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## Enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration: A feasibility study

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Education

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## **Abstract**

The Healthy Relationships Plus – Enhanced (HRP-E) program was designed for vulnerable youth to develop healthy relationships skills and reduce risk behaviours; however, it has not yet been adapted for Indigenous populations. This study used a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to explore the feasibility and fit of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth through co-creation and collaboration with the Yellowhead Tribal Council (YTC) and its nations. Data was collected through individual interviews with YTC staff, researchers, and community members (educators, helpers, Elders, youth). Participants discussed potential barriers, facilitators, and recommendations for implementation of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth. Participants' experiences with the co-creation and collaboration process, including successes, challenges, and recommendations for further partnering opportunities with Indigenous communities were also explored. Findings from this study can inform and guide future research as well as implementation considerations for enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration.

## **Keywords**

Indigenous youth; Indigenous communities; Healthy Relationships Program; Evidence-Based Program; Cultural Adaptation; Community-Based Participatory Research; Research Partnership; Co-creation; Collaboration

## Summary for Lay Audience

Indigenous youth in Canada are at a heightened risk for experiencing health and systemic disparities, including disproportionately high rates of poor mental health, substance misuse, suicide, violence, and victimization. Strategies that aim to address these concerns for Indigenous youth must include historical, social, and cultural considerations. The Healthy Relationships Plus – Enhanced (HRP-E) program was designed to help vulnerable youth populations develop healthy relationships skills and reduce risk behaviours. The HRP-E program has been implemented and evaluated in various settings with diverse groups; however, it has yet to be culturally adapted for youth in Indigenous communities. This study was based on a research partnership between Western University’s Centre for School Mental Health (CSMH) and the Yellowhead Tribal Council (YTC). A community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was used to explore the feasibility and fit of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth through co-creation and collaboration. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 11 YTC staff, researchers, and community members (educators, helpers, Elders, youth). Further data were also collected using observations and meeting minutes. Participants perceived the HRP-E program to be relevant, adaptable, and beneficial for Indigenous youth. Potential successes, challenges, and recommendations for further implementation of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth were discussed. Participants also shared their experiences with the co-creation and collaboration process, including successes, challenges, and recommendations for further partnering opportunities with Indigenous communities. This study helps to inform and guide future research and implementation considerations for enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration.

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## **1 Introduction**

Indigenous communities in Canada are working to leverage cultural strengths and relationships to improve outcomes for their youth. Yet, Indigenous youth remain at risk for experiencing high rates of violence, substance misuse and early school leaving (First Nations Information Governance Centre [FNIGC], 2012; Ning & Wilson, 2012; Health Canada, 2014). Strategies that aim to address these concerns for Indigenous youth must include historical, social, and cultural considerations (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], 2010; Crooks et al., 2010). Based on the ‘Fourth R’ curriculum, the Healthy Relationships Plus – Enhanced (HRP-E) program is an evidence-informed small groups program to help youth develop healthy relationships skills and reduce risk behaviours (Centre for School Mental Health [CSMH], 2019). The HRP-E program was developed to meet the needs of vulnerable populations but has not yet been tailored specifically for Indigenous youth. This study was based on a research partnership initiated by the Yellowhead Tribal Council (YTC) to explore the feasibility and fit of the HRP-E program for youth in Indigenous communities through a co-creation and collaboration process.

### **1.1 Historical and ongoing trauma among Indigenous peoples**

Indigenous peoples have endured high rates of trauma exposure in both historical and contemporary contexts (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Brave Heart et al., 2011). Historical trauma has been defined as “cumulative and generational emotional, physical, and psychological harm stemming from mass trauma exposure” (Gameon & Skewes, 2020, p. 224). In Canada, Indigenous communities have experienced historical trauma and significant loss as a result of settler-colonialism practices, including involuntary removal of peoples from traditional land and removal of children from families to attend residential schools (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1995;

Brave Heart, 2003; Whitbeck et al., 2004; Evans-Campbell, 2008). Such traumatic experiences have led to lasting detrimental effects for Indigenous peoples, families, and communities (Gameon & Skewes, 2020).

Many generations of Indigenous families have been targets of systemic oppression and violence that continues to impact those who experienced trauma firsthand, as well as their kin (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1995, 1998). Moreover, the effects of historical trauma are associated with a breakdown in healthy family connections and functioning, which further contributes to adverse outcomes (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Jacobs, 2006; Bombay et al., 2014). This incessant cycle is often referred to as 'intergenerational trauma,' which has been linked to various physical and mental health concerns (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Brave Heart, 2003; Evans-Campbell et al., 2012). It is therefore not surprising that unresolved historical trauma can exacerbate present experiences of relational trauma with dire consequences for Indigenous populations (Brave Heart, 2003; Walls & Whitbeck, 2012).

The correlation between historical and relational trauma is reflected in the high rates of interpersonal violence, community violence, and child abuse reported in Indigenous communities (Oetzel & Duran, 2004; Deters et al., 2006; Gone & Trimble, 2012; Beals et al., 2013; Brockie et al., 2015; Rosay, 2016). Both the United States and Canada consistently report higher rates of domestic violence, sexual abuse, homicide, and other violent crimes among Indigenous peoples in comparison to settler populations (Brzozowski et al., 2006; Yuan et al., 2006; Rosay, 2016). These acts of violence demonstrate the enduring relational trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples (Beals et al., 2005; Deters et al., 2006; Brockie et al., 2015), which, in turn, contributes to significant health disparities for this marginalized group (Boyd-Ball et al., 2006; Evans-Campbell et al., 2006).

In Canada, the Indigenous population endures not only higher rates of violence and victimization, but also lower levels of education and income, higher rates of unemployment, higher rates of poverty and inadequate housing, food insecurity and limited access to clean water, and greater involvement in the child welfare system compared to non-Indigenous citizens. Each of these risk factors is associated with disproportionately high rates of physical and mental health concerns, including lower life expectancy, chronic health problems such as diabetes and obesity, substance use and misuse, psychological distress, depression, and suicide (Adelson, 2005; Gracey & King, 2009; Bombay et al., 2011; FNIGC, 2012; Elias et al., 2012; Lemstra et al., 2012; Health Canada, 2014).

## **1.2 Indigenous youth at risk**

These health and systemic disparities have become increasingly evident among young Indigenous people in Canada. This population reports overwhelmingly high rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) before age 18 (Gameon & Skewes, 2020). More specifically, Indigenous children and youth are at greater risk for experiencing and witnessing familial violence compared to other cultural groups (Yuan et al., 2006; Brockie et al., 2015; Rosay, 2016). They are also more likely to drop out, or be removed from, schools due to bullying and violence (Richmond et al., 2012). Dating violence has also become a cause for concern among young Indigenous peoples (Hautala et al., 2017). In fact, violence remains a leading cause of mortality and morbidity among Indigenous youth, in addition to socioeconomic conditions, accidents (Harder et al., 2012; Bougie et al., 2014), and suicide (Kirmayer, 1994; Hunter & Harvey, 2002; Leenars, 2006; Barker et al., 2017; Crooks & Dunlop, 2017). Furthermore, broken family ties and displacement has led to a high number of Indigenous youth in care (Sinclair &

Grekul, 2012) and the resulting loss of supportive family networks has been linked to an increased likelihood of gang membership and incarceration (Latimer & Foss, 2004).

The intergenerational trauma experienced by many Indigenous youth is associated with poor mental health and self-esteem (King et al., 2009; Dell & Hopkins, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Robbins et al., 2017) and reduced social support, which can lead to difficulties sustaining healthy relationships (Elias et al., 2012; Iwasaki, 2014) and constructive coping mechanisms (King et al., 2009; Dell & Hopkins, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Robbins et al., 2017). Historical and ongoing trauma have also been shown to impede the development of healthy coping behaviours that have served Indigenous peoples for ages. Children and youth of families with unresolved historical trauma are likely to internalize distressing emotions and cognitions to avoid further suffering or traumatization for their caregivers (Walters et al., 2006; Evans-Campbell, 2008). Moreover, those children and youth who are unable to express negative feelings may struggle to learn coping skills from their caregivers, which can inhibit their ability to cope with trauma and stressors later in life (Walters et al., 2006; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Walls & Whitbeck, 2012).

This generational breakdown in learning constructive coping strategies may contribute to the health and systemic inequalities for Indigenous communities. For instance, individuals who are unable to learn healthy coping skills may rely on harmful risk behaviours to manage distress, such as substance misuse and social exclusion (Cooper et al., 1988; Wolsko et al., 2007). It is evident that the cycle of historical and relational trauma continues to impact Indigenous peoples throughout the lifespan; however, early intervention could have positive effects on a range of health behaviours and outcomes for younger generations (Weissbecker & Clark, 2007). One such way to reduce health and systemic disparities is to identify and develop evidence-based

programming designed to stop the cycle of intergenerational trauma and prevent violence (Gameon & Skewes, 2020) and, ultimately, to enhance well-being for Indigenous youth.

### **1.3 Evidence-based programming for Indigenous youth**

Young Indigenous peoples are not only faced with significant risks to well-being, but they are also underserved in regard to health services and programming (Crooks & Dunlop, 2017; Gameon & Skewes, 2020). The majority of Indigenous youth who want help or are referred to treatment never receive it due to the limited support from existing services available in their community (Manson, 2000; Johnson & Cameron, 2001; Beals et al., 2005; Oetzel et al., 2006; LaFromboise et al., 2010; Wexler et al., 2012). Many communities have a lack of, or restricted access to, these services as well as a mismatch of Indigenous and Western views (Vukic et al., 2011; FNIGC, 2012; Wexler & Gone, 2012). Rather, youth services are primarily accessed through school-based programs (Langley et al., 2010), and the effectiveness of these targeted programs remains unknown. Furthermore, because Indigenous youth have higher rates of early school leaving, these services are not accessible to many youths.

The research literature regarding the adoption, implementation, and effectiveness of evidence-based programs and services in Indigenous communities is scarce. Such interventions are deemed evidence-based by way of the “Western scientific method of systematic measurement, observation, and experimentation” (Jernigan et al., 2020, p.76). In recent years, Western science has been widely criticized for assuming that evidence-based interventions are universally beneficial despite the fact that certain populations were not adequately represented in the research (Dickerson et al., 2020). It is perhaps unsurprising that evidence-based programs developed in Western settings seldomly translate to Indigenous communities, particularly if

culturally relevant programming is excluded from research (Dutta 2007; Persaud & Mamdani 2006).

Many researchers recognize how critical it is for evidence-based programs to integrate traditional practices when serving Indigenous communities (Dickerson et al. 2012; Venner et al. 2007). Although it is clear that evidence-based programs do teach skills that have been shown to benefit a wide range of youth, they must also be flexible in applying these practices according to unique cultural, policy, and organizational differences pertaining to Indigenous settings (Fixsen et al., 2013). For example, Indigenous communities use some aspects of the scientific method (e.g., observation) to gain insight, while also recognizing that there are several other ways of acquiring knowledge. Cultural knowledge is shared verbally from one generation to the next, often through storytelling or proper apprenticeship (Jernigan et al., 2020). The acquisition of this knowledge is somewhat based on one's faith in their internal self, Elders, ancestors, and spirituality. Furthermore, this knowledge can be acquired through practical learning in real-world settings (Cochran et al., 2008).

Other factors have been identified as potential facilitators or barriers to successful implementation of evidence-based programming in Indigenous communities. Some studies have shown that past experiences with healthcare providers, including feeling misunderstood and receiving inadequate care and/or intervention options, may reduce the likelihood of program success (Flores et al., 2005; Guerrero et al., 2010). Differing historical and cultural viewpoints that do not fit with program goals and implementation strategies can also influence the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions (Yeh et al., 2004; Pina et al., 2019). In addition, it has been argued that evidence-based programs take an average of 17 years to become 'certified' as effective and considered for dissemination (Balas & Boren, 2000; Rotheram-Borus et al.,

2012). This process is far too lengthy when there is an urgent need to be addressed, such as reducing health and systemic disparities for Indigenous youth.

#### **1.4 The need for culturally adapted programming for Indigenous youth**

To date, there have been a wide range of strategies used to address the prevention gap for Indigenous youth. Strategies that aim to address these concerns for Indigenous youth must include historical, social, and cultural considerations (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], 2010; Crooks et al., 2010). One such approach is to develop culturally appropriate youth programs that recognize and support Indigenous ways of knowing through the decolonizing of dominant views within Western science (Dickerson et al., 2020). In an effort to do so, many Indigenous communities have partnered with researchers from academic institutions to adapt existing programs originally designed for non-Indigenous populations. These collaborative efforts are based on the assumption that program effectiveness can be generalized if proper adaptations are made to fit with the local context and culture (Walters et al., 2020).

The cultural adaptation of interventions is defined as the systematic modification of an established evidence-based program to purposefully integrate aspects of culture, language, and context for a specific minority group (Bernal et al., 2009; Pina et al., 2019). The extent of adaptations can range from surface-level changes to deep-level changes. Surface-level adaptations often include minor modifications to the program content to incorporate cultural aspects such as traditional language, music, and imagery (Resnicow et al., 2000). While surface-level changes do reflect some cultural values, they may not be useful for addressing the historical and ongoing trauma endured by Indigenous peoples. Rather, culturally adapted interventions with deep-level changes are better suited to address such systemic issues by integrating cultural

teachings and practices into the program curriculum (Gameon & Skewes, 2020; Resnicow et al., 2000).

