I met that day they were out talking to me like I never left, and I just

thought it was a really amazing place to be in. I start coming in, I started working with Hector.”

Trevor’s experience shows that connection can have occasional interruptions as a consequence of their complex living situations. Zaff, Ginsberg, Boyd, and Kakli (2014) suggest that it takes time for youth to get accustomed to their environment, so it not unusual for them to experience phases of connection and disconnection on their journey to consistent engagement and positive development.

The youth often come for engagement in the music program, but as Nathaniel explained, there are other reasons why he came. He spoke from his heart:

“I like coming here because, for one, I just like the humbleness. The guys like Hector and Josh put in their time out of their day to help people, kids that want to do this, and give an equal opportunity to everyone.... I like this place because you can come, do your thing, be yourself, you see a smile on everyone’s face and this is a nice place—can spend hours here.”

Nathaniel’s sense of being valued and respected highlights the importance of leaders in community organizations being non-judgemental and demonstrating sincere appreciation for everyone, no matter who they are (Iwasaki, Hopper, & Whelan, 2017). Other youth expressed similar sentiments. Oliver described how he made connection and began his engagement in the music program:

“I was in the hospital because I have a schizoaffective disorder, that’s basically psychosis, and I was looking for a day program to kind of keep my day going, and a friend of mine ended up talking about [the organization] because I’ve been playing guitar

since I was like seven years old and I have been rapping so they referred me here and then I started coming and I met Josh first and then I met Hector and started”.

Based on what I heard from the youth, it is clear that connecting with others is a critical phase in building trusting relationships and engaging in a meaningful activity that contributes to PYD.

“When you sit there and you meditate with your favourite artist, you can connect in so much different way and get away from all that, like negativity that’s pushing you,” Israel said. Trevor put it this way: “I’ve been able to meet a lot of intelligent people, lot of youth actually, and I keep in contact with a lot of the youth.”

**Confidence.** Confidence is a key indicator of PYD. It injects a sense of positive self-worth and self-efficacy in youth and helps to move their development forward at times when they would otherwise give up. As Heather from one of the focus groups put it, “confidence is a big thing for me as well.”

Trevor demonstrated that he was confident enough to move forward with his life when he said, “I didn’t have a really good childhood, but I didn’t let that hold me back.” He went on to say, “I am in a good position, but it’s taken me a while to get here.” Just as staying connected has a bumpy trajectory for HTYs, building confidence follows a similar path. Hence, it was not surprising to hear Trevor say it took him a while to achieve his positive growth. But in the end, he credited music for his growing confidence:

“As a confidence builder, music has always been there as the main confidence builder. I have been performing since I was 11 years old, and I have set up shows, I’ve done fundraisers and just the confidence it gives you just in sacrificing and working hard for music is huge. And it’s inspiring to have a place like this to go to, because I can keep acting and keep taking initiative and keep going.”

Others also said music has boosted their confidence. “Well, it’s made me more confident when I talk to people and I approach people, because I speak with purpose,” Allen said. Alisha felt much the same way:

“I guess developmentally-wise for me music brought me out of my shell, it was a way to not only build confidence and self-respect but to also give me a little bit of that courage that I needed to step out and talk to people and meet people.”

She added:

“It’s as simple as someone saying ‘I can’t do this.’ I can’t is just another word for I won’t or I’m scared to. In giving people a little bit of extra time, and empathizing with them, and helping them along their journey turns that ‘I can’t’ into ‘I will and I am.’

Hector also sees confidence develop as the youth participate in the music program:

“What I’ve seen is that they begin to get to a point where they are like, ‘If he is doing this, I can too.’ There is a way, like this is attainable, this is possible, this is not just some dream that I have in my head, this is a dream that can happen now and begin right now.”

**Competence.** Data gathered in this study show that confidence was acquired as a result of the youth’s involvement in the music program. Communication, both written and verbal, is an area where the youth were apt to show early development. Yelenka said, “I would write a lot of like little poems and little songs.” Miriam too expressed some motivation for developing her communication skills by engaging in music:

“I would write little things like, I don’t know, like singing a song or listening to a song would make you feel some type of way and then you kind of like start writing your own little like whether it’s a little poem or just journaling.”

She went on to say, “I’m trying to get into more of like speaking, so I was trying to like build kind of like a foundation like getting on the mike and stuff, but it was cool.” Another young woman said:

“That’s how I learned how to write, like write essays and stuff, is writing poems and songs and just things of the top of my head. Even like I don’t even know how to play the guitar, but I kinda learnt a little and even that. And it’s like helping me with other skills that’s like meticulous with putting your hands in proper places.”

The youth demonstrated how they used connection, confidence, and competence as significant building blocks to support their development. One youth explained:

“I found myself more expressive lately because I have a pretty good set of friends that listen and relate to me. So having them around and having them be like a listening ear, and like have similar experiences, I find, has helped me and has made me have a little more confidence in myself, I guess, and what I do and say and express.”

Developing competence through music encourages the youth to move out of their comfort zone and take a risk. Here is what Mariam had to say:

“I would like to use like my speaking and like where I’m from and stuff like that and kind of whatever I’m doing, like artistically, to kind of like send a message that is very meaningful to me. And I think that’s what I’ve been working on is kind of like creating like what can I like put out there, and actually like say like make a statement and like of something whether I care about or, I don’t know like, making an actual like serious statement, so that’s—and how to do that in the form of whether it’s speaking, riddles, poems, dressing, so yeah.”

Trevor referred to his development in terms of teaching and learning. What has kept him in the program, he says, is “that we are here learning, but we are also here to teach type situation.”

Teaching what one has learned to others demonstrates competence and displays the confidence needed to teach others. Trevor affirmed this idea when he added:

“I started using my knowledge in creating songs that I feel that Indigenous youth or any kind of youth could resonate with and actually take that and apply it to their life and maybe avoid some of the stuff I did at a young age and be better, be on a better path than I’m on right now.”

Trevor’s remark demonstrates not only competence and confidence, but also caring/compassion, which I will write more about later in this chapter. Alisha described the communication aspect of her development when she said, “Nowadays, developmentally wise, it [the music I make] helps me a lot with vocabulary, my English and stuff, and it helps me communicate and convey positive messages not only to myself but to the people that listen to it.” Nathan described an innovative communication approach that uses music with the help of body language to communicate his message:

“I’m a dancer, so music to me is a kind of my communication on the floor. So I’m not really communicating to the music, I’m trying to communicate through what I can do and what you can see me do on the floor. So music to me is a way to build, not just your connection with your... but build with your connection with yourself. So mentally what resources can you give through music and what physical resources can you give through music. So I’ve learned that through my dancing I can give mental and physical communication through what I produce on the dance floor.”