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that incorporating cultural content is a suitable adjunct to Westernized approaches to prevention programming for Indigenous youth (Moran & Reaman, 2002; Hawkins et al., 2004; Penn et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2012; Wexler & Gone, 2012; Gone, 2013; Fiedeldey-Van Dijk et al., 2017). Some studies have examined the different aspects of culture, including cultural continuity (Chandler & Lalonde 1998; Hallet et al., 2007), engagement in traditional practices and language, bicultural competence, enculturation, and cultural identity. Each of these aspects have been shown to improve mental health, resilience and positive functioning, as well as reduce emotional distress, substance use and misuse, and suicide (Kirmayer et al., 2000; Whitbeck et al., 2002; Kirmayer et al., 2003; Lafromboise et al., 2006, 2010; Smokowski et al., 2014). Thus, incorporating these cultural aspects into evidence-based programs can have a positive impact on Indigenous youth and their communities (Baydala et al., 2014), particularly in certain circumstances such as poor intervention response, limited engagement, unique features in presenting problems, and unique risk or protective factors underlying the target group for the program (Pina et al., 2019).

Culture, in and of itself, has been consistently identified as a protective factor for Indigenous youth (Wexler & Gone, 2012; Gone, 2013; Fiedeldey-Van Dijk et al., 2017). In particular, cultural identity and connectedness and engagement in traditional cultural activities are associated with positive mental health and well-being for Indigenous youth (Pridemore, 2004; Mohatt et al., 2011; Henson et al., 2017; Snowshoe et al., 2017; Jernigan et al., 2020). The integration of cultural content is thus widely accepted as an essential component to effective prevention and intervention programming for Indigenous youth (Moran & Reaman, 2002;

Hawkins et al., 2004; Penn et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2012). Recent research has found that including culturally relevant content in addition to using a strengths-based approach are especially important for Indigenous youth programming (Crooks et al., 2013; 2018). Thus, programs that emphasize youth strengths while integrating culturally relevant beliefs, traditions, and practices are most fitting for Indigenous youth (Crooks et al., 2010).

A growing number of evidence-based interventions have been culturally adapted for diverse groups of Indigenous youth and preliminary findings have consistently shown increases in program effectiveness across a range of health domains (Barrera et al., 2013). In fact, studies have shown that culturally adapted programs may be more effective than their original versions with non-Indigenous youth (Dickerson et al., 2020). One scoping review by Rowan and colleagues (2014) found that cultural interventions effectively promoted well-being as part of substance use treatment for Indigenous populations. Similar results have been found for culturally adapted substance use programs, including increased knowledge and skills regarding drug resistance (Baydala et al., 2009; Kulis et al., 2013), reduced substance use, and increased levels of hope, optimism, and cultural identity (Donovan et al., 2015). In addition, suicide prevention programs have shown promising findings, including decreased suicidal ideation and hopelessness, and enhanced problem-solving skills (Lafromboise & Lewis, 2008; Le & Gobert, 2015). Culturally adapted programs that aim to promote positive youth development and well-being have also demonstrated encouraging results, including increased self-esteem, healthy coping strategies, and a greater connection to culture and cultural identity (Goodkind et al., 2012; Langdon et al., 2016).

The cultural adaptation of evidence-based programs is not only beneficial for Indigenous youth participants, but also for their communities. Previous studies based on a research

partnership between the University of Alberta and Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation (YTC nation) have shown that youth programming is more effective when led by the community and aligned with the local values, beliefs, traditions, and cultural context (Baydala et al., 2012; Ruttan et al., 2017). Results from these studies showed that participants can better relate to locally relevant curriculum and are thus more likely to engage in programming. Moreover, the collaborative process of adaptation was associated with a stronger sense of cultural identity and pride, as well as community ownership and commitment to sustaining the program (Baydala et al., 2012). These findings demonstrate that establishing research partnerships between academic and community organizations can be a viable approach to culturally adapting and delivering evidence-based programs for Indigenous youth while contributing to positive outcomes at both the individual and community level (Baydala et al., 2012; Ruttan et al., 2017).

While preliminary results are encouraging, few evidence-based programs have been adequately adapted by, and for, Indigenous communities and thus cannot be deemed culturally validated (Lucero, 2016). Such limitations may be due to challenges related to following standardized Western methodologies while using community-based participatory research approaches. Specific challenges have been identified in the literature, including a mismatch between implementation fidelity and flexibility to incorporate locally relevant knowledge, a lack of culturally appropriate research methods, and difficulties related to quantifying Indigenous cultural practices and obtaining sample sizes which are adequately large and representative (Friesen et al., 2012; Gone, 2012; Crooks et al., 2013). In addition, the process can be resource-intensive (McKleroy et al., 2006) and there are no established guidelines for culturally adapting evidence-based programs to date (Gameon & Skewes, 2020). There is, however, existing evidence to support the process of adapting cultural program content, the feasibility of these

adapted programs, key characteristics of promising interventions, and implementation challenges and successes (Crooks & Dunlop, 2017). These findings are central to advancing knowledge in this area; yet, there remains a need for further evaluations to help guide researchers and community leaders in culturally adapting evidence-based programming for Indigenous youth through co-creation and collaboration.

### **1.5 The evolution and adaptation of the *Fourth R* for Indigenous youth**

Since the early 2000s, a multidisciplinary team of researchers, educators, program specialists and community leaders have worked together to develop initiatives that emphasize youth assets, promote healthy relationships, and reduce risk behaviours. The result of these efforts was the *Fourth R*, an approach that highlights the importance of learning about relationships (i.e., the fourth r) within the school curriculum, alongside the first three *R*'s: reading, writing, and arithmetic (Wolfe et al., 2009). Based on a social-emotional learning framework, the *Fourth R* consists of a range of evidence-based and evidence-informed programming to develop healthy relationship skills, promote positive mental health, and prevent violence among youth (Crooks et al., 2018).

The *Fourth R* originated as a dating violence prevention program delivered by teachers within health classes as part of the school curriculum for grade 9 students (Wolfe et al., 2008). Now, there are a variety of *Fourth R* program options available. The *Fourth R* has expanded to include curricula for grades 7-12, most of which still align with curriculum expectations to ease program implementation for teachers. Several training options (e.g., in-person and online) and translations have also been made available to minimize barriers to implementation for teachers

and other program facilitators. More recently, the Fourth R has been revised to include a stronger emphasis on mental health promotion (Crooks et al., 2018).

The Fourth R team has not only been working to increase feasibility for program facilitators, but also to maximize youth engagement. In collaboration with partners and other stakeholders, the team continues to adapt the Fourth R programming for particular settings and groups. The program has been tailored and *enhanced* to meet the unique needs of vulnerable youth, including those in corrections, LGBTQ2+ youth, and Indigenous youth. While these adapted programs are still based on core components of the Fourth R, special considerations have been made to address the needs of each group or setting (Crooks et al., 2018).

The Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations was designed to meet the specific needs of the Indigenous youth population. Based on the original principles of the Fourth R, the program uses a strengths-based approach to enhance healthy relationship skills and social-emotional skills within a positive youth development framework. However, there are components of the Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations that are unique to this program. The Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations integrates “cultural identity development and mentoring, utilization of culturally appropriate teaching methods, and inclusion of Indigenous community members and locally relevant teachings” (Crooks et al., 2018, p. 305).

To date, these cultural components have been integrated into several initiatives as part of the Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations program. These initiatives have been implemented and evaluated in various settings with Indigenous youth groups, including mentoring programs for elementary and secondary students, cultural leadership courses and camps, student leadership committees, and the ‘Indigenous Perspectives Fourth R.’ (Crooks & Dunlop, 2017). Studies have

shown that these programs increase cultural connectedness and positive mental health among Indigenous youth (Crooks et al., 2013, 2016, 2017). Building on these successes, the Fourth R team has since developed enhanced programming to better meet the needs of various vulnerable populations, including Indigenous youth.

### **1.6 The Healthy Relationships Plus Program – Enhanced**

More recently, the Fourth R team developed the Healthy Relationships Plus – Enhanced (HRP-E) program in response to a societal need to promote positive, healthy relationships, and prevent violence among vulnerable youth populations in Canada (Crooks et al., 2018). The HRP-E is a small group program based on the core Fourth R components (e.g., skill development, strengths-based approach) with an additional emphasis on mental health, suicide prevention, and addiction. This enhanced program was adapted using a trauma-informed lens and harm reduction approach to promote healthy relationships and reduce several identified risk behaviours among vulnerable youth aged 12-18 years (Centre for School Mental Health [CSMH], 2019).

The program consists of 16 one-hour sessions, which incorporate role-playing of high-risk scenarios and open dialogue. Youth are encouraged to engage in discussions about healthy and unhealthy romantic and peer relationships, effective communication, help-seeking, media literacy and peer pressure. Program content has been further adapted to include more detailed information on dating violence, safety planning, consent, and sexual exploitation (Kerry & Crooks, 2017). Upon completion, youth participants receive a certificate of achievement (CSMH, 2019).

Preliminary results have shown that youth participants found the HRP-E program to be both enjoyable and valuable (Crooks et al., 2018). More specifically, participating youth

identified the program materials and interactive components as most favourable. Similarly, program facilitators enjoyed implementing the program and found it to be valuable for youth (Crooks et al., 2018). Facilitators considered the HRP-E program to be a positive experience, and many stated they would recommend the program to a colleague. Many program facilitators also reported observing positive changes in youth participants (Crooks et al., 2018).

This enhanced version has been piloted in both school and community settings for vulnerable youth across Canada, including youth in corrections and LGBTQ2+ youth. However, the HRP-E program has not yet been enhanced for, or implemented with, Indigenous youth in remote communities. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the feasibility and fit of the HRP-E program for youth in Indigenous communities through a co-creation and collaboration process.

### **1.7 The use of community-based participatory research to facilitate co-creation and collaboration**

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is an approach that highlights the importance of building partnerships between researchers and community stakeholders (Jull et al., 2017). In CBPR, researchers and knowledge users engaging in reflective, communal, and systematic analysis throughout the research process to achieve the shared goals of educating, enhancing practice and/or creating social change (Israel et al., 1998; Baum et al., 2006). CBPR recognizes that it is critical to involve members of the targeted population as active and equal participants in all aspects of the research process in order to effectively create change (Holkup et al., 2004). The equal and active involvement of community stakeholders is a key component of CBPR, as it challenges the power relationships rooted in traditional Western research

approaches. CBPR advocates for power to be shared among the researchers and community stakeholders, legitimizes experiential knowledge, and utilizes research to improve circumstances and practices (Baum et al., 2006).

CBPR has been identified as a suitable approach when working with marginalized populations such as Indigenous peoples. Using a CBPR approach is particularly important when conducting research with Indigenous peoples, as the lasting impacts of colonial practices are often echoed in prevailing Western research processes (Ruttan et al., 2017). Moreover, CBPR is consistent with the requirements of Chapter 9 on Research Involving First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples of Canada in the Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (CIHR, 2010). A CBPR approach supports the development of reciprocal relationships between researchers and communities with an emphasis on the shared control of health and social conditions (Baum et al., 2006; Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Research partnerships with Indigenous populations involve the sharing of cultural knowledge and practices and/or traditions which provide necessary context, regardless of whether these are the areas of study. For example, Indigenous communities in Canada abide by unique legal, political, and cultural governance structures that support decision-making on a wide range of issues within their jurisdiction (Waechter et al., 2009). It is therefore critical that research partnerships with Indigenous communities reflect a shared vision of project goals (Waechter et al., 2009).

This study was based on a research partnership initiated by the Yellowhead Tribal Council's Child and Family Services Department (YTC-CFS) contacting Western University's Centre for School Mental Health (CSMH) with the shared goal of enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in the nations. The use of a CBPR approach can help to build an equal, respectful research partnership that supports the autonomy of Indigenous communities and

leads to positive benefits for this underserved population (Crooks et al., 2013). According to Stewart (2009), research conducted with Indigenous communities entails a paradigm shift from Western approaches historically used by academics. Research methods must employ Indigenous theories and values for many reasons which include consequences that can impact the research practice itself as well as the general validity of results. The quality of the research is also strengthened during each step of the process using a CBPR approach. Some authors have emphasized the importance of remaining flexible to exploring and expanding the CBPR approach in order to best support Indigenous communities in benefiting equitably from research findings (Jernigan et al., 2020). While CBPR has been deemed effective for conducting research with Indigenous communities (Baydala et al., 2012; Ruttan et al., 2017; Jernigan et al., 2020), there are several imperative considerations for researchers before engaging in this work.

Waechter and colleagues (2009) identified six key points to consider when conducting research with Indigenous peoples. First, Indigenous world views and culture should be incorporated into the research design. Second, researchers should become familiar with community bylaws, policies, and procedures. It is also important that Indigenous peoples be included in the research design and implementation as a means of community engagement (Waechter et al., 2009). Third, researchers must align their ethical principles with those of Indigenous perspectives, including concepts such as sacred and/or traditional knowledge and sacred space. Fourth, traditional Indigenous approaches to research are typically verbal in nature and should thus be applied to all procedures, including obtaining participant consent (Waechter et al., 2009). Fifth, researchers should make efforts to share research findings with the participating Indigenous community in appropriate ways to allow for ongoing discussion, relationship-building, access to expertise, education, and training for its members. Lastly,

community members should be given the opportunity to review the research findings to ensure proper context, potential limitations and/or to identify further directions (Waechter et al., 2009).

CBPR was the most fitting approach for this feasibility study to guide and inform the adaptation of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth based on locally relevant cultural knowledge and practices through co-creation and collaboration. This approach was used to incorporate both Western scientific and Indigenous ways of knowing (Waechter et al., 2009). The Western scientific contribution was the utilization of evidence-based literature to address the need to offer culturally adapted healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth living in remote communities. Indigenous ways of knowing were incorporated throughout all research phases, including input into training and program content and guidance on the partnering process. In this study, using a CBPR approach best met the needs of both the research team and the community, while aligning with the CIHR guidelines for research with Indigenous peoples (CIHR, 2010).

## **2 Methodology**

The translation of research into everyday practice requires a partnership that consists of *communicative validity* through which knowledge is created equally between contributors, as well as *pragmatic validity*, whereby the research goal is productive change (Kvale, 2002). Such a partnership can support the connection between scientific validity and more practical questions (Bradbury & Reason, 2001). Ideally, a sustained partnership involves collectively identifying the research question, conceptualizing study procedures, providing key training and education opportunities, employing knowledge translation activities, and evaluating impact to support practice change (Waechter et al., 2009).

In April 2020, Western University's CSMH was contacted by the YTC-CFS to adapt and implement the HRP-E for Indigenous youth in their communities. The use of a CBPR approach helped to facilitate a sustained research partnership between the CSMH and YTC-CFS. This partnership involved the reciprocal sharing of relevant information to enhance healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth. More specifically, this study applied a CBPR approach to answer the following research questions:

1. What are YTC staff and community members' perceptions of the fit and feasibility of the HRP-E training and program content, as well as potential successes, challenges, and recommendations for further implementation of healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth?
2. What are YTC staff, researchers, and community members' experiences with the co-creation and collaboration process, including potential successes, challenges, and recommendations for further partnering opportunities?

## **2.1 Setting**

This feasibility study took place in the nations of the Yellowhead Tribal Council. The YTC is an organizational community consisting of four diverse member nations from across Treaty Six territory: the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Alexander First Nation, O'Chiese First Nation, and Sunchild First Nation. In 1977, the YTC was formed to work collectively to govern political issues within its member tribes (Yellowhead Tribal Council [YTC], 2020). The YTC provides essential programs and services to fulfill the needs of each nation, including the Yellowhead Tribal College which was designed to meet the communities' labour needs and to equip students for a range of careers and/or further studies (YTC, 2020). Moreover, the YTC employs over 50 full-time staff members in several program and service areas, including

administration, finance, health, corrections, environment, technical services, education, and Aboriginal skills and employment training (YTC, 2020). The primary community partner in this study was YTC's Child and Family Services Department.

Each of the four member nations has its own unique community identity and needs. As such, the YTC decided to pilot this study in one of its communities, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. The Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation is located on the shores of Wakamne, or Lac Ste Anne, in northern Alberta. Its name was taken from Chief Alexis, who signed Treaty Six on behalf of the Nakota of the North Saskatchewan, Pembina, and Athabasca River region. The traditional language is Nakoda/Stoney or Isga I'abi (YTC, 2020). There are approximately 2,000 members of the nation, which is governed by a chief and council, staff members, and other departments according to the Canadian Indian Act regulation (Ruttan et al., 2017).

## **2.2 Participants**

A non-probability (purposive, convenience) sampling strategy was used to recruit participants for this study. First, a purposive sampling technique was employed, as all participants were recruited based on pre-selection criteria. All YTC staff and community members who participated in the HRP-E training and community consultations were invited to participate in this study. YTC staff consisted of administrators (i.e., leadership) and registered social workers employed by the Child and Family Services Department. Community members included educators, helpers, Elders, youth, and other Indigenous stakeholders from YTC nations that were participating in a youth leadership capacity. In addition, YTC staff, researchers, and community members who were considered key informants in the co-creation and collaboration process were invited to participate in the study. Researchers consisted of the principal

investigator and a community partnerships coordinator from Western University's CSMH who were actively involved in the partnering process with YTC. Key informants were defined as YTC staff, researchers, and community members who were involved in the planning, development, and implementation phases of this study.

### **2.3 Recruitment**

Research staff at the CSMH invited YTC staff and community members who participated in the HRP-E training and community consultations via email or telephone using the appropriate recruitment script. Both the email recruitment script (Appendix A) and telephone recruitment script (Appendix B) emphasized that participation was voluntary and had no effect on their employment or participation in the project or HRP-E programming. When recruiting participants via email, a copy of the Participant Letter of Information and Consent Form (Appendix C) was attached to the email. Participants were instructed in the email to review the Letter of Information and fill out an online consent form (Appendix C) using the link provided. Completed consent forms were received by research staff at the CSMH to ensure that the YTC would not be informed of who agreed to participate. Verbal consent was obtained when access to email or internet was limited.

When recruiting via telephone, verbal consent was obtained by the student investigator. The written narrative from the Letter of Information (Appendix D) was read to the participant by CSMH research staff. Consent was documented on an online verbal consent form (Appendix D), along with interested participants' name, the date and time, and the name of the person recording the consent. CSMH research staff ensured that all participants were fully informed, and all

questions were answered. The same procedures were followed to recruit key informants, including YTC staff, researchers, and community members.

## **2.4 Materials**

Several materials were required throughout the duration of this thesis project. First, the HRP-E training was adapted through a co-creation and collaboration process with YTC administrators to prioritize certain elements and create space for discussion about feasibility in one particular community. This modified HRP-E training was delivered as part of this study. Program materials were required for successful implementation of the HRP-E training and regular community consultations, including (but not limited to) training manuals and PowerPoint presentations. In addition, the HRP-E training session was delivered virtually using Zoom, a cloud-based software platform offering video, voice, content sharing, and chat applications commonly used for teleconferencing, telecommunicating, distance education and social relations (Zoom, 2020). Regular community consultations and working meetings with YTC partners were also conducted using Zoom software. During one of these community consultations, a group discussion process was facilitated using Jamboard to collect input from the whole group.

Materials were also prepared for the purpose of data collection. Two semi-structured interview guides were developed for this study. In consultation with YTC partners, an individual interview guide (Appendix E) was developed for YTC staff and community members who participated in the HRP-E training to explore their perceptions of the fit and feasibility of the HRP-E training and program content for Indigenous youth. Following consultation, this initial interview guide was drafted and shared with YTC partners for further input. The second interview guide (Appendix F) was developed for conducting interviews with key informants

(YTC staff, researchers, community members) to explore their experiences with the co-creation and collaboration process. Lastly, the student investigator maintained a reflective journal throughout the study.

## **2.5 Procedure**

This project was undertaken in partnership with the YTC-CFS organization and its member communities. The YTC administrators initially contacted the CSMH team with the intent of establishing a sustainable partnership, and shared research goals and procedures were prioritized throughout the study to ultimately enhance healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth through a co-creation and collaboration process. Regular working meetings with YTC partners were held, which consisted of assessing community readiness, strategic goal setting, identifying potential barriers and facilitators, formulating study design, and conducting research appropriately within the local context.

Together, the CSMH research staff and YTC partners adapted the existing HRP-E facilitator training to ensure that it was locally relevant and engaging for YTC staff and community members. The modified two-day HRP-E training session was led virtually by members of the CSMH team, and YTC administrators played a co-facilitation role on-site in northern Alberta. During the second day, our first community consultation was held with YTC staff and community members who participated in the HRP-E training, as well as Indigenous youth and one Elder from the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. Participants volunteered to partake in the HRP-E training and community consultations with the understanding that they would provide feedback to improve future iterations of the training and program content. Consenting YTC staff and community members were invited to participate in the first phase of individual interviews.

The second phase of this study involved regular working meetings with YTC partners and further community consultations to discuss opportunities for the adaptation and implementation of the HRP-E program in Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. Those YTC staff, researchers, and community members (educators, helpers, Elders, youth) who were considered key informants in the co-creation and collaboration process were also invited to participate in an in-depth interview.

## **2.6 Data Collection**

This feasibility study applied a CBPR approach using primary data collected from observations, meeting minutes, and in-depth interviews with YTC staff, researchers, and community members. The student investigator made several efforts to remain culturally sensitive and follow local cultural practices and procedures (e.g., traditional ceremony) using virtual conferencing software (i.e., Zoom) due to pandemic-related social gathering and travel restrictions.

### *Phase 1: YTC staff and community members*

YTC staff and community members who participated in the HRP-E training and community consultations were invited to participate in individual interviews to gather more in-depth feedback on the HRP-E training and program content. Two trainees participated in the interviews, which lasted approximately 20 to 45 minutes. Questions explored YTC staff and community members' perceptions of the fit and feasibility of the HRP-E training and program content, as well as potential challenges, successes, and recommendations for further implementation of healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth. Interviews were semi-structured in that there were predetermined questions; yet, the interviewer remained

flexible to follow the direction of the participant. Consenting participants were emailed the details for the interview including date, time, and a link to the Zoom meeting. Interviewees were given the chance to share any concluding statements at the end of the interview. In addition, the student investigator utilized a member checking process by providing a verbal summary of each interview to ensure that participant responses were accurately captured (Krefting, 1991; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Participants were provided a \$30 gift card for participating in the interview.

### *Phase 2: Key Informants*

YTC staff, researchers, and community members considered to be key informants were invited to participate in an individual interview to gather more in-depth information on the partnering process. The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes to one hour. Questions explored YTC staff, researchers, and community members' experiences of the co-creation and collaboration process, including potential challenges, successes, and recommendations for further partnership opportunities. Key informant interviews followed the same procedures as described above.

In addition, the use of a CBPR approach allowed for further data sharing opportunities to emerge over the course of the study. Such opportunities were encouraged and integrated, including (but not limited to) observations, meeting minutes, structured brainstorming activities in meetings and community consultations, and ongoing feedback provided by the study participants.

## 2.7 Data Analysis

This study was conducted using a CBPR approach to explore the fit and feasibility of the HRP-E for Indigenous youth through a co-creation and collaboration process with the YTC. This approach was most suitable for this study, as the research methodologies were informed by both Western scientific and Indigenous ways of knowing and guided by the reciprocal relationship between the CSMH and YTC partners.

Initial transcription of the individual interviews was conducted using an automated transcription software called Trint. Audio recordings of the interviews were uploaded to the secure Trint web-based software, which uses artificial intelligence to transcribe the recordings into electronic written scripts (Trint, 2020). The student investigator listened to the interviews and made corrections to the transcripts. Each transcript was reviewed, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative datasets through the generation of codes and themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The key phases of thematic analysis were followed. First, the student investigator became familiarized with the data by reading and rereading transcriptions while noting initial concepts. Second, initial codes were manually generated through the creation of a code book with definitions and specific examples. Third, codes were organized according to the research questions and potential themes were identified. Fourth, preliminary themes were repeatedly revisited and revised. Fifth, finalized themes were defined and named. The final step involved reporting the data using an iterative process of reviewing, restructuring, and refining codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Member checking was used by reviewing the codes and themes with participants to ensure the accuracy and relevancy of the data. During the interviews, a verbal summary was provided to ensure that responses were accurately captured (Krefting, 1991; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Each transcript was subsequently emailed to respective interviewees for a comprehensive review; four responses were received. Furthermore, the student investigator used a reflective journaling process throughout the study to minimize personal biases, assumptions, and goals of the researcher. These strategies helped to strengthen the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and analysis of the study (Baillie, 2015).

### **3 Results**

Throughout this study, participant feedback was gathered using observations, meeting minutes, and in-depth interviews. A total of 13 interviews were conducted with eleven participants, including five YTC staff members, two CSMH researchers, and four Indigenous community members (Elder, helpers, educators, youth). YTC staff and community members who participated in the first phase of the study also completed follow-up interviews regarding the partnership process; therefore, all study participants were considered key informants. Data were merged to create the following themes.