Some skills acquired through engagement in the music program are useful outside of the program. Everett suggested that the writing and speaking skills being developed through music build negotiating skills that could be used in any setting:

“There is also just the skill sets from just being able to talk to not just to a recording engineer to say like, ‘This is what I’m imaging,’ and to be able to negotiate that with the person who has technical skills to talk about what it is that you want to accomplish and negotiate that. Those are transferrable skills in many areas.”

Hector described a specific learning success demonstrated by a youth:

“There is a young person here who has FASD, and when he first came in he, he listened to a lot of music, and music was his thing. He loved listening to it, but to create, he had no idea. I taught him and slowly started to break down, now he’s making, he makes tracks. May not be quite my taste, but they actually... it’s music! He is making music without my help! How phenomenal is that!”

**Character.** In the context of this study, character development involves practicing generally accepted standards of behaviour and observing cultural and social norms. For example, Israel explained how his behaviour changed very early in his participation in the music program: “I cursed my first time [I came to the program] and then they told me to come back later, next time, so I did. I came back the next time and I didn’t curse at all. I failed a little bit, but it still made sense.” Nathaniel also described how he experienced behavioural change through his music:

“For me that’s one thing that really help me, like you said, build character, because one thing especially my mom told me was don’t lie. She is always telling, “You can’t lie.” So

listening to a lot of music, especially now, a lot of people lie, lie after lie after lie... especially... rap music. So for me, music helped me build character.”

Nathaniel added, “Once you go through dirt, once you go to hell, once you go through like a bad situation, you come out and you’re like, you become better. You look back and you like, ‘That wasn’t so hard.’”

HTYs are generally not accustomed to receiving accolades. Henrik explained that when they do, they are often suspicious about the motive behind the accolades. But the youth soon learn over time to appreciate praise and respond positively to it. Another staff member pointed out subtle character benefits to participating in the music program that are not readily observable:

“I think there is other things around that are less obvious or relatable to music, like how to socially engage with people, how to set boundaries, how to, how to share, how to, how to risk and do a performance and receive feedback — or receive applause, because that is a foreign thing to many of these young people”.

**Caring and Compassion.** Caring and compassion demonstrate heart-felt concern for others — a desire to reach out and comfort them. Yelenka demonstrated caring and compassion when she said:

“I see other artists, like big artists, they’ll write songs, people relate to them, and they’ll you know same thing. I would love to do that for somebody else, for them to relate to something; it kinda merge with their, you know what I mean.”

Yelenka went on to say “I might be healed over it, but if I can help somebody else heal too, it might even find more things that will help me heal, too.” Heather also sees the value of sharing what she has learned, but said she wants to get herself in a certain position before she reaches out:

“I try and work through my stuff before I share my experience, just in case I run into someone that’s going through a relatively close topic. That way I have advice to give to them since I’ve been through that situation and I’ve overcome it, I have gained the coping skills to go and move past the challenges and obstacles in my life.”

In the following statement, Trevor showed that he uses his music not only to bring about change in his community, but also to demonstrate a sense of compassion and kindness:

“I started using my knowledge in creating songs that I feel that Indigenous youth or any kind of youth could resonate with and actually take that and apply it to their life and maybe avoid some of the stuff I did at a young age and be better, be on a better path than I’m on right now. I’m in a good position but it’s taken me a while to get here. So maybe my words can actually help influence that for youth and put them in a better position when they’re 18, instead of what I was doing when I was 18.”

Trevor recognizes that his words have impact:

“A lot of the youth, they reach out to me because I’ve made a difference in what I said, or the way I said it, or how I phrase something. Something stuck with them and they still reach out, and I get message request daily about some of the people that I’ve talk in front of.”

Karlos said his involvement in music exposes him to messages that touch his heart and encourage him to reach out in compassion to others:

“There are stories I hear, and how I talk about them sometimes just makes me have sympathy for the other side that’s depressed or stuff like that, and it just makes me feel better that I did something; it might not be significant, but at least I did something.”

Alisha said she feels that her music helps people in a special way:

“When people empathize with my music, essentially they’re finding a part of themselves that they didn’t know they had to work on or that they didn’t know was hurting them, maybe that they just ignored for a while, and it brings almost a light to them and hope, because then they can not only see that they’re not alone but that somebody else has gone through it and it’s not impossible to overcome. So in a caring aspect, I do find that it has helped me care a lot more for other people.”

Edwin confirmed that as the youth continue in the program, “there is a later transformation where the next phase is to share the wisdom of what has been learned and so there is a wanting to share that for the benefit of others.”

### **Music-Making and SJYD**

In this section I will demonstrate that music-making had SJYD impact, but that this was facilitated by facets of PYD. SJYD was less dominant in focus group responses because the youth were more focused on personal development than on broader social justice action. Though their expressions of SJYD were less common the data does reveal consideration and discussion of those central tenets described before.

Ginwright and James (2002) states that promoting systemic and institutional changes in our society is an arduous endeavour, especially if the action is instigated by the powerless. The fact that youth engage in music-making demonstrates their desire to activate their voices so that their message will be heard and a conversation ignited about the oppression they face and the liberation they demand. By making music, young people are able to engage in moments of reflection (McDaniel, 2017) about who they are, about the power they are up against, and about actions they need to take to confront impediments that render them voiceless with diminished

hope. In response to a question about how their music is used to motivate change in their community, one female participants in the focus group said:

“I feel like if a lot of people were more open about the stuff they create they could really change a lot of things. I even make that poem the other day about... that would make some heads turn, but it would hopefully get people to take care of their children.”

That young female participant’s poem was about issues she understood well. Those experiences made her want to impress on people the importance of their responsibility for their children’s well-being. Trevor was also explicit about his concerns and his action for change. He said this about his music:

“It’s taking my story and using that as something I could create a verse about, or something I could do a series on, like suicide prevention, mental health, addiction. There is so much that I’ve been doing and there is so much that I still need to do around [this organization].”

Trevor added that creating music is “not about making money; it’s about making an actual difference in their community.” Karlos, a compassionate and caring youth, said he wants to bring about change in the hearts of people in his community. He described how he uses his music:

“To spread a message of love, in spite of all the hate in the world. Because there is so much hate that I can’t stand it and I feel I need to do something about it, but in other ways. I can’t just go protesting on the street or whatever, so I felt like music was the best way.”

Despite their disadvantage position, these young people expressed confidence that they could promote change.

Although the youth did not express any collective action they have taken to bring about change, they understand that it takes the concerted effort of several individuals to effect societal change and that music-making is an effective platform for voice activation. Given how easy it is to access the music program, they invite and encourage their peers to participate in the program not just to connect, learn, and heal but also to use their voices for change. Staff indicated that although some of the youth are referred to the organization by other agencies, most come through word of mouth. Edwin highlighted that fact:

“Youth tend to come to us through word of mouth and the credibility of their peers to refer peers here.... It is through the word on the street that young people identify peers that they say, ‘Well, you look like you might need support or help or you want to be creative. Go to [this organization]’.”