**Table 1: Summary of Qualitative Themes**

<b>Organizing Themes</b>	<b>Key Themes</b>
Perceived fit and feasibility of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth through co-creation and collaboration	HRP-E program content perceived to be relevant, adaptable, and beneficial for Indigenous youth
	Community readiness and commitment to enhancing youth well-being
	Co-creation and collaboration perceived to be a key facilitator for success
Potential challenges related to the successful implementation of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth through co-creation and collaboration	The history of intergenerational trauma and adverse past experiences among Indigenous community members
	The unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic
	Competing interests and commitments among Indigenous community members
	Limited engagement among Indigenous youth in YTC communities
Recommendations for adapting the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth and further research partnership opportunities	HRP-E training and programming must be fun, engaging, and relevant to Indigenous youth in YTC communities
	Addressing historical and ongoing trauma as part of the HRP-E programming for Indigenous youth
	Indigenizing the HRP-E training and program content
	Tailoring HRP-E training and program content to address specific community needs
	Increased community member awareness and involvement throughout the partnering process
	Commitment to a flexible and iterative partnering process with Indigenous communities
	Researchers should be fit to work with Indigenous populations

### **3.1 Perceived fit and feasibility of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth through co-creation and collaboration**

#### **3.1.1 HRP-E program content perceived to be relevant, adaptable, and beneficial for Indigenous youth**

Participants believed that the HRP-E program content was relevant and beneficial for Indigenous youth in their communities. The program was also considered to be valuable from an Indigenous worldview standpoint. One YTC community member highlighted the significance of relationality among Indigenous peoples and how the skills-based HRP-E program can help to enhance familial relationships, as well as those with peers and romantic partners:

*“They're going to most likely look for an intimate relationship or maybe they might go through many intimate relationships, but they need to have those tools to be a good partner, a good friend, you know, just a good relative. And that's like one of the main concepts, main pillars of who we are as Indigenous people is to be a good relative... Because even just, you know, learning about healthy relationships...it's a lot more, I guess, complex than we know, right? Because you're working on, you know, strengthening, perception, processing, communicating – like we're helping them with these skills, which I hope is going to impact every relationship they have. So, it'll help to strengthen them, you know, their peer relationships, their family relationships, future intimate relationships. Like, I just hope it kind of has this ripple effect.”*

Many interviewees referred to the program content as universal and applicable to all youth. One CSMH researcher emphasized the importance of learning the foundational skills taught as part of the HRP-E program and applying them to a wide range of relationships:

*“The reality is that the skills you're learning are important in school. They're important in the workplace. They're important in all kinds of relationships. How do you communicate clearly? How do you apologize when you make mistakes? How do you know when you need more help?... How do you, you know, put down boundaries with people who are pushing your boundaries? Those are all such important skills in all relationships. So even though it's a dating violence program, we know from other research contexts that youth talk about being able to use these skills in a wide range of relationships.”*

Other participants described the HRP-E program content as open-ended and easily modified to meet the unique needs of each community. One YTC staff member felt that the adaptability of the HRP-E program was fitting for Indigenous communities in particular:

*“It's just nice to see somebody else who's already tried and tested it. And what I love is that it's so simple and stuff, but it's so open-ended... It's very open-ended. And that's a component that I think makes it very friendly for the Indigenous communities.”*

More specifically, the HRP-E program content was perceived as a way to address community needs by helping youth to restore and reclaim the historical intergenerational trauma endured by Indigenous peoples in Canada. One YTC staff member commented:

*“I feel like the Healthy Relationships Program can assist in restoring, you know, reclaiming some of that. And I think it's a good place to start with the youth, especially in their adolescent years, because it's during that time their brains are going through another phase of growth. They're in transitioning into becoming adults.”*

### 3.1.2 Community readiness and commitment to enhancing youth well-being

Nearly all participants endorsed a high level of community readiness and a commitment to enhancing youth well-being among members of the YTC nations. One member believed that a shared vision of community healing and growth as well as a deep-rooted love for young people in the nations can serve as an inspiration for this collaborative work:

*“You know, a shared vision of community healing and growth, helping people to become the best version of themselves so our community can attain wellness... And the awesome thing about Alexis is, there's this like, deep, profound love for children, babies, children, and it's just everybody has this inherent investment, whether it be large or small. And I think building relationships and starting to have these conversations about that is going to...it's going to be an energy that inspires us to continue forward and doing the work.”*

Many participants emphasized the critical need for further intervention within the nations. Increasing rates of suicide and other community crises were a major concern among interviewees; yet, they remained hopeful for positive change. One YTC community stakeholder considered the HRP-E program to be a source of hope for members of the nations:

*“I feel like we're at a critical point in our community in some ways because of the suicide, because all this, you know, the mental health...the state of the mental health of our people, our youth. This would give them something to, you know, it's kind of like a distraction, but also a way to – it's hopeful. It's hopeful, right?”*

Similarly, a participating YTC community member expressed a strong desire to urgently implement the HRP-E program within the nations in order to proactively address the needs of Indigenous youth:

*“I’d like to see this take off. And I’d like to see some proactive things happen, you know? We lost some community members recently to mental health issues and they were once youth. So, you know, a lot of stuff like that goes on... So, I think this is ‘operation now.’”*

Some participants identified Indigenous youth as generational knowledge- and change-makers. Members of the YTC nations believed that the HRP-E program would help to create sustainable change among the youth, as illustrated by one hopeful community stakeholder:

*“I’ve said it quite a bit these past couple of days, being around the wake and all that. And it’s telling my son’s generation, and my grandson’s generation, you know, you are the generation that has to make that change. You know, we’ve been on this path too long. We’ve been on this lateral violence path too long. And if we’re going – if our community, you know, is going to change, then they have to be the change-makers. And we’re going to do that by having things like this – healthy relationships, and continuing it, you know, continuing it not just a one-time course or you know, project... but that –sustaining that.”*

Several interviewees discussed the possible long-term benefits of equipping Indigenous youth with foundational skills through the HRP-E program. One YTC community member specifically referred to the youth as future leaders with the potential to facilitate positive change among fellow Indigenous peoples:

*“It feels like there’s more youth than adults right now, and they’re the next future. They’re the next adults. They’re the next leaders. And I think it is highly beneficial to get some fundamentals and get a good foundation going for them. Anything would help... Because even, I don’t know, if you get a crowd, there’s going to be at least maybe one or two people that are going to take something away from what happened. And that person could be a leader in the future.”*

### **3.1.3 Co-creation and collaboration perceived to be a key facilitator for success**

The partnering process between the YTC and Western University’s CSMH was described by participants as honest, transparent, and intentional. Creating a strong foundation based on authentic friendships was identified as a key facilitator to building a sustained, trusting partnership with Indigenous communities, as illustrated by one CSMH researcher:

*“I think the fact that it has been, in my view, collaborative and a co-creation this entire time is such a benefit and a privilege to be able to be a part of. Because, really, a lot of the work has been on [YTC administrator] and [YTC administrator], but they’ve been able to share their experience and their wisdom and their knowledge throughout this entire process. And so, I think that we’ve been able to sort of create a really good foundation so that when conversations need to happen, there’s a lot of honesty and a lot of transparency between both partners. And I think we saw that at the consultation meeting where concerns were brought up, but there was a really honest and frank deep conversation between the partners about ‘this worked well, this didn’t work really well.’ People were very honest and I think that wouldn’t have happened if it was just one meeting...I think [researcher] and [YTC administrator] and [YTC administrator] have*

*created this like friendship that they've been able to form with each other. And I think that's important and allows for those honest conversations to say, 'this isn't working. This went off the rails. This worked really well.' ... and the fact that it's happened for so long and through a pandemic, where I think [researcher] has mentioned that if it weren't in these times, people would have visited already. We would've gotten one to one, in person interactions. People would have seen the different nations if we were invited. We would have just had a bit more one on one time, which can be so valuable. So, the fact that these strong relationships have been created through Zoom is pretty impressive."*

Community members noted the perceived benefits of engaging in co-creation and collaboration processes through partnerships with external organizations, such as the CSMH. Many interviewees viewed the research partnership as a community resource. One Elder endorsed mutual benefit and continued learning as a result of engaging in such partnerships:

*"Some of the schools and some of the tribes are experimenting things. So, I think in those areas, these kinds of key people are coming to our community... they're there for a resource. And they identify. And because of that, our people have the opportunity to be part of it, because they're trained. The people that come onto our reserve are the ones that are identified – they have a specific role. They have an agenda that they have to follow. So, there's an expected outcome and they work towards that. And then they have a group that they have where they meet together to bring their findings or to bring like brainstorming. 'What's working and what's not working, what can be done?' So, the people that are involved in this to help in that area, they're reaching out to the people and they're getting feedback. So, they're resourceful, they're skillful. They can read and write. They're articulate. Extrovert. Those are the keys things that I saw when I sit in*

*these meetings, when I watch people. Like, I see that I'm just a carpenter. I'm sitting there watching all these very smart people here that can read a blueprint and build houses and they want to interact with people, society. They plan and, you know, they help people that need help. So, I say to myself, I'm learning. I'm learning something."*

Several participants believed that the sustained partnership between the YTC and the CSMH could help to create a sense of ownership of data and build research capacity among Indigenous community members. One YTC staff member described how this research partnership can help to empower the nation to be self-governing and self-sufficient:

*"It may be great for young people to see research in action as well, and so to be able to visualize themselves doing that kind of thing. So, if we talk about, we don't want outsiders on the reserve all the time... you have to have the people who can do it internally. They don't have that right now. And so, you know, there's probably a possibility for us to see what kinds excel at that or are interested and support and guide them to the right places to do the work if they want to be researchers... And actually, that concept is not really embraced a lot, but it's probably worthwhile exploring some more. And, you know, if Western can be that mentor kind of to our young researchers... that would be a cool relationship. And again, it fits so well with the nation. So, it's empowering the nation to be self-governing and self-sufficient."*

Another common theme among interviewees was the central role of the YTC as a community connector. It was deemed critical for researchers to establish a collaborative partnership with a reputable community liaison in order to conduct ethical research with Indigenous populations, as highlighted by one member of a YTC nation:

*“When you're first going to connect with a community or Indigenous community, a lot of times you're ‘in’ is through a working relationship or somebody you know from that community. Or you might not even have a community in mind, but then all of a sudden, you know, somebody comes, you come across somebody that tells you stories. And, you know, something leads you to that. That's how I look at things. With Indigenous communities, it's so, so important...there's many steps that are important... If you don't have connection, a lot of time people will phone the band office. And from the band office, they'll connect you to somebody and somebody to somebody and so forth. So, you're ‘in’ with our community is YTC.”*

Moreover, the established partnership between the CSMH and YTC helped to foster a sense of trust among Indigenous community members. One staff member described how the YTC's rapport with community stakeholders was a key facilitator for project success:

*“There's that certain level of trust that the nations have with YTC, right? So, if it's suggested by YTC, I think that just brings that much more trust to the nations and leaders... I think it would help just because YTC has that rapport with the nation's leaders and the program members and what not. So, I think it would help everything go smooth, and then the benefit could be all the youth learning all these skills and all the benefits from the program, basically.”*

### **3.2 Potential challenges related to the successful implementation of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth through co-creation and collaboration**

#### **3.2.1 The history of intergenerational trauma and adverse past experiences among Indigenous community members**

Nearly all interviewees identified the history of intergenerational trauma and adverse past experiences among community members as a barrier to implementing the HRP-E program through co-creation and collaboration. One member from the YTC nations expressed the ongoing need to address the harmful lineages of colonialism and capitalism to ultimately enhance healthy relationships for Indigenous peoples:

*“The historical relationship with the crown and the state and basically colonialism and capitalism, which have, you know, which uses genocidal tactics to dominate my people... we still have a lot of historical trauma we need to work through, and a part of that is how this trauma interfered with our kinship system. And in a larger scope...like our philosophy of relationality... we're going to be addressing historical trauma and breaking those, what do they call it, almost like those lineages – those negative lineages of colonialism, and change takes leadership.”*

Other participants spoke about the historical loss of traditional teachings and ways of life among Indigenous community members, particularly the youth. One Elder from a YTC nation described how this loss has been a challenge for decades and continues to impact Indigenous peoples to date:

*“One of the things that we lost - a lot of our teachings. A lot of our paths, our way of living. And that transition in the last twenty, twenty six years, going back to the states, and doing research to find out who we are, because if we don't know who we are and where we come from, there's a part that's always going to be missing... It's so important for our people to know who they are, what their ceremonies are and all the gifts that were passed on to us. It's important.”*

Participants also identified a communal fear of exploitation related to research as a significant barrier to program implementation and partnering opportunities with Indigenous peoples. Several interviewees reflected on the history of research within the nations and its harmful consequences, which led to reluctance to participate among community members. One YTC staff member suggested that longstanding generational views of research among community members may be a significant obstacle for researchers to overcome:

*“I think the name Western University scares the community members... the fear of just research being taken and stuff. I think that could be a real challenge, like to really convey, ‘this is just sharing some programming with your youth’... Convey to them that you're not going to steal their traditional ways and then go write about it. That's a real concern... I know that people are concerned about their culture and stuff, just kind of being exploited... And I would somehow really address that. That's huge. Even in my family, that's the mentality and it's so deeply ingrained in our brain that we are thinking that but our actions, we don't even realize it... Because we're told ‘you do not share our culture with outsiders. They'll steal it. They'll write about it’... And so, that's in my mentality at my age and some of these people we're trying to converse with are older than me. So, these are the ones who told me that and taught me that.”*

### 3.2.2 The unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic posed several challenges throughout this project, including the co-creation and collaboration process. More specifically, the pandemic proved to be an everchanging obstacle to building trust and rapport with Indigenous community members due, in part, to social gathering and travel restrictions, as mentioned by one CSMH researcher:

*“First of all, all of this is unfolding in the context of an unprecedented, in recent history, pandemic. So, that continues to derail things in terms of being able to bring people together, both the adults who are doing the planning, the location that they were maybe going to hold the programing in, and obviously all the stressors that have come with the pandemic around mental health. And so, that continues to be a challenge... Another one would be to attend to ceremony to learn how to appropriately approach Elders in that particular community or what's important to them to do. And I think, again, in a pandemic, it's so much harder.”*

Other participants reiterated the various challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. One YTC staff member identified pandemic-related restrictions as a major barrier to building trusting, sustained relationships with community members, while also highlighting the creative solutions used to overcome such obstacles, including the honouring of cultural protocols and processes through a virtual format:

*“I felt like we were in a bit of a stagnant kind of place, not just with healthy relationships stuff, but just in general with our project. And so, the pandemic really slowed things down. And now we're trying to pick up the pace again... You need to come. And so, I know that we're restricted. That's not going to happen for sure until you come, and they*

*see you and you're holding hands in a round dance or whatever... There's some travel happening. I just, I don't understand the parameters of it right now... We're doing these virtually offerings, they're so weird... But I'm glad that we're still in the motion of it. Like, we're not just saying 'so screw it' or whatever. And we're still taking the time to honor that process and the protocol. It's awkward but the whole year's been awkward."*

The COVID-19 pandemic also presented challenges related to the delivery of the HRP-E training and program content for Indigenous community members. Interviewees identified several potential challenges related to the virtual delivery of the HRP-E program, including limited opportunities to engage participants remotely. One YTC community member suggested that limited access to technology and a reliable internet connection may be a barrier to participation for youth within the nations:

*"I think a barrier out there would be just the Internet connection... Because they don't have the best connection out there, not like [YTC community]. Unless they have a stronger connection, it's very touchy out there, and possibly laptop technology for some of the youth."*

### **3.2.3 Competing interests and commitments among Indigenous community members**

In addition to various restrictions and limitations, the COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to competing priorities and commitments among members of the YTC nations. Throughout the study duration, the YTC partners were relentlessly attending to the urgent needs of their communities. One CSMH researcher emphasized the importance of being aware of the pandemic's impact on the unique needs of each community and its members:

*“I think the COVID-19 really showed that where the ‘people need food so I can't answer your emails about when we're going to have our meeting, even though I want to have the meeting. It's just I need to deliver the soup to people because that's a bigger priority.’ And like, 100% it is. I think being really mindful of that and aware of those unique needs.”*

Another CSMH researcher identified competing commitments and interests among Indigenous community partners as a common challenge related to enhancing healthy relationships youth programming through a co-creation and collaboration process:

*“There's always competing commitments and interests. So, just trying to get youth together and the adults, like even just the scheduling and having people be able to commit to a certain number of weeks. We know these groups work better when it's a stable group of youth and they can develop those relationships and trust within the group. So, that's hard when people have other commitments and other commitments come up. And I think we've seen, even in the planning phase, community crises and losses are disruptive because they bring a lot of emotion and sadness and they need to be honoured properly. So, first of all, nobody feels like doing the work when there's been a loss. But also, there's lots of ceremony and things need to be attended to. So even that, and then also knowing when's the right time to do this work. So, if there's been a big community incident, you know, having to kind of make sure that it's the right timing for the program or particular topics even in the program.”*

The critical need to address recurring community crises among Indigenous populations has been widely acknowledged; however, this critical pattern continues to be an unfortunate

reality for many nations. One YTC community member revealed the significant impact of recent losses in the community and the need for change:

*“With the recent suicide that just happened, and they had another death on the weekend, not a suicide, but somebody else died and it's rocked the community again... it's usually how it goes... When somebody dies, it's like a few people, and then it just makes it more difficult... And so, we know that other young people are going to probably attempt suicide in the next couple of days. That's what our research – that's what the research shows us. That's what we know. And so, I need you to look beyond, you know, the community's ways of doing things because we need to bring some change, or it will continue. It will continue in this pattern.”*

Conversely, there were some changes that were thought to pose their own challenges to enhancing programming for Indigenous youth through a co-creation and collaboration process with community partners. One YTC staff member stated that a change in community leadership may act as a potential barrier to successful implementation of the HRP-E program in the nations:

*“Alexis isn't due for an election for, I think, another year. But a change in leadership...that will be a challenge. Even when they declare the running of the election, like when people start running, which is usually a long, like way in advance, we risk the new people coming in and saying, ‘we don't want this now.’ So, we've gotten pretty good at honoring the commitments of prior leadership and so, we don't get caught up in whether or not there's a new Chief or whatever.”*

Several participants argued that existing community dynamics and politics may be a challenge to navigating the HRP-E program delivery within four distinct YTC nations. A number

of participants emphasized the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of each community and its members, including traditional languages and cultural practices. One YTC community stakeholder commented:

*“There's two different clans that don't necessarily get along... I'm not sure about all the history and that kind of stuff. But it is something that we have to be aware of and so, if they're saying, ‘this is Stoney Nakota stuff’ and then we hear that there's a different story, we have to be able to balance it. I'm aware of that kind of stuff when I go out there, because I think I just know that there's lines that are drawn and that kind of stuff.”*

#### **3.2.4 Limited engagement among Indigenous youth in YTC communities**

Limited youth engagement was another key challenge to successful implementation of the HRP-E program among participants. More specifically, members of the YTC nations identified low self-esteem, shyness, and perceived limits to trust and confidentiality among the youth as potential barriers to participation in the HRP-E program. One YTC community member stated:

*“I would think youth would probably be shy, more scared to talk just because of the gossip after the fact – the confidentiality... number one would probably be gossip after the fact or ‘if I said something wrong and then they would be mean after and they would turn it into a whole, you know, a bigger thing than it really is’... So, embarrassment. Yeah, and then just getting the youth to actually participate.”*

One Indigenous youth from a YTC nation shared that a general lack of perceived efficacy of prevention programs among young community members may also be a challenge for successful implementation of the HRP-E program in the communities:

*“I know we always get talks about drugs and what not to do. We always get that, and it seems like it doesn’t do nothing to prevent that. And all these prevention programs do nothing to prevent these kids... so, I don’t really know what can help them from going down that road.”*

The young participant further elaborated that previous youth programming within the YTC nations has not only been ineffective, but also disengaging:

*“Personally, I noticed every time we go somewhere...a conference... it kind of gets boring after a while because they kind of just make you sit down while they talk. First of all, I don’t like that. I don’t like to keep still and just listen to someone talk on and on and on... I think last year, we went to this youth camp. It was like a camp outside for a week. It was like really fun sometimes, but I noticed it got really disengaging a lot of the time, because they made us just sit down and listen to them talk and I find it’s hard to pay attention.”*

### **3.3 Recommendations for adapting the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth and further research partnership opportunities**

#### **3.3.1 HRP-E training and programming must be fun, engaging, and relevant for Indigenous youth in YTC communities**

Most participants stated that the HRP-E training and programming must be fun, engaging, and relevant for the youth in the YTC nations to increase community participation. One CSMH researcher elaborated that the program should also be strengths-focused and skills-based, which, in turn, can help to equip Indigenous youth with useful skills and strategies:

*“The program has to be engaging and fun or nobody will come. It needs to be strengths-focused because both participants themselves and adults who work with them and supporting them, everyone's tired of this deficit-based ‘try and fix things’ model. And I think it needs to be skills-based. Youth need to feel like they're developing skills and strategies.”*

Several interviewees proposed modifications for the virtual delivery of the HRP-E training and programming, including additional icebreaker activities, cultural arts and crafts, and incentives for participation. One YTC staff member suggested presenting online videos of mock program facilitation skills as part of the HRP-E training to engage trainees:

*“If you're doing virtual – it just came to me now – it would almost be kind of neat to see little snippet videos of the sections in action, even if it was just your team kind of mocking it...or role playing it. I think that would be a little bit more intriguing... like even just like a minute, minute and a half... the scenarios can go all from one spectrum to another, but sometimes, you know, even just seeing how a facilitator would have to switch gears. You know, like just*

*seeing how, 'OK, that this room really doesn't give a rip about grief. This is not the time. But they're sure talking a lot about gender roles.' You know, like just kind of little examples...I just kind of see, like, little clips being a little bit more of an attention grabber."*

To increase levels of engagement among Indigenous youth, a few participants suggested that the HRP-E program would best be delivered in an intensive, in-person format. One YTC staff member recommended incorporating the HRP-E programming into a summer camp for youth in the communities:

*"Well, unfortunately, the in-person, I think would be important. I think the longer duration together would be good, like a camp. I think kicking it off with a camp as an introduction would be enough. I fear that like a one- or two-hour thing, it's just too much to, for the kids to accept or deny. But if they're around it for, you know, anywhere from four to five days, I think they'll be like, 'oh yeah, you know what? There's something I can use from this'... And I think that would draw them back to returning... Quite often, you know, you get the 'yeah, I don't need this, or this doesn't interest me. Whatever, you know, and it's just an hour or two.' But if you're kind of around it for a week, you know, you go home... you go to bed, you kind of sleep on it, and the next day or two, something's kind of like, 'hey, you know what, this actually kind of makes little sense. Maybe I should listen a little closer.'"*

Both youth and adult participants believed that it was critical for reliable, engaging facilitators to deliver HRP-E training and program content. One YTC community member stated that HRP-E facilitators must have a high level of positive energy to engage Indigenous youth:

*“Like some really good presentations or workshops. Someone with a lot of energy can come present to the school. But sometimes when they present to the kids and the youth, it’s like presenting to the trees. They’re not going to get a response. You have to get somebody who is...a good presenter, like Chris Farley. Make Chris Farley – that kind of energy... I think some good mentors because the kids got to - they need to trust who they're working with.”*

### **3.3.2 Addressing historical and ongoing trauma as part of the HRP-E programming for Indigenous youth**

Some participants recommended addressing historical and ongoing trauma as part of the adapted HRP-E program content. One YTC community stakeholder claimed that increasing knowledge and awareness of the intergenerational trauma and abuse endured by Indigenous peoples is a critical first step to successfully implementing the HRP-E program for youth in the YTC nations:

*“I think maybe some workshops and presentations on trauma because our community’s based on a lot of historical trauma... Understanding trauma and abuses, I think, can let the youth understand like, ‘hey, OK, I see what’s going on here.’ Because like my son said, they always talk about addiction, but they didn’t say why there’s addiction. They don’t say why there’s addiction. They don’t say why people are trying to medicate their mind and forget something that they’re hurting with. That needs to be a first.”*

One CSMH researcher emphasized the importance of initiating conversations about the history of colonial violence and marginalization for Indigenous populations in Canada, particularly regarding issues of power and control and gender stereotypes, as part of the HRP-E program:

*“This would be sort of done in, I think, like an age-appropriate way, but to have a conversation around colonial violence and how that is so intertwined with gender-based violence and like we're not going to end gender-based violence if we don't end colonial violence... I think especially when we're talking to Indigenous youth to recognize the realities of colonial violence and, yeah, to really recognize that they're impacting each other all the time. So, I think naming it is important. You know, I think when we talk about power and control, to recognize that, like how race and status and sort of Indigeneity impact sort of power and control, which I think is important... like two spirit understandings. I know sort of in session two, where we talk about gender and we do sort of the gender box, to include conversations around two spirit and how two spirit folks may or may not identify with these boxes...and even how these boxes are sort of built on a white ideal of like ‘this is masculinity’ is code for white masculinity and white, heterosexual, cis settler masculinity. And so, being Indigenous, you're already outside of the box. And so, I think recognizing that the conversations that you would have about gender with Indigenous youth may look very different than the conversations you have around gender with settler youth and newcomer youth or young moms or whoever it is... I think to bring in that nuance to the conversation, I think is really important.”*

### **3.3.3 Indigenizing the HRP-E training and program content**

A key theme among participants was ‘Indigenizing’ the HRP-E training and program content to meet the needs of YTC community members. Interviewees recommended that the HRP-E content be modified to ensure that it is more relatable to Indigenous issues. One member of a YTC nation said:

*“I would add an Indigenous perspective because, like, I can't remember everything, and I wish I had my book here to look through it. Yeah, but the one that stands out is the media one. And I'm looking at that in the book, there's pictures of the magazine article or advertisements and stuff like that. That's from the perspective of just mainstream. But as Indigenous people, we have a lot more different forms of discrimination... And so, I would like, Indigenize it. Like, do the workshops from an Indigenous perspective, more relatable to Indigenous issues.”*

Multiple participants suggested that the HRP-E content should be Indigenized to incorporate traditional teachings and other cultural aspects. Another YTC community member specified that incorporating Elders, prayer, and the seven sacred teachings would ensure that the training and program content was more applicable for Indigenous peoples:

*“I think just including an Indigenous spin, including an Indigenous thing like we did with the last one with an Elder, with a smudge and prayer and just really incorporating that cultural aspect... Maybe even incorporating the seven sacred teachings like respect and humility and love and truth, honesty, wisdom, and courage.”*

Furthermore, one YTC community stakeholder emphasized the importance of including traditional ceremonies as part of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth:

*“In our Nakota kinship, there are ceremonies, like I said, that were forgotten – the naming ceremonies, rites of passage. I'm sure that, you know, I'm just going to guess that most of these young people, these youth, will have missed that opportunity to even experience that rite of passage. And one of the things I'd like to see is to still have that ceremony, even though they're past that stage of life... there might be some late bloomers*

*but for the most part, I think that this age group has really missed those ceremonies. I really believe that that has to be one of the features of this... I think naturally, in order for this to be delivered, you know, in our community and have a respect for the way that we do things and how we want to bring back, you know, some of the teachings that's lost, that's another purpose... the suggestion I made about, you know, this age group and bringing them through that rite of passage ceremony regardless if they've already made that change, you know? I think that in itself will be healing.”*

Integrating teachings from both the Western and Indigenous ways of knowing into the HRP-E programming and the partnering process was also recommended. One community member referred to this knowledge integration as ‘braiding the two ways together.’ An Elder from one of the YTC nations stated:

*“It is important that we become skilled in the areas of Western society. So, we complement. We walk in two worlds... When we become resourceful, we can help our community.”*