Regarding change, Alisha was emphatic:

“I definitely believe music can help the community out and bring positive changes into a community. Music brings people together. You’re more likely to find people that are willing to come perform for free for the benefit of a community block party than you would people to perform for some highly paid function. The goal is not only just to bring people together but to teach people through their children and through their youth that if we work together we can fix things that are broken in the community or make things better.”

While some youths, like Alisha and Trevor, said they feel confident enough to take collective action to bring about change, the majority did not feel prepared to do so. Most of the youth, especially the female participants, explained that they are focused on healing at this juncture of their lives. They are still vulnerable and fragile—most with limited education, and

little understanding about the socio-political world in which they live. Although they feel the pain of the oppressive systems and policies they live under, their thoughts focus more on ‘How do I survive?’ than on ‘How do I dismantle?’—dismantle the systems that detain them in a state of oppression and subjugation. Bear in mind that these youth are just 16 to 25 years of age with little awareness of the intricacies of systems and policies and saddled with their complex burdens of trauma. Hence, collective action is still quite challenging for them. Alisha described these burdens as “intergenerational trauma and stuff like that,” and added:

“Those are scary things to talk about and scary things to hash out and bring to the table, but through music and bringing people together we’re able to do things like that in a way that nobody has ever really seen before. And it doesn’t necessarily have to even relate to the song that’s being played, it’s the fact that the community is gathering around and willing. They’re open to hearing something, and open to doing something about it, their children feel better, they’re having a good time, they’re laughing and playing. And they’re learning something along the way, which they then take home to their brothers and sisters and to their parents—and their parents to their uncles and their aunties, and it spreads like that.”

Alisha also indicated that she encouraged “other people to get involved, to do something, to become active, not only with themselves but in their community.” Karlos echoed that desire for collective change:

“About ten or so years later, I [heard] a rapper sang that Brenda still throwing babies in garbage. So like no matter the word of one man, there is always going to be those same struggles and stuff, unless we can convince the society as a whole instead of just one

block or one set of society. We might, we just might hope to whatever god you worship that it might change something.”

When the participants in one of the focus groups were asked what music means to them and how it is part of their life, they offered responses such as “inspiring,” “empowering,” “a beat of a drum,” “a lightening,” and “motivational.” Clearly most of these traumatized youth were inspired to empower themselves and activate their voices to bring change to their community via the platform of a music program in a community organization.

The fact that the youth, of their own accord, registered to be part of an organization that encourages and supports identity development demonstrates that they are proud of their identity and eager to develop and defend it. Allen did not hide that enthusiasm for protecting his identity. In one of the focus groups, he said:

“I personally use my music to remind myself who I am. I like to rap about my upbringing. And at the end of every day when I go home, I like to put on a beat and rap about what I did today, or rhyme or sing about it in a way, just to recap your day.”

Allen is demonstrating what Cammarota (2011) describes as “awareness of self,” a critical requirement for staving off societal pressures that threaten to strip away identity and diminish self-esteem. Alisha was just as explicit, declaring:

“My identity lies solely within myself as an interdependent person, but music enhances parts of my identity and allows me to continue to be confident and solid within myself as I grow further in the future.”

Traumatized youth are often marginalized because of who they are. By connecting with an organization that makes identity a core value of their programs, including their music program, these youth have chosen the appropriate path to achieving social change. Deprived of power and



privilege, they recognize that to overcome this disadvantage they must come together as a group to effect social change and defeat oppression (Cammarota, 2011).

Youth culture is depicted in many forms, including language, fashion, dance, and music. In this study I focus on music, particularly the hip hop genre. Although music-making is an expensive undertaking that requires financial inputs beyond the reach of these youth, at this organization they are fortunate to have access to a well-equipped studio and an experienced engineer who helps them create beats for the lyrics they write and songs they produce. This studio is available at no cost to them, and the youth are able to use this opportunity effectively, not only to embrace their culture and spread their message of hurt, inequity, and marginalization, but also to unite people around culture. Alisha demonstrated that desire when she said:

“I tend to connect to audiences from different ranges. I connect to the people who love the oldies—your grandparents, your grandfathers, and people who love soul music. I think for me, connecting with people and my audience is huge part of my music 'cause not everybody necessarily likes that stuff. Like [hard won] experience gives birth to truth in my eyes, and I think that through hearing somebody's experience or metaphorical view of somebody's experience could help somebody else through theirs. There is also a time to have fun with it as well, like your grandparents love that old school swing jazz music for a reason. There was a time and place they met their loved ones somewhere or they went to a [sock hop] and they had a great connection there, and bringing back those feelings and those emotions just kinda breathes life back into people.”

Alisha is effectively using her music to unite people/community and to invite joy. Gordon had similar thoughts. He said:

“I think that music does bring the community together, because I’m First Nations, and we have celebrations and it’s non-stop music where we have those celebrations, and I think that’s kinda what aligns us. We hear the same things, see the same things, but as you hear the music your heart beats, kinda gets into rhythm with the drum beat, so it’s like you’re all kinda having the same heart beat at the same time.”

Identifying and analyzing power in our society requires youth to reflect on how society functions: who makes decisions, how these decisions are made—and how power is often misused, leading to problematic situations. As Everett suggested, youth in the music program do challenge power:

“Those that are interested in critiquing that system or resisting against that system, that gets expressed a lot in their [the youth’s] lyrics for sure. Their awareness of um of treaty obligations, reconciliation issues, what it means to be um [infantilized] by the government.”

Although the data show that the youth have a broad understanding of the social and political power structures negatively impacting their lives, most of them, as pointed out before, are not emotionally and psychologically ready to confront and question (Ginwright & James, 2002) power holders regarding the misuse of that power. Instead, the youth use the lyrics of their songs to convey the message of their suffering and the need for action to eradicate oppression in their lives.

## **Summary**

The participants in the focus groups and interviews had many positive things to say regarding the benefits of the music program. In exploring the discussions it is easy to tell that the youth embraced the support of the organization and began their long journey of healing and

developing by virtue of their engagement in the purposefully designed music program offered by the community organization. However, these young people experienced development to varying degrees, depending on the complexities of their trauma and the level of their intellectual development. It was clear in the discussion that, for most participants, their focus was on healing—on recovering from the trauma of their life experiences. Music-making for them was therapeutic, and that therapy was an important element in commencing and sustaining their development. In the next Chapter I will reflect on the nuanced experiences the youth described in group discussions to understand what they mean relative to the research question.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

Building on the contributions of my participants documented in the preceding presentation of their experiences and perceptions, this Chapter presents a more focussed discussion of the research data by returning to the overall research aims and questions outlined in Chapter One. I consider the ability of a directed music program to support highly traumatized youth become agents of their own development. And, moreover, address the degree to which youth were able to build on foundations of development and personal empowerment to engage their community as citizens and promote positive change and justice within the tough contexts in which they are living their lives. In relation to the theoretical frame discussed in Chapter Two, I first explore the values of the organization and music program as they relate to a series of foundational attributes for supporting Personal Youth Development (PYD). Secondly, this chapter, presents a discussion of the opportunities for youth to grow through music making, and hip hop music in particular, to achieve participation in Social Justice Youth Development. The Chapter concludes by summarising the findings and identifying two key aspects of successful youth engagement before briefly turning to a discussion of the study limitations and opportunities for future research.