### **3.3.4 Tailoring HRP-E training and program content to address specific community needs**

All participants suggested that the HRP-E content must be locally relevant and tailored to meet specific community needs. One YTC staff member advised that modifications should be made using a trauma-informed approach to safely address community needs that are applicable to Indigenous youth in the communities:

*“As a facilitator, I think I would lead with statements or questions in each topic, and I would open with something...for example, with grief, if that was a topic that was being discussed, I would – and if I was in a specific community – I would say, you know, ‘grief is something we all experience’... ‘How is grief addressed on the nation?’ And a lot of them would probably say stuff like ‘we have four days; we keep the fire burning’ ... and I would get them to kind of just share. And then I would elaborate and sneak in all the emotions, like not sneak them in, but as the conversation would go up, the emotions and the struggles would all surface through those conversations and even stuff like something as simple as, you know, ‘there's the feast.’ And I would just get them to really personalize it... I think that would give them the lead, you know, and then just using the skills that we've learned in our education as well as in our personal lives to as safely as possible address the different issues... On the nations, one of the complications may be somebody might say something to the effect of ‘half my family is traditional, and the other half is Christian...and that's causing a lot of disharmony’ ... You're just kind of asking the group, ‘has anybody else been in this position?’ And 99% chance everyone will say, ‘oh yeah, my aunt is Christian, my uncle's traditional, and when their child passed, that's when the lines got blurred’ or, you know, like just whatever the issues are, because that is one of the issues on the nations... I could even see that in the dating, because they're quite often in a community where a lot of them may be relatives and stuff like that. But I can't really see in the typical high school where that would be an issue for kids to say, ‘so, what are your thoughts on dating?’ And it's like ‘well, my parents tell me make sure they're not your cousin.’ You know, something like that's not something you get from a school, a typical high school, you know, just little things just kind of pulling out of them*

*things that are unique to them. And they just love educating us. You know, they really love to inform us on how things shake out there...and if they feel you're really listening in a nonjudgmental way, all the stuff surfaces.”*

CSMH researchers reiterated the need to tailor the HRP-E training and program content to address the unique needs of each YTC community and its members. One CSMH researcher stressed the importance of encouraging HRP-E facilitators to continuously adapt the program to meet the needs of Indigenous youth participants:

*“This process has just been with Yellowhead Tribal Council and sort of the nations that they work with and support. And so, I think well, obviously, there's going to be similarities with other nations and communities that aren't affiliated with Yellowhead Tribal Council. I think being really mindful to pay attention to the uniqueness of the nations that we're working with and the people that we're working with. I think we were able to see that in some of the...consultation meetings with community members where we were able to see their unique experiences, the unique needs that they have. And I think really recognizing that those needs need to be prioritized over maybe the needs of Western or the needs of the funder or for the program... I think really emphasizing and encouraging and empowering them in any training... to allow facilitators who are in the community doing the program to know that they can adapt the program to meet the unique needs and to be locally relevant. But I think it's a part of the enhanced training that we already do is to sort of make sure that we talk about ‘oh, you can adapt and here are some ideas’ ... some facilitators can feel really nervous about that, especially if they're involved in research, like, ‘oh, I should sort of stick to this program’ or ‘oh, I disagree with this part of it, but I'm just going to do it because this is what I have to do.’*

*So, I think encouraging facilitators and decision-makers, and sort of everyone who is involved in running the program, too, to have that flexibility and to recognize that that's great. And that that is so fundamental to our research, to know that like, 'oh, I changed something, and it worked really well.' OK, so that's maybe something we should know and how can that help other folks running the program? I also think being open to what those adaptations can look like."*

Many community members recommended that program implementers and researchers take into consideration the various cultural differences among the YTC nations, including traditional languages. One YTC community member commented:

*"Although we face a lot of the same challenges, we're not all the same... I think the culture part of it, there would be a difference. Language for us, too... and it probably doesn't work across the whole board... On each reserve, like, if you go to [YTC community], they do things different. If you go to [Indigenous community], they do things different. A lot of it, there's similarities, but they have their own differences."*

### **3.3.5 Increased community member awareness and involvement throughout the partnering process**

Increased community member awareness and involvement throughout the partnering process was another common theme among participants. Many interviewees suggested that greater community awareness about the HRP-E program was necessary for successful implementation. Participants also emphasized the importance of involving YTC community members at each stage of the co-creation and collaboration process, as outlined by one CSMH researcher:

*“It includes things like partnering, planning together, training, adaptation, consultation, evaluation and sharing back with the community. And then the other part, my role as a researcher side, is just ensuring it's a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship and making sure we meet all our ethical obligations, so, our institution's ethics process, but also the different types of authorities in YTC and other available guidelines...*

*Maintaining regular communication is important, ensuring different voices in the community are heard. And so, even this research process that you're undertaking is a chance to do that by including Elders and people who work in education and social workers and potentially youth... I think it's important to get feedback at each stage from these different stakeholders. So, when we actually get around to implementing the program, not just asking youth about the feasibility and satisfaction regarding the program, but going back to the Elders and again, the different adults who work with youth.”*

Other participants reiterated the need to ensure that different voices were heard throughout the co-creation and collaboration process. In particular, the need to consult with Indigenous community members from various age groups was underlined by some participants. One YTC community stakeholder recommended regular community consultations in the form of an intergenerational working group to enhance credibility and transparency:

*“That working group that I talked about... I think it's a really good opportunity to work with parents... And grandparents or grandmothers and even like other youth that have, you know, that are role models or mentors. I think it's good to have them. You have that intergenerational voice – voices... As a researcher, you need a team. And that's the team that I'm talking about, which is this working group, but I think that's being transparent...*

*When you have a working group, that working group that involves these lodge- or language- or bundle-keepers. When you have those in there, that sort of ensures the credibility of the work. So, it's really, really important. That has to be there."*

Consultations with Elders and other cultural advisors to help guide HRP-E training and program content was a key recommendation made by several participants. One YTC staff member proposed engaging in consultations with Elders to incorporate traditional teachings and languages into the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth:

*"I would probably go to Elders and kind of inquire like, using some of their language... for the titles of the classes or for each section... I would probably kind of start with that... but that would be hard for you guys to put in your manual because it is so universal. But I might have something in there in bullet forms, you know, identify the 'languaging' of this community and identify any teachings, traditional teachings, on this topic."*

Moreover, interviewees suggested that Elders should be invited to actively partake in the HRP-E program adaptation and delivery in the communities. One member of a YTC nation described how the presence of Elders may also help to increase Indigenous youth engagement:

*"I would think something important we should definitely incorporate is, well include sorry, would be probably Elders... Elders that know the community quite well, and I think if they're just present, I'm pretty sure the youth would respect that greatly and yeah, I don't know, maybe they would participate from their heart."*

Regular consultations with YTC community members who work directly with the youth was also highly recommended. One YTC staff member endorsed gathering feedback from

frontline community workers to ensure that program adaptations are locally relevant, as well as to enhance co-creation and collaboration throughout the partnering process:

*“I think maybe consulting with the actual program managers and the schoolteachers and you know, all the people who work with the youth already... And then just trying to get any feedback from them on what they would like to see or what they might see fit or think that would be beneficial... Because they're the ones that are working with the youth day by day, right?”*

Another member from a YTC nation elaborated that it is not sufficient to merely gather feedback from frontline community members but rather, it is critical that researchers establish trusting, sustainable relationships as part of the partnering process:

*“I think the best way to do that is to build relationships with the people who are already doing work in the community... We have directors, you know. We have coordinators. We do have a lot of like frontline staff that do a lot of ground work with the community in the school, you know, the mental health wellness center, the daycare, the Head Start, like there's just a lot of people... And I think building relationships and starting to have these conversations about that is going to be an energy that inspires us to continue forward and doing the work.”*

A few participants advised research partners to increase school involvement to ensure successful program implementation. Referring to the schools as community hubs, one YTC staff member suggested that school involvement in the partnering process can help to increase community buy-in and awareness of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth:

*“In each community that we have worked with, the common thread is the schools are always the hubs... It's amazing the work they do with their communities. And the true genuine compassion they have for the youth as well. Because coming in as if, if you would, an outsider... if the school is going to take the time to invite you in with their students...those students, in an unwritten way, are saying, ‘well, if they're letting you in here, you must have something good to say.’ Nobody knows those kids better than those educators. Because, as with any child, children spend probably more waking hours with their teachers than they do with their parents. And so, those women know what's shaking in those kids’ lives, even if the children aren't voicing it to them – if they're qualified leaders, they know what's going on.”*

Some interviewees recommended incorporating youth voice and leadership opportunities into the HRP-E program adaptation and delivery, as illustrated by one CSMH researcher:

*“I think exploring opportunities for youth voice and leadership. So, there was an idea early on about how to kind of have a mentor type of role for college students who are from the community and are getting further education in a helping profession. And we're still trying to figure out how that works, but that's a really exciting opportunity as well in terms of getting the right voices to the table.”*

### **3.3.6 Commitment to a flexible and iterative partnering process with Indigenous communities**

Commitment to a flexible and iterative partnering process was highly recommended among participants. More specifically, interviewees highlighted the importance of partners remaining open and adaptable throughout the research process. One CSMH researcher stated:

*“It's important to commit to an iterative process. So, we're going to pilot the program and learn and make some changes and then we're going to do it again and then we're going to do it again. So, sometimes I see research plans or project plans where someone's saying ‘OK, we're going to pilot this and then we'll make all the changes and then it will be done.’ But recognizing, again, that need for patience and that kind of iteration... Hugely important to be flexible, both with our primary partner who is Child and Family Services, but also the community. Situations change, priorities change. Suddenly, we realize that somebody who should have been part of the circle or conversation had been overlooked. And so, there's that backing up and then moving forward. Again, it's not a linear process... It's OK to come in with an agenda or objectives that maybe are coming from your funder. But that's just the starting point... It's going to take longer than you think... even outside of the pandemic, there's always forward and backward and different things happen, and people change positions or leadership changes in the community.”*

One YTC staff member reiterated that research partners must be open and flexible, as well as patient and respectful, when collaborating with Indigenous populations:

*“Patience...to have patience and to respect their protocols right off the hop for sure. And to be willing to change on the dime... not to be so dependent on structure... Sometimes even just the little chaos and setbacks are all just thought to be part of the teachings... Open and flexible... and really patient – but kind of not to give up too. Like, for future people, like if they connect with them and they don't hear back, you know, give them some time and space, but just kind of tap back in.”*

In addition, interviewees emphasized the need for researchers and program implementers to be consistent and reliable when working with Indigenous peoples. One YTC community member commented:

*“I’ll tell you right now, in the community here, you got to be consistent. You got to be consistent. The kids need pattern. They’re adjusted to patterns and any time there’s a break, it disrupts them for some reason. So, I think stability. You know, it’s got to be consistent... A lot of these kids look forward to... if you tell them something, they’re going to believe it’s going to happen tomorrow at 7:00... because otherwise you’ll lose their trust right there.”*

### **3.3.7 Researchers should be fit to work with Indigenous populations**

Many participants suggested that it takes a certain type of person to conduct research with Indigenous communities. It was considered imperative that researchers be a good fit to co-create and collaborate with Indigenous peoples in an effective and ethical way, as stated by one CSMH researcher:

*“Right now, in Canada, because there’s been a growing understanding about colonization and the need to decolonize research, there’s a lot of researchers who are newly becoming interested in this or, and there’s a lot of funding for it. And I think I would encourage researchers to really think about whether this is a good fit for them, because you may be a really good researcher and you may really care about social justice and righting historical wrongs, but you might still not be the right type of researcher to do this work. So, that being able to be flexible and co-create, those are such important pieces that not all researchers should embark on this work... it’s not that*

*researchers are like trying to get easy money and they don't care. They do care and they think, 'oh, gosh, that's terrible. I want to make a difference.' But we don't have good mentoring or development for them to get into that work."*

Other interviewees underlined that researchers who engage in collaborative work with Indigenous communities must do so for the right reasons. One YTC staff member identified the seven sacred teachings as key characteristics for researchers to practice in their work with Indigenous peoples, as well as their personal lives:

*"There's the seven grandfather teachings...I would say to researchers that you need to know those at a basic level. And you need to be able to show how you live those, both in your research but as a person, because that's what they look for and they'll see through you. So, if you're doing it for the wrong reasons, it'll come out...And that's the thing about what people don't understand about doing research on the nations is that if you break some kind of law...there are consequences of those kinds of things. So, it's more of a 'who you are in the world and what you do and what you say and what you bring to the table.' And if you're a phony and if you're doing research because you're getting a big grant, that'll show, and it'll just come back and not in a good way."*

Additional researcher characteristics were identified as essential for successfully engaging in co-creation and collaboration processes with Indigenous populations, including authenticity, humility, and a sense of humour. One YTC staff member described how these individual characteristics were pivotal in building a trusting, sustainable research partnership between the CSMH and YTC communities:

*“I think humility – if that’s the right thing. I would say that to other researchers as well, is that when you sit in that circle, I don't care if you have a degree, master's degree or a PhD, you're the same as that person next to you, across from you. And you need to be humble about that. And so, no one cares about your big letters after your name. You just need to be thankful that they let you come in and that when we're in that circle, that everybody is the same, treated the same, same respect, and given the same amount of time to talk... So, I've liked how I've noticed it from you guys, and I would just say that that's been I think to your advantage. I think it's worked. I think it's helped get us as far as we have so fast. I think they see the humility. I think they see that you're respectful of your place in all of this.”*

#### **4 Discussion and Conclusions**

Indigenous peoples in Canada continue to endure the devastating impacts of historical and ongoing trauma (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Brave Heart et al., 2011). In response, communities have been vigorously working to leverage cultural strengths and relationships to improve outcomes for Indigenous youth. Yet, this young population remains at risk for experiencing disproportionately high rates of violence, substance misuse, and leaving school early (FNIGC, 2012; Ning & Wilson, 2012; Health Canada, 2014). Strategies that aim to address these concerns for Indigenous youth must include historical, social, and cultural considerations (CIHR, 2010; Crooks et al., 2010). The HRP-E program was designed to help vulnerable youth develop healthy relationships skills and reduce risk behaviours (CSMH, 2019); however, it has not yet been tailored for Indigenous youth. This study used a CBPR approach to explore the feasibility and fit of the HRP-E program for youth in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are YTC staff and community members' perceptions of the fit and feasibility of the HRP-E training and program content, as well as potential successes, challenges, and recommendations for further implementation of healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth?
2. What are YTC staff, researchers, and community members' experiences with the co-creation and collaboration process, including potential successes, challenges, and recommendations for further partnering opportunities?

#### **4.1 Key Findings**

Overall, the HRP-E program was perceived to be promising for Indigenous youth living in remote communities. Participants found the training and program content to be valuable for all youth, which aligns with previous evaluations of the HRP-E program (Crooks et al., 2018). In particular, the foundational skills taught as part of the program were considered universal and applicable to various youth relationships, including those with peers, romantic partners, and families. This finding was particularly important for Indigenous youth, as relationality was identified as a main pillar for this vulnerable population. Moreover, the adaptability of the HRP-E program content was considered an asset for successful implementation for, and by, Indigenous communities. It was recognized that the HRP-E program could be adapted to incorporate key historical, social, and cultural considerations to best address the unique needs of each YTC community.

The HRP-E program was perceived as a way to help youth overcome historical and ongoing trauma endured by the Indigenous population in Canada. Many participants emphasized the need to address the nation's longstanding history of colonialism and colonization as a first

step to program implementation. It has been widely acknowledged that such traumatic experiences have had lasting impacts for generations of Indigenous families (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Brave Heart, 2003; Evans-Campbell et al., 2012), which was further confirmed by participating YTC community members. Several interviewees revealed high rates of mental health concerns, substance misuse, and suicide among community members. The urgent need for youth healthy relationships programming was highlighted by YTC staff and community members alike. Participants did not wish to engage in a lengthy process of developing an evidence-based intervention (Balas & Boren, 2000; Rotheram-Borus et al., 2012). Rather, the adaptation of the HRP-E program was considered timely and fitting for YTC communities, referred by one interviewee as ‘operation now.’ Similar to previous research (Donovan et al., 2015), some participants expressed a sense of hope and optimism about the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth during this time of great need.

All YTC participants demonstrated community readiness and an unwavering commitment to enhancing youth well-being. One participant described how a shared vision of community healing, growth, and love for children and youth served as an inspiration to partake in this work. Both YTC staff and community members were willingly and actively engaged in the co-creation and collaboration process throughout the study duration. These findings align with those from earlier research conducted in Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. Previous studies showed that youth programming was more effective when led by the community and aligned with locally relevant cultural context, as participants were better able to relate to the curriculum, which, in turn, increased program engagement (Baydala et al., 2012; Ruttan et al., 2017).

The adaptation process through co-creation and collaboration has been correlated with a heightened sense of cultural identity and pride, community ownership, program effectiveness,

and commitment to sustaining the program (Baydala et al., 2012; Dickerson et al., 2020). These findings are congruent with this study, as most interviewees endorsed the mutual benefits and ongoing learning obtained through the established partnership between the CSMH and YTC. In particular, YTC participants believed the partnership could bring a sense of ownership of data and enhanced research capacity among community members which could ultimately empower the nation to be self-governing and self-sufficient. Results from this study are therefore consistent with previous research conducted in Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, where participants perceived the collaborative adaptation process to be beneficial for not only Indigenous youth participants, but also for the community as a whole (Baydala et al., 2012; Ruttan et al., 2017).

Staff, researchers, and community members alike identified the sustained partnership between the CSMH and YTC as a key facilitator for project success. Many interviewees discussed the role of the YTC as a ‘community connector’ between Western University’s CSMH and members of the nations. This connection helped CSMH researchers to build trust and rapport with YTC community members. Some interviewees strongly advised researchers to establish partnerships with reputable community organizations to conduct ethical research with Indigenous populations. Corresponding studies have shown that forming research partnerships between academic institutions and community organizations can be an effective approach to adapting and implementing evidence-based programs for Indigenous youth while promoting positive outcomes at the individual and community levels (Baydala et al., 2012; Ruttan et al., 2017).

Indigenous communities have endured a longstanding history of trauma and adverse experiences (Mohatt et al., 2014; Nutton & Fast, 2015; TRC, 2015), the effects of which continue to impact those who have experienced it firsthand, as well as their kin (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1995, 1998; Jacobs, 2006; Bombay et al., 2014). The impacts of historical and ongoing

trauma were reiterated throughout the interviews. YTC staff and community members described how the negative lineages of colonialism and capitalism has interfered with their kinship system. Other participants discussed the resulting loss of traditional teachings, language, and other cultural practices among nation members. Each of these traumatic experiences was identified as a major challenge to overall project success.

Many participants described how the detrimental effects of historical trauma and adverse past experiences can impact the co-creation and collaboration process with Indigenous community members. Interviewees recognized a communal fear of exploitation related to research as a key barrier to the partnering process and, ultimately, the implementation of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth. These findings are similar to those from previous studies in which negative past experiences with healthcare providers was shown to reduce program effectiveness for Indigenous peoples (Flores et al., 2005; Guerrero et al., 2010). Such challenges were not limited to past experiences but rather, the current COVID-19 pandemic was also a significant barrier to project success.

The unprecedented pandemic was a common theme identified throughout the study duration. This emerging theme was unsurprising, as the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated many Indigenous communities to date (Wendt et al., 2021). Recent research has shown that Indigenous peoples are at an increased risk for health and systemic disparities amid pandemics (Dávalos et al., 2020). Congruently, the harmful impacts of the pandemic within the context of historical and ongoing trauma was mentioned by several interviewees. The pandemic was said to have exacerbated recurrent crises often endured by Indigenous communities, such as mental health problems, substance misuse, and suicide (Kirmayer, 1994; Hunter & Harvey, 2002; Leenars, 2006; Barker et al., 2017; Crooks & Dunlop, 2017). YTC participants described how

their rapid response to community crises, such as food shortages and sudden deaths, inevitably took precedence over project goals. Furthermore, the prolonged social gathering and travel restrictions posed various challenges, including the transition to using virtual software to deliver HRP-E training and program content, honour cultural protocols and processes, and build trust and rapport with Indigenous community members.

Competing interests and commitments among YTC participants was also identified as a key barrier to project success throughout the interviews. This finding, however, was not unique to the present study, nor to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants often reminded CSMH and YTC partners that maintaining a shared vision of project goals (Waechter et al., 2009) and flexibility (Fixsen et al., 2005) is crucial when working with Indigenous populations. These earlier studies emphasized the need for researchers to recognize the unique cultural, legal, and political structures pertaining to Indigenous communities when engaging in research partnerships (Waechter et al., 2009) and/or applying best practices through evidence-based programming (Fixsen et al., 2005). Similarly, interviewees underlined the need for CSMH and YTC partners to be aware of different community dynamics and politics across the nations. Some participants identified these community differences as potential barriers to the co-creation and collaboration process, as well as to the successful implementation of the HRP-E for Indigenous youth.

Another potential challenge to implementing the HRP-E program in YTC communities was limited engagement among Indigenous youth. YTC staff and community members described how Indigenous youth tend to experience low self-esteem and shyness, which may deter them from actively engaging in HRP-E programming. This finding coincides with earlier research showing that Indigenous youth are at a disproportionately high risk for poor mental health and self-esteem, often leading to unhealthy coping strategies such as social inclusion and substance

misuse (King et al., 2009; Dell & Hopkins, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2015; Robbins et al., 2017). Not only did interviewees acknowledge the prevalence of these risk factors among Indigenous youth in the nations, but they also expressed a strong desire to address these concerns. Several recommendations were made to help CSMH and YTC partners overcome such obstacles.

All participants endorsed the cultural adaptation of the HRP-E program to ensure that locally relevant curriculum is relatable and, in turn, more engaging for Indigenous youth. Earlier research partnerships between the University of Alberta and Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation highlighted these findings and elaborated that youth programming is more effective when led by communities and reflective of locally cultural context (Baydala et al., 2012; Ruttan et al., 2017). Moreover, the cultural adaptation of programming can positively impact Indigenous youth and their communities (Baydala et al., 2014), especially in circumstances such as limited engagement and unique risk or protective factors among the target group (Pina et al., 2019). Results from these studies were confirmed throughout the interviews. Participants also recommended that the HRP-E program must be fun and relevant to increase engagement among Indigenous youth in YTC communities.

Interviewees provided several recommendations for integrating locally cultural context into the HRP-E training and program content. Almost all participants emphasized the need to incorporate traditional teachings and language into the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth. Many interviewees stressed the importance of delivering adapted content in an effective and culturally appropriate manner. Such recommendations are reflected in previous work conducted by the Fourth R team as part of the Uniting Our Nations program. The Fourth R team has offered several training options (e.g., in-person and online) and translations to minimize barriers to implementation for program facilitators (Crooks et al., 2018). The Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations

program has been implemented and evaluated in various settings with Indigenous youth, including cultural leadership camps (Crooks & Dunlop, 2017). Some participants also suggested that the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth be implemented as part of a summer camp to increase engagement. However, similar to previous findings on the Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations program (Crooks & Dunlop, 2017), the integration of cultural context was deemed most critical to successful implementation of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth.

Throughout the interviews, participants made clear that several considerations must be made prior to the implementation of the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth. One recommendation commonly made by participants was to speak to the underlying causes of presenting problems for Indigenous youth. More specifically, interviewees stressed the importance of addressing historical and ongoing trauma endured by Indigenous peoples as part of the HRP-E program in order to enhance youths' understanding of unhealthy coping mechanisms and promote healthier strategies. This finding suggests that deep-level adaptations in which cultural teachings and practices are incorporated into the program curriculum (Gameon & Skewes, 2020; Resnicow et al., 2000) are necessary to adequately address these systemic issues.

Results from this study support the earlier work of Crooks and colleagues (2010), which suggested that initiatives aiming to address these concerns for Indigenous youth must first consider historical, social, and cultural contexts. Many participants endorsed the integration of both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing into the HRP-E training and program content. The process of incorporating Indigenous knowledge was referred to as 'Indigenizing' the HRP-E content through the inclusion of traditional teachings and cultural practices. Interviewees also recommended integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into the research partnership by

honouring cultural protocols and processes. These recommendations aligned with those put forth by Waechter and colleagues (2009), which emphasized the need to incorporate Indigenous worldviews and culture throughout the study when conducting research with this population. It was however noted that Indigenous knowledge and worldviews are not universal and thus, the HRP-E program must be tailored to meet the unique needs of each YTC community.

The tailoring of HRP-E training and program content to meet local community needs was a common theme among interviewees, many of whom underlined the various cultural differences across YTC nations. It was recommended that the CSMH and YTC partners enhance community awareness and involvement throughout the research process to best tailor the HRP-E content for each nation's members. These findings correspond with previous evaluations of the Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations program, of which the inclusion of Indigenous community members and locally relevant teachings remains a core component (Crooks et al., 2018). In the present study, participants specified that Indigenous youth, frontline workers, Elders, and other cultural advisors should be actively involved in community consultations, as well as HRP-E program adaptation and delivery.

Several interviewees proposed further community consultations with diverse members of YTC nations to ensure that project partners acquire the local cultural knowledge as part of the adapted HRP-E program for Indigenous youth. One recent study found that Indigenous peoples share cultural knowledge verbally, often through storytelling or teachings (Jernigan et al., 2020). Community consultations may thus facilitate the acquisition of locally cultural knowledge for project partners. In addition, participants suggested that further consultations could help CSMH and YTC partners to become more aware and knowledgeable of community dynamics and politics in the nations. These findings also reflect Waechter and colleagues' (2009)

recommendations, particularly that researchers working with Indigenous populations must become familiar with community bylaws, policies, and procedures. Using a CBPR approach was indeed best suited to facilitate the sharing of cultural knowledge and familiarization of community dynamics and politics in the context of co-creation and collaboration.

Most participants strongly advised CSMH and YTC partners to build trusting, sustainable relationships with nation members. Participants emphasized the importance of taking adequate time, involving various age groups, and ensuring that different voices are heard throughout the co-creation and collaboration process. These recommendations are supported by the CBPR literature, as such an approach helps to build equal and respectful research partnerships that uphold the sovereignty of Indigenous communities while promoting positive outcomes for this population (Baydala et al., 2012; Crooks et al., 2013; Ruttan et al., 2017; Jernigan et al., 2020). Establishing mutually beneficial partnerships is particularly important when conducting research with Indigenous peoples, which requires the use of culturally appropriate methods that honour Indigenous values and beliefs (Stewart, 2009). Thus, interviewees proposed that researchers must commit to a flexible and iterative partnering process by remaining open, patient, humble, and persistent in their work.