### **Laying the Foundation for PYD**

The music program examined in this research showed to be an effective mechanism for the development of the youth it serves because it is delivered in an environment that considers the extent and severity of the trauma the youths have experienced. The program takes into account the youths' urgent challenges without losing sight of the fact that all who engage in the program have innate talent that can be nurtured. This innovative music program empowers the youth to become agents of their personal development. While existing literature identifies a

number of arts-based programs as effective means of helping young people cope with the pain of trauma (Cherewick, et al., 2015; Palidofsky & Stolbach, 2012; Greenberg & Harris, 2011; Travis, 2013; Rodriguez, 2009), relatively little in that body of knowledge describes how HTYs experience development. The findings in this study suggest that engagement in a purposefully designed music program within a contextually suitable environment is an effective mechanism for PYD as a precursor to SJYD.

The factors that hamper an uncomplicated transition to SJYD are primarily relate to their high-risk conditions and high-risk behaviours. The stories the youth told clearly highlighted their focus on healing and satisfying their immediate needs (e.g., safety, confidence connectedness). Engagement in the music program, therefore, emphasized those factors that mitigate their pains and promote healing so that they can become agents of their own personal development (Iwasaki, 2016; Petrucka, et al., 2014). The healing process facilitated the uptake of the 5Cs of PYD in preparation for SJYD. While our governments are interested in building communities of empowered and socially responsible youth, our society must realize that for HTY, patience is required because the journey is long and the path bumpy. HTYs have to be supported in their development - not pushed. Forcing them to do anything is usually met with resistance or negative behaviour. One female participant openly stated that if pushed to do something, she most likely would not do it. Thus it's crucial that youth engagement be self-motivated and conducted on their own terms. Engagement is often suggested by friends, educators, or social workers as was indicated by the youth; but to be successful it should never be forced upon. Palidofsky and Stolbach (2012) argue that in a theatre program that engaged incarcerated youth the engagement was successful in promoting healing because it was centred on voluntarism. It was not conducted by those with authority over them. It created community, and it was fun.

Youth come to the program mostly to find a safe space where they can be themselves and not be subjected to judgment; to connect with others whom they could identify with; to activate their voices (“vent”) without fear of ridicule; and to make music they enjoy (be creative). Having a safe space to reflect and vent (even in a moment of anger) makes confronting their daily challenges less daunting and facilitates their uptake of the 5Cs of PYD. A staff member indicated that the despondence of some of the youth is obvious when the organization closes its doors at the end of the day. They confront fear and uncertainty for the night, because many of them have no secure accommodation. Many are homeless, sometimes sleeping on a couch in someone else’s house. Their stark situation keeps the pain of trauma in their faces, day after day, eating away at their hope. Insecurity and fear are their reality, and success can be as fleeting as staying sober for a day or two, as one staff member (Edwin) lamented. Another staff member said, “If that child or that young person shows up tomorrow, then they’re alive and that is a major success” (Henrik).

Successful engagement in the music program means that the youth begin to find purpose in their lives. Statements made by focus group participants indicate they were embracing their identity, they felt a real sense of belonging, and they had a positive value about themselves (self-worth). As they began to feel safe and accepted, trusting relationships took root with staff and others at the organization. In other words, they were on their healing journey. Healing from hurts helps to remove feelings of anger and hopelessness; healing also helps to chip away at the high-risk behaviours. As youth engage in their music-making they activate their voices (Petrucka, et al., 2014; Iwasaki, 2016), experience personal development, and pave the way for SJYD.

The dominant expressions of PYD among focus group participants occurred in the areas of connection, competence, and confidence. As indicated earlier, these young people participated

in the music program because they were seeking not only to make music, but to be off the streets in a safe space with other youth they could identify with. PYD was a desirable outcome of their music-making, although not a formal goal of the program—and often not the youth’s intended outcome. They came to the music program because they sought a safe space where they could be who they really are. As Miriam confidently stated, “There is some spaces that lets you be like your unapologetic self and there is some spaces where you feel you have to be kind of like more reserve” (Miriam). At the program Miriam felt safe to be herself; outside of the organization she was more reserved. “Most of my friends or people that know me don’t even know I do music at all,” she said. “For me it was more of like a personal thing; it’s like my own personal little journey, it’s like my own secret kinda thing.” Miriam is indicating that development occurs in a safe environment. As she gets stronger (e.g., builds confidence, consolidates connections, and builds character) she would be the person she wants to be outside the organization’s facility.

Growing competence is evident in the youths’ comments about their communication abilities. Music-making helps them develop their writing and speaking skills. As they write their lyrics and sing their songs, or write their poems to inform, development comes along. Written and verbal communication skills are significant outcomes of their music-making. Enhanced writing and reading skills help in many other areas of development, including relationship-building, decision-making, and conflict management. These are critical skills that HTYs need to navigate life (Snyder & Flay, 2012) succeed in, and prepare for SJYD. These competencies also enhance their potential for learning and making academic advances that, in turn, open opportunities for employment and career choices.

Development of communication skills also had the ripple effect of building the youths’ confidence, another of the 5Cs of PYD. Being able to express themselves effectively enhances

self-confidence and adds power to their voices. Although many of the participants acknowledged development in their level of confidence as a result of their participation in the music program, a few saw slow growth because they needed more time to heal from traumatic experiences. The rate of development hinged on the complexity of their traumatic experiences. As we saw before, for example, Miriam's journey was a secret, due to her vulnerability.

Although gender comparison was not an objective of this study, it is worth noting that within my small sample young women expressed self-doubt and reservation more often than young men. Anticipating that, the organization had wisely suggested I conduct one focus group exclusively for female participants. Female participants tended to be more reclusive, less willing to risk than their male counterparts, for fear of being criticized or derided. Heather said: "I write music but I guess I'm kind of fearful of what other people might think or say or how they might react... I'm scared that I might be judged for what goes through my head, I guess." Asked about singing in front of a group, one female participant responded: "I would probably have an anxiety attack and just stand there shaking and probably crying." Another said: "Like if you ask me to sing right now, I'd probably just walk away." Heather accurately sums up the fear and insecurity among most of the female participants: "I feel like you have to learn how to swim before you just jump right into the deep end."

Despite all the expressions about fear, what is remarkable and common among the female participants is their willingness to make the journey, notwithstanding the challenges. The fact that they continue to participate in music-making is convincing testimony of their desire to acquire the confidence to confront and overcome fear and insecurity.

Character development is an evident outcome of the music program. The youth showed signs that they are building trusting relationships, good work ethics in their music-making, and



care and compassion for their peers and others in their community. Both the focus groups and the staff interviews provide evidence of positive behaviour change in areas such as work ethic, acceptable social behaviour, perseverance to achieve success, and setting appropriate boundaries.

Caring and compassion also emerge as outcomes of youth music-making. Participants who had experienced particularly difficult times described how they reached out to other HTYs who were going through similar difficult situations. They were able to reach out by telling their own stories through the lyric of their songs. Some explained how they were motivated to deal with their own healing so they could comfort and encourage others to persevere and overcome. Others talked about recording music so that those who might be having a hard day could listen to their music and be comforted. Some participants told about making music just for others to have a good time — to have fun. Clearly, for most of the participants, the motivation behind making music is a desire, not so much to become famous and wealthy, but to be caring and to show compassion to youth with whom they can identify.

What the youth demonstrated in terms of building confidence corroborated what I found in the literature. The confidence developed by engaging in music-making empowered them to activate their voices to tell their stories (Petrucka, et al., 2014) about their life experiences of poverty, homelessness, marginalization, and intergenerational trauma — and further energized them in preparation to take action for positive societal changes (Iwasaki, Hopper, & Whelan, Insights on Inspirational Education for—"High-Risk" Youth Informed by Participatory Action Research (PAR) on Youth Engagement: Short Communication, 2017). Snyder and Flay (2012) argue that youth endowed with confidence are emboldened to take more risks, confront challenging issues, assume responsibility, and become active leaders.

## **Achieving SJYD Through Music-making**

SJYD hinges on youth attaining a state of critical consciousness of the oppressive systems and institutions in order to take appropriate action to bring about positive social and political change (Freire, 2005; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). That consciousness is facilitated by a sense of physical and psychology safety and security (Ginwright & James, 2002) which is what the music program strives to achieve. As discussed, the safe environment promotes healing. As healing occurs in the context of music-making development of the 5Cs ensues. Despite the challenges in their development journey, some HTYs in the study demonstrated some attributes of SJYD. In this section I will describe how the youth revealed each of the five constructs in SJYD.

**Identifying power in social and political relationships.** The youth showed some awareness of social and political issues in their world and of how those issues affect their well-being. They are particularly knowledgeable about political matters such as treaty rights and government obligations to Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, and its recommendations. They told stories, sometime in jest, about interaction of elders with the colonialists, describing consequences imposed on them for things they had done. Their songs reflect the impact of Indigenous people's colonization, the '60s scoop, the child welfare system, and the effect of intergenerational trauma on their lives. (See Appendix E for lyrics of a song by a Canadian Indigenous rapper. The lyrics mirror some of the sentiments expressed by the youth participants.)

**Protecting and nurturing identity.** In our discussion it was evident that the youth struggled with identity so they made it central in their music. They rap about their upbringing and share their stories about who they are through music. The fact that they come to a place

where they find support for who they are demonstrates that they hold their identity sacred and worthy of celebrating. By so doing, they build solidarity with each other in an effort to heal and become strong enough to defend themselves against the forces that seek to change who they are. Despite the fact they are a marginalized group, they feel no shame about who they are and are prepared to bring awareness to others about their identity. I heard terms such as “brotherhood” and “knowledge sharing” used in our discussion, supporting my perception that coming together to make music had the outcome of making identity central in their development. One male youth ask how I came by my name, detecting a conflict between my racial/cultural identity and the label imposed on my forefathers as a result of the slave trade and the slavery in the Caribbean (see section on positionality in chapter three). Taking pride in who they are strengthens their resolve to protect their identity. However, Henrik indicated identity as still a challenge for the youth when he stated:

“I meet with a lot of elders that say our young men are taking on black culture because they don’t know who they are, so that’s a big component [of] the hip hop, and it’s not to say, hey, don’t go and do that, it’s just the reality is a lot of our young men don’t know what it is to be a man.” (Henrik)

The organization realizes the issue of identity is a challenge for the youth hence they have made identity a focus of their work with them.

**Promoting system and social changes.** Using the weapons at their disposal, including poems and musical lyrics, the youths show some determination to effect change in their communities (see Appendix E). One participant said she wrote a poem that “would hopefully get people to take care of their children.” Other participants told stories in their music intended to help those with suicidal ideation, and/or who suffer with mental health disorders and drug

addiction. Participants said their intent in making music is to make positive changes in their community — not changes that would destroy it. Participants expressed a positive feeling about their music and considered it to be a potent means of addressing the problem of hatred. They believe music is an effective means of working to create change for those who are unable to actively protest on the streets. They also spoke about the use of music to bring awareness about missing Aboriginals and missing young people. Music-making among this group of youth gives them a sense of purpose that is manifested in their desire to bring healing not only to themselves, but also to their community.

**Encouraging collective action.** Participants explained that they use their music to encourage others to become active, not only individually but with their community. They believe music brings people together. Karlos said: “So like no matter the word of one man, there is always going to be those same struggles and stuff unless we can convince the society as a whole instead of just one block or one set of society [to make necessary change].” Alisha supported Karlos’ statement when she said: “I definitely believe that music can help the community out and bring positive changes into a community.” Although few gave specific examples of their involvement in activism, the general consensus was they have a desire to make change happen if only through their music.

**Embracing youth culture.** Youth culture is evident among the participants, particularly in their music, fashion, and language. The hip hop genre of music, especially rap music, is predominant among the youth participants. Hip hop has been the vernacular of choice for urban youth (Rodriguez, 2009), particularly those seeking to share their message of the daily oppression and marginalization they face. It facilitated the birth of what is often termed “protest music” and is a culture of discourse that reaches the corners of the world, primarily in the form

of music, visual arts, dancing, and political engagement (Rodriguez, 2009). Hip hop as a culture is believed to have roots in an era of social and political activism, such as Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. Although the culture has no precise date of birth, most enthusiasts point to the 1970s and early 1980s as the period when hip hop emerged as an eminent art form. In the same vein, no clear definition exists of the form and content of hip hop culture, but adherents believe it includes a gamut of art forms such as rapping, deejaying, breakdancing, graffiti art, fashion, and poetry.

In making music hip hop through the music program the youth engaged in this research project both draw upon and contribute to this critical and countercultural aesthetic of the genre. It may be most attractive because it contradicts what most adults today accept and combines language and fashion to challenge the adult world. But beyond simple adolescence, highly traumatized youth wrote lyrics and beats to reflect on their circumstances, empower themselves and spread the knowledge about the oppressive forces that work against them and about the need for society to change — to become just and equitable. Making music and sharing lyrics with one another - in some cases through the use of social media and YouTube videos — they demonstrate a willingness to act beyond their individual empowerment and become active through their music-making to effect positive changes. In other words, their music making not only creates foundations for resiliency in their own lives, but in the lives of their peers and in the life of their community. They are indeed advancing their participation as empowered social justice actors and through their role as engaged artists, as well as HTY, demonstrate the potential for the achievement of SJYD through their music-making.

## **Summary**

The data show that PYD and SJYD indicators emerged at varying degrees in the discussions. Overall, there were more expressions of PYD factors than SJYD factors, particularly the pro-social indicators such as competence, confidence, and connection in PYD. Three individuals, Alisha, Trevor, and Karlos clearly expressed SJYD characteristics. This was not surprising because they have had more community connections/engagements than the others. Karlos expressed his determination to use his music to help make this world a better place - with less hatred. Albert, who had a difficult childhood and suffers from mental disorders, sees himself as an advocate for people who experience similar disorders. He expressed his intention to use his music to help others address their trauma so they can avoid issues he faced early in life. Alisha, who brought her baby to the focus group, wants to get into social work. As a young mother, she is intent on working with children to help them have positive life experiences.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, a group of youths and some staff members of an organization collaborated to explore personal development of the youth in the context of music-making. The youth were highly traumatized individuals accessing the music program at the organization. There were some challenges involved in building the appropriate relationships to successfully conduct the study. The experience was enriching and created tremendous learning benefits in the area of collaborative research.

The results of the study show that HTYs do experience PYD and SJYD albeit to varying degree. PYD indicators (e.g., competence, confidence, connection) were more often expressed than the SJYD indicators. That was not surprising because HTYs are focused on healing from the hurts and more inclined to embrace pro-social values to aid their survival. Their innate

talents/assets, were nurtured in an appropriate environment with meaningful engagement. The trajectory of youth's development was not linear, it did not follow a predetermined course. The complexity of a youth's journey can be difficult to see in the literature on PYD and SJYD with its emphasis on abstract categorizations of development and the assumption of their ability to move along trajectories. Instead this research highlights the bumpiness of the journey to development and the transition of HTYs into active citizens in their own growth. Faced with this inevitable uncertainty, this research underlines the value for agencies in building strong foundations of security, trust and healing.

In summary, the key learnings from this study are: (a) HTYs can accomplish PYD and SJYD but that healing is paramount in their journey, and that PYD factors are more dominant in expression than SJYD factors; and (b) collaborative research with a community organization requires careful planning and a strong trusting relationship.

In addition to these overall conclusions, the research highlights the importance of two further elements when considering community support for HTY, and the roles programming, such as documented above, can play in successful youth development.

**A safe space and trusting relationship.** The experience and learning generated through this research project underline the critical importance of providing HTY a safe space in which to assemble and the creation of an environment where relationships can flourish and bonding can occur. These are fundamental prerequisites for helping youth to experience PYD and SJYD. Given the high-risk conditions that are the reality for HTYs, community organizations must be fully aware of the youth's vulnerability and need to feel valued and accepted for who they are in a non-judgemental, respectful way. It is only after trust is established that a solid and lasting relationship can occur. Once these conditions are satisfied, youth will more likely engage in

activities that are meaningful to them. Once engagement has begun, development is likely to follow.

**Self-determination.** For HTYs, successful development hinges on how much control they have over the activity they engage in — both what it is and how it is done. It is essential that the youth plot their own path to development. They accept guidance, but resent being controlled. They want to develop at their own pace and not be pushed. Every youth, regardless of circumstances, possesses unique assets/talents and must be reminded of those assets in order to build the confidence and critical competencies that are essential factors in PYD and SJYD. Above everything else, engagement must be purposive and meaningful, to sustain interest and motivation and attain the desired outcomes of PYD and SJYD.

Overall, the study highlights two critical notions for HTYs development: strength-based and self-determined. The music program was built around the notion that every youth is endowed with in-born strength that can be energized through meaningful engagement to help them heal from their trauma and become agents of their own development; development of the skills needed for successful transition to adulthood, and to be contributors to positive societal change. By building on their strength an engagement program is more likely to have positive outcomes than one that focuses on attempting to correct youth's shortcomings. Additionally, it is important to value self-determination in youth. HTY thrive when they are given control of their journey. They need to make their own choices—what they want to do and how they want to do it. By controlling their journey, they feel valued, they build confidence and competence. It is only with this two-pronged approach (i.e., a strength-based and self-determined notions) that engagement can be meaningful and successful in development of HTYs.



## **Potential Implications for Practice and Policy Development**

Beyond the research conclusions offered above, there is value in considering some lessons for the broader institutional systems involved in policy development and program/service design for these young people. Briefly I outline some admittedly speculative conclusions, first for wider governance approaches and policy communities, and secondly for community organizations serving traumatized youth and the programming and opportunities they afford their clients.

Governments at all levels may find the results of this study useful for their own planning, perhaps for child welfare program/services, justice system, mental health, and education initiatives (Smithgall, Cusick, & Griffin, 2013). Governments should note from the results that interventionist approaches that aim at fixing problems do little to promote positive youth development. Strategies should be developmental in nature and not prescriptive in their intent. Policies must signal an intention to show empathy to the youth and move beyond the deficit-based approaches that highlight their weaknesses and only serve to aggravate their hurts and stifle their healing and development. Strategies aimed at promoting youth development should include a teaching component that brings awareness to the plight of HTYs. Positive development is not just a concept for the youth, we are all in this together, and as concerned and responsible citizens, it begins with us.

Traumatized youth may often be simultaneously involved in the justice, education, and health systems, however, these public systems may not necessarily coordinate their services/programs or engage the youth in a manner that facilitates continued holistic development. Public systems need to collaborate and develop effective trauma-informed approaches (Smithgall, Cusick, & Griffin, 2013) to assist youth on their development journey.

There is an opportunity for policy-makers in the public arena to put their knowledge and experience together, perhaps working with community agencies that serve traumatized youth, to create policies that coordinate service delivery for HTY (Smithgall, Cusick, & Griffin, 2013).

Community organizations may continue to build positive relationships with traumatized youth in the community by supporting adult-youth mentorships, peer-to-peer mentoring, and other partnerships initiatives (Albright, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017; CYCC Network, 2017; Iwasaki, Hopper, & Whelan, 2017; Iwasaki, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2007) as a way to build on the positive development that started in their earlier years. These can be after school or after work programs that fit with the youths' schedules to encourage and facilitate involvement. Civic engagement is another means of building leadership skills by encouraging youth to participate in community initiatives to influence change (CYCC Network, 2017). Teaching institutions may also contribute to continued youth development by sponsoring participatory research opportunities with youth leaders to capitalize on what they have accomplished to this point. These young people can be given the opportunity to collaborate with institution researchers to explore questions such as homelessness, substance misuse, and mental health disorders that are of concern to them. In this circumstance, youth can be both learners and teachers empowering themselves to assume greater autonomy over their development. Assisting in planning, and conducting research may also help the youth build confidence, experience adult-youth power balance, and promote the healing process. Theoretically, the study results may also encourage collaborative initiatives among community agencies in areas of common interest such as service/program delivery, trauma informed engagements, and leadership development to more effectively engage the youth and help them become agents of their own positive development. Additionally, the creation of youth councils (Iwasaki, 2016) to provide input into agencies'

programs/services may lead to more relevant engagements and give the youth greater control and ownership these program/services. A key takeaway for the organization is that the youth's development is not standardized and may occur at different rates (Zaff, Ginsberg, Boyd, & Kakli, 2014) depending on circumstances of the individuals. Nevertheless, they [the organization] may exploit their asset-based approach and expand this study to include another one or all of the art-based programs to examine how the youths experience the program(s) in the context of their development.

### **Limitations**

The 12 youths who participated in the focus groups and the four staff members who participated in the interviews were all from a single community agency in Edmonton, Alberta, which is a relative small setting. The study was conducted over a relatively short period, given the limited time and resources available. Also, it did not consider the strength of the assets/talents possessed by each participant at the time of the focus groups sessions. It was not possible to examine how much influence, if any, the youths' assets/talents had on their development. While the data show that the youth did experience some degree of PYD and SJYD, I was not able to confidently determine whether their music-making was the dominant factor in helping them develop, or if community or family support played any part in their development. Also, no questions were asked about their educational accomplishment.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

While the findings of this study have created important knowledge applicable to practice improvement and implications for further research, what happens to the development process after the youth reaches the age when he or she is no longer eligible for the program (aged out)? A

longitudinal study of these youths would provide useful information on the sustainability of their development after they have aged out. While this study focused on youth ages 16 – to 24 years their continued development in subsequent years is just as important. If engagement to support/sustain development is unavailable, limited, or inaccessible, there is a high likelihood that what was gained during those earlier years would be lost.

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## Appendix A

### *INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM*

#### **Research Investigator:**

NAME: Edrick Andrews

EMAIL: [eaandrew@ualberta.ca](mailto:eaandrew@ualberta.ca)

PHONE NUMBER: 780-803-4935

#### **Supervisor:**

Kevin Jones, PhD

EMAIL: Kevin Jones [kjones4@ualberta.ca](mailto:kjones4@ualberta.ca)

PHONE MUMBER: 780-492-1746

#### Background

I am doing up to four focus groups for this study. I am inviting you to take part in one of these focus groups because you are taking part or have taken part in [Organization's Name] music program. I will use information from the focus groups to support my Master's Degree in Community Engagement.

Carefully read this Information Letter and Consent Form. If you have any questions about the study, you can ask me now or at a later time. My contact information is shown above.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how your participation in the music program at [Organization's Name] helps you become self-empowered to make positive changes in your lives. I want to answer the question: How are traumatized youth able to use a purposefully designed music program to become individuals capable of making lifestyle changes to achieve positive self-development? I will discuss the findings of the study with you in a meeting at [Organization's Name]. I will also share the findings with the academic community via conference presentations and peer reviewed journal publications. I may also share the findings in government and business circles, and among community organizations.

### Study Procedures

There will be three to five participants in each focus group. Focus group discussion will last about 60 to 90 minutes. I will ask you open-ended semi-structured questions about what the music you produce and sing means to you and how you use it for your healing, personal development, and general well-being. I will audio record the discussion, transcribe it on paper and then use it for analysis and reporting.

### Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you. However, you may learn from each other and use the knowledge to work with your friends and the broader community to make positive changes in your life and in your society.

### Risk

The risk to you in this study is minimal. If discomfort or stress occurs during the focus group you may stop participating in the discussion briefly or for good without penalty. If it appears that you need support because of emotional discomfort, I will refer you to [Organization's Name] care services.

### Voluntary Participation

You do not have to take part in this study. Even if you start to take part, you can change your mind and withdraw at any time without penalty. If you change your mind let me know. Also, if you decide to take part, you do not have to contribute in every subject that is discussed. At the end of the focus group session you will receive \$20.00 as a show of appreciation for your contribution. If you choose to withdraw from the focus group, you will still receive the \$20.00. I will also serve a light meal.

### Confidentiality & Anonymity

I will ensure that your information remains confidential. However, I cannot guarantee full confidentiality on behalf of other participants. Each participant is responsible for keeping the discussion confidential. Data from focus groups cannot be withdrawn. Remember, you do not have to answer questions and you are free to leave the focus group at any time. Also, I cannot guarantee anonymity because participants in the focus groups could mention who else attended. In addition, because of the relatively small size of the music program, anonymity cannot be guaranteed because individuals with knowledge of the program might perceive that they know who provided a particular response if they read the report. The only exception to my promise of confidentiality is that I am legally obligated to report to the appropriate authority any evidence of child abuse or neglect. If I employ a professional transcriber, that person will sign a confidentiality agreement. I will not use your name in any report or presentation, instead, I will use aliases to protect your identity. All text of discussions will be stored on a password protected computer. All physical documents such as focus groups notes, transcripts, analyses, and consent documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at a secured location for a minimum of five years. If the data is needed for other purposes after five years, I will apply for ethics approval. The Transcriber will not retain audio recording or any documents once their work is done. I will report the study's findings to you in a meeting at [Organization's Name].

### Further Information

I will answer any questions you may have about this study now, during the study, or at the end of the study. If you have any further questions regarding this study, please call or text me at 780-803-4935, or e-mail me at [eaandrew@ualberta.ca](mailto:eaandrew@ualberta.ca). The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615.

### Consent Statement

Please acknowledge that you have read and fully understand the information in this Information and Consent Form. Acknowledge that you had a chance to discuss the study and ask questions, and that you know who to contact if you have additional questions. By signing this form, you are agreeing to take part in this study. You are also acknowledging that you have read and understand the information in this Information and Consent Form.

---

Participant's Name (Print)

---

Date 

---

Participant's Signature

## Appendix B

### *INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM*

**Research Investigator:**

NAME: Edrick Andrews

EMAIL: eaandrew@ualberta.ca

PHONE NUMBER: 780-803-4935

**Supervisor:**

Kevin Jones, PhD

EMAIL: Kevin Jones [kjones4@ualberta.ca](mailto:kjones4@ualberta.ca)

PHONE NUMBER: 780-492-1746

#### Background

I am doing interviews for this study. I am inviting you to take part in one of these interviews because you are an employee of [Organization's Name] who is directly or indirectly involved its music program. I will use the information from the interviews to support my Master's Degree in Community Engagement. Carefully read this Information Letter and Consent Form. If you have any questions about the study, you can ask me now or at a later time. My contact information is shown above.

#### Purpose

The purpose of the study is to understand how participation in the music program at [Organization's Name] helps traumatized youth become self-empowered to make positive changes in their lives. Specifically, I want to answer the question: how are traumatized youth able to use a purposefully designed music program to become individuals capable of making lifestyle changes to achieve positive self-development? I will discuss the findings of the study with you in a meeting at [Organization's Name]. I will also share the findings with the academic community via conference presentations and peer reviewed journal publications. I may also share the findings in government and business circles, and among community organizations.

#### Study Procedures

You will be asked to participate in an individual face-to-face interview. I will ask you open-ended semi-structured questions about the music program and how you perceive the effectiveness and accomplishment of the program. The interview will last about 30 to 45 minutes. I will audio record the discussion then transcribe it on paper and use the information for analysis and reporting.

#### Benefits

There are no direct benefits for you. However, from the interview, you may gain new perspectives that you may share with your colleagues to enhance the effectiveness of the music program. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you will not receive any payment for taking part.

#### Risk

There are no anticipated risks or discomfort to your participating in this interview. Questions do not involve personally sensitive information.



### Voluntary Participation

You do not have to participate in this study; your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. If you decide to participate, you are not obligated to answer any specific questions or all of the question asked. If you wish to withdraw from the study or modify the information you provided, whatever parts you wish to withdraw or modify will be modified or removed from all records as long as you inform me up to two weeks after the interview session. After two weeks, your information will become part of the study and final report. If you choose to withdraw you can contact me by phone, e-mail, or text message at the contact information provided.

### Confidentiality & Anonymity

I will ensure that your information remains confidential. If I employ a transcriber, that person will sign a confidentiality agreement. I will not use your name in any report or presentation, instead, I will use aliases to protect your identity. All text of discussions will be stored on a password protected computer. All physical documents such as interview notes, transcripts, analyses, and consent documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at a secured location for a minimum of five years. However, due to the size of [Organization's Name], I cannot guarantee anonymity since someone reading the report might be able to guess who the participant might be. If the data is needed for other purposes after five years, I will apply for ethics approval. Transcriber will not retain audio recording or any documents once their work is done.

### Further Information

I will answer any questions you may have about this study now, during the study, or at the end of the study. If you have any further questions regarding this study, call or text me at 780-803-4935, or e-mail me at [eaandrew@ualberta.ca](mailto:eaandrew@ualberta.ca). The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615.

Consent Statement

Please acknowledge that you have read and fully understand the information in this Information and Consent Form. Acknowledge that you had a chance to discuss the study and ask questions, and that you know who to contact if you have additional questions. By signing this form, you are agreeing to take part in this study. You are also acknowledging that you have read and understand the information in this Information and Consent Form.

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name (print)

\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature

## **Appendix C**

### **A Purposeful Music Program for Traumatized Youth**

#### **Focus Group Questions Guide**

#### **Personal Youth Development**

##### **Competence**

1. How has your music help you to develop interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution?
2. In what ways has your music help you to make good decisions?

##### **Confidence**

3. How do you feel about yourself having been involved in music making?
4. How do feel about your future?

##### **Connection**

5. In what ways have you built positive bonds with people, including peers, family, and your community?

##### **Character**

6. How has your music help you to develop respect for cultural or societal rules and standards?

##### **Caring and Compassion**

7. How has your music help you to improve your sense of sympathy and empathy for others?

#### **Social Justice Youth Development**

##### **Identifying Power in social Relationships**

8. How have you been able to identify the power holders in your society?
9. What power do you hold in your society?

##### **Protecting Your Identity**

10. How have you use your music to educate others about your identity?
11. How have you use your music to defend your identity?

#### Promoting Systems and Social Changes

12. In what ways have you used your music to end inequality?

13. How has your music caused positive changes in your own life?

#### Encouraging Collective Action

14. How has your music rally your peers and allies to take collective action for change?

#### Embracing Your Culture

15. How has the music program help you to use your culture (example, Hip Hop) to take your message to your society?

## **Appendix D**

### **A Purposeful Music Program for Traumatized Youth**

#### **Interview Questions Guide**

##### **Introduction**

1. Please describe your role at the organization?
2. What are the goals of the music program?
3. How does the program work?
4. Describe in general terms the youth who participates in the program?
5. What role do participants play in advancing the goals of the program?

##### **Access to the Program**

6. How do the youth learn about the program?
7. What criteria do you use to accept and exclude potential participants from the program?
8. On average, how many youth participate and how long do they remain in the program?

##### **Strength of the Program**

9. What do the youth say about the program?
10. What do you consider to be the strength of the program?

##### **Challenges**

11. What are the challenges you face in running the program?
12. How do you think you can improve the program?

##### **Successes**

13. What does success of the program look like to you?
14. In your opinion, how successful has the program been in achieving its goals?
15. How do you think the program has help the youth?
16. What general lifestyle changes have you noticed in the youth who take part in the program?

**General**

17. What do you like most about the program?
18. How has the community responded to the program?
19. What else would you like to share about the program?

## Appendix E

### Red Winter Lyrics

#### Drezus

Verse 1 [Drezus]

My skin's red, I bleed red, I'm seeing red  
I'm praying for my people out there who ain't seen it yet  
His blood is cold, he's living lies forever told  
By his ancestors 500 years ago  
Yeah I said it, got my peoples getting restless  
Making money off our land and we ain't even on the guest list  
Carry on traditions of a racist ass pilgrim  
And I know you really love it when my people play the victim  
'Cause it makes it seem like we're folding under pressure  
But we up to bat now no more playing catcher  
'Cause we see the bigger the picture that we have to capture  
See how quick we get together? Man, we out to get ya

Chorus

You can lock us in jail and throw away the key  
Take away my rights but you ain't stopping me  
'Cause I been quiet for too long its time to speak  
We got to stand for something to keep us free!  
I'm idle no more  
I'm idle no more  
I'm idle no more  
Yeah I'm idle no more

Verse 2 [Drezus]

I'm getting aggravated, my people saying chill  
I feel my heart breaking, but I don't need your pills  
I need my people strong, with hearts of many men  
He letting women die outside of the parliament  
Opposition's only siding for their benefit

The only ones we really got is us and it's so evident  
Before you take a stand, remember to get educated  
Once you understand the message go and share it with your neighbors  
Basically, we're getting taken hostage for our land  
'Til we sell it out for profit now they got the upper hand  
But trust me we can stop it, I'm thanking the four sisters  
Dear Mr. Harper we all coming to get ya  
And we won't stop for nothing we're bringing all of our cousins  
And we're getting educated so the fighting ain't for nothing  
Stand up for your people our time for power is coming  
I'm a full-blooded native believe me I'm proud of it  
Chorus Repeats

<https://genius.com/Drezus-red-winter-lyrics>

Retrieved: December 20, 2019



## Appendix F

### Interviews and Focus Groups

#### Pseudonyms of Participants

Interviews (Staff)		
Edwin		
Everett		
Hector		
Henrik		
Focus Groups (Youths)		
Females	Males	Mixed
Heather	Israel	Alisha
Miriam	Nathaniel	Allen
Yelenka	Oliver	Gordon
	Trevor	Karlos
		Nathan