Finally, researcher characteristics were also considered a determining factor of project success. Participants suggested that researchers must practice the seven sacred teachings, both professionally and personally. This finding also coincides with the recommendations put forth by Waechter and colleagues (2009), stating that researchers must align their own ethical principles with those of Indigenous philosophies. Furthermore, researchers should utilize approaches that are verbal in nature and allow for opportunities to share findings in a way that engages Indigenous community members in ongoing discussion, relationship-building, and access to

knowledge, training, and education (Waechter et al., 2009). This study used a CBPR approach to build trusting, sustainable relationships with YTC participants through regular community consultations and partner meetings, HRP-E training sessions, and in-depth interviews. Throughout the study, researchers made every effort to adhere to ethical guidelines for conducting research with Indigenous peoples (Schnarch, 2004; CIHR, 2010).

#### **4.2 Ethical Considerations**

This feasibility study was conducted within the context of a collaborative partnership with the YTC. This partnership was initiated by the YTC to propel a dedicated interest in promoting healthy relationships and preventing violence among their nations' youth. Over the past year, regular partner meetings between the YTC and CSMH project teams have occurred with the intent to co-create appropriate procedures for this research. Several consultations were also held with YTC community stakeholders to further inform collaborative goals and protocols for this study.

All study procedures were guided by a strong commitment to ethical principles and strategies for conducting research with Indigenous peoples (CIHR, 2010; Schnarch, 2004). In recognition that research has not historically served Indigenous populations well, this study was designed to adhere to Ownership, Control, Assess and Possession (OCAP) principles (Schnarch, 2004), as well as Chapter 9 on Research Involving First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples of Canada in the Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (CIHR, 2010). As such, the CSMH project team made several efforts to ensure that this study was mutually beneficial to all those involved through sustained community engagement and building research capacity among the YTC and its members, while gaining a relevant perspective

of the implementation considerations for the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth. Furthermore, this research is conceptualized as the first step in an ongoing partnership.

Several efforts were made to engage YTC staff and community members throughout each stage of the study process. The CSMH project team consulted with the YTC community in several ways, including (but not limited to) the review and approval from formal leadership to conduct research in the community, joint planning with various YTC staff and community members, commitment to a research partnership, and continued dialogue with cultural advisors. Throughout this project, the CSMH team collaborated with YTC through information sharing, community empowerment, and shared leadership. The student investigator and at least one other team member plan to visit the YTC communities in person as soon as there are fewer restrictions on travel, in recognition of the importance of place-based and face-to-face relationship building.

This study was positioned as one of co-creation, where all those involved adopted both teacher and learner roles. Thus, the CSMH team did not deliver a standard two-day training session on the HRP-E program. Rather, a two-day sharing was co-designed to include the CSMH team providing information and training about the program, and the YTC team providing feedback on how the program must be enhanced or adapted for their particular context. Initially, the second training day was intended for youth facilitators; however, it became clear that there was a general lack of readiness and thus, the project team pivoted accordingly and the YTC team took the lead. Training and program content were adapted and tailored to YTC communities to ensure that suggestions for further training and program implementation remains locally relevant. The study findings can be used to inform and guide the process of contextualizing evidence-based practice to develop a more culturally appropriate and relevant version of the HRP-E

program to better meet the needs of YTC youth and, ultimately, enhance healthy relationships and prevent violence among Indigenous youth living in remote communities in Canada.

### **4.3 Limitations**

While this study has underlined many important aspects of enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration, there are several limitations to be considered. This study was based on a research partnership with YTC and its member nations; and therefore, results may not be generalizable to other Indigenous communities. A non-probability (purposive, convenience) sampling technique was used to recruit YTC staff and community members who participated in the HRP-E training and community consultations. In addition, CSMH researchers who were considered key informants in the co-creation and collaboration process were invited to participate in the study. Participants consisted of YTC staff (administrators, social workers), CSMH researchers, and community members (educators, helpers, Elder, youth); yet, only 11 participants consented to an individual interview, two of which participated in both phases of interviews (i.e., two separate interviews). These results may therefore not be representative of all YTC staff and community member voices, as those individuals who consented to interviews likely differ from those who did not. However, several efforts were made to include a diverse group of participants in this study.

All data collection and analyses were conducted by one researcher (student investigator), which may have increased the likelihood of bias in the interpretation of the results. The student investigator made every effort to enhance methodological rigor throughout the study, including member checking, reflective journaling, and regular consultations with project partners and YTC participants (staff, community members). Member checking was used by providing a summary

of key findings from each interview and subsequently emailing a copy of individual transcriptions to interviewees for their review. Four participants responded and confirmed the accuracy of the data. Greater participation in member checking procedures may have strengthened the study findings; however, all participants were engaged in regular community consultations and partner meetings throughout the co-creation and collaboration process.

It is also important to note that this study took place amidst an unprecedented pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic presented several delays throughout the research process. Given the heavy reliance on community participation, ongoing pandemic-related restrictions remained a significant barrier to co-creation and collaboration with YTC and its nations. Social distancing and travel restrictions required the CSMH and YTC partners to transition all research activities to be conducted via telephone or video conferencing, including the HRP-E training, community consultations, partner meetings, and interviews. This was particularly challenging considering the importance of establishing relationships when conducting research with Indigenous peoples. In addition, YTC participants have continued to endure high levels of crises such as food shortages and increased suicide rates in their communities. In an ongoing effort to build trusting, sustainable relationships with YTC participants during these difficult times, further consultations and meetings were held to maintain community readiness and commitment to enhancing healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth.

#### **4.4 Implications for Future Research and Conclusions**

The present study makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, it adds to the limited research on culturally adapted healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth living in remote communities. These findings can also be used to guide and inform the co-

creation and collaboration process in research partnerships with Indigenous communities. It has been recognized that co-creation and collaboration may improve the ultimate efficiency and sustainability of programs that are locally adapted based on cultural knowledge and practices. Incorporating community-based knowledge into culturally adapted programming can also help Indigenous communities to address the historical and ongoing trauma endured by this underserved population (Dickerson et al., 2020). The integration of Western scientific methods with Indigenous ways of knowing is critical to address health and systemic disparities for Indigenous youth, despite potential challenges related to implementing deep-level cultural adaptations to existing programming (Baldwin et al., 2009; Kaholokula et al. 2017). However, most approaches used to guide the development of youth prevention programs to date are based on Westernized models (Walsh 2014; Kagawa-Singer et al. 2015).

This study proposes that the use of a CBPR approach that incorporates both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing is best suited for enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration. University-based researchers must recognize that the unique understandings and knowledge of participants, including (but not limited to) Indigenous community members, can make significant contributions to the field of study. It is thus possible to advance future research while also rebalancing power between Western academics and Indigenous communities through the deliberate integration of cultural knowledge and practices throughout the process (Denzin et al., 2008). Using a CBPR approach advocates for shared power among university-based researchers and Indigenous community members and endorses different ways of knowing to ultimately create change (Holkup et al., 2004; Baum et al., 2006).

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that it is indeed beneficial to use a CBPR approach to build equal, respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities to engage in cultural adaptations of youth healthy relationships programming through co-creation and collaboration. The results from this study provide an in-depth understanding of YTC staff, researchers', and community members' experiences with, and perceptions of, the HRP-E program for Indigenous youth as well as the partnering process. It is also important to note that this thesis project was conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and thus, findings contribute to the emerging literature on establishing research partnerships with Indigenous communities in addition to several implementation considerations for enhancing youth programming during such unprecedented times.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Participant Email Recruitment Script

**Subject:** Invitation to Participate in a Study of the HRP-Enhanced Program for Indigenous Youth

As a recent participant involved in the Healthy Relationships Plus- Enhanced (HRP-E) training, you are being invited to **participate in a study on the HRP-E for Indigenous youth in [community name or region]** conducted by researchers at Western University. The purpose of this study is to learn more about attendees' experiences participating in the HRP-E training and exploring potential barriers and facilitators, and your recommendations for implementing the program for Indigenous youth. As part of this study, you may choose to *[If YTC staff:]* agree to participate in an individual interview/ *[If community member:]* agree to participate in an individual interview.

**Participation in this study is voluntary** and in no way will impact your involvement in the project, the program, or your professional role. The link below includes the letter of information and consent form that outlines the purpose of the research, procedures, and your rights as a participant. Please review the letter and if you wish to participate, complete the consent form. Completed consent forms will be received by research staff at Western University, and the [community name/organization] will not be informed about your participation in this study.

**Link to Letter of Information and Consent Form:**

[https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_2o6x8fw3n1cuw61](https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2o6x8fw3n1cuw61)

*If you have any further questions about this study, please contact **Claire Crooks, Principal Investigator** or **Kelsey Huson, Research Assistant**.*

The attached Letter of Information is for you to keep for your reference.

Thanks,

**Claire Crooks, Ph.D., C.Psych.**

## Appendix B

### Participant Telephone Recruitment Script

#### Procedures

1. Before phoning the participant, prepare by opening link to the Letter of Information and Verbal Consent form: [https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_dcHJA9smH6IR3w1](https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dcHJA9smH6IR3w1)
2. Phone participant using the script below.
3. Document consent on the **online verbal consent form** that is provided in the link above following the letter of information.

#### Telephone Script

*Hello, may I please speak with [insert the name of the participant].*

*\*If participant is not available, ask if there is a better time to call. Do not leave a message as it may be a confidential matter you are calling about that may not be apparent to you\**

*\*If they are home, continue with the conversation\**

*Hi, [insert the name the participant] this is [insert your name here] calling from [insert name of your organization]. As a recent participant in the Healthy Relationships Plus- Enhanced (HRP-E) training, you are being invited to participate in a study conducted by Western University on the HRP-E for Indigenous youth in [community name or region]. The purpose of this study is to learn more about attendees' experiences participating in the HRP-E training and exploring potential barriers and facilitators, and your recommendations for implementing the program for Indigenous youth. As part of this study, you may choose to [If YTC staff:] agree to participate in an individual interview/ [If community member:] agree to participate in an individual interview.*

*I am now going to read you the letter of information over the phone that outlines the purpose of this study, the research procedures, and your rights as a participant. Please note that **participating in the study is voluntary** and in no way will impact your involvement in the project or the program, or your professional role. Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have or clarify any of the information I am reading to you.*

*\*Clearly read the letter of information provided on the link above\**

*Do you have any questions?*

*\*Answer any questions they may have\**

*If you would like to participate, I can write down your agreement to participate on your behalf.  
[community name/organization] will not be informed of your participation in this study.*

*\*Continue to online Verbal Consent Form on the link above, review questions with participant, and then document their responses on their behalf.*

*If you have any further questions about this study, please contact **Claire Crooks, Principal Investigator** or **Kelsey Huson, Research Assistant**.*

## Appendix C

### Participant Letter of Information and Consent Form

**Project Title:** Enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration

**Principal Investigator:**

Claire Crooks, PhD, Director of Centre for School Mental Health

Faculty of Education, Western University

**Research Assistant:**

Kelsey Huson, MSc, Research Assistant for Centre for School Mental Health

Faculty of Education, Western University

### Study Information

You are being invited to participate in this study as a recent participant in the Healthy Relationships Plus- Enhanced (HRP-E) Program training. The purpose of this study is to learn more about trainees' experiences participating in the HRP-E training and explore potential barriers, facilitators, and recommendations for implementing the program for Indigenous youth. This study will also explore participants' experiences with the co-creation and collaboration process, including successes, challenges, and recommendations for further partnering opportunities.

### Study Procedures

You may choose to participate in any of the following activities:

1. You will be invited to participate in an individual **interview** to further share your experiences with the training and the co-creation and collaboration process. Questions will also explore potential barriers, facilitators, and your recommendations for implementing the program for Indigenous youth and further partnering opportunities. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. It is mandatory for the interview to be audio-recorded to accurately capture participants' responses. You will be instructed to keep your video off throughout the duration of the Zoom meeting and the video file will be destroyed immediately following the interview. The information provided in the interview will be reported as summarized group data and will not be linked to your

identifiable information. Direct quotes may be used in the reported findings but will not be linked to your identifiable information.

**Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

**Possible Benefits**

There are no personal benefits for participating in this study. The information you provide will help us develop and improve youth programs for Indigenous youth.

**Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate with no effect on your involvement in the project or your role within the organization. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you wish to withdraw your responses for research purposes, you may request to do so at any time by contacting the Western research staff.

**Confidentiality**

All data collected will remain confidential and is only accessible to authorized staff at the Centre for School Mental Health at Western University. Your individual data will not be linked to your name or shared with anyone outside of the research team. The information is reported only as group findings. Your data will be stored in locked files in a locked office at Centre for School Mental Health at Western University separate from your consent form. Electronic data will be stored on a secured server at Western University.

Your informed consent and contact information will be collected through a secure online survey platform called Qualtrics. Your email address and phone number are collected in order to contact you about the interview, send a link to the Zoom meeting, and send you an electronic gift card. Your personal information will be kept separate from and will not be linked to your data. Qualtrics uses encryption technology and restricted access authorizations to protect all data collected. In addition, Western's Qualtrics server is in Ireland, where privacy standards are maintained under the European Union safe harbour framework. The data will then be exported from Qualtrics and securely stored on Western University's server.

Interviews will be facilitated through the use of a third-party online video conferencing software called Zoom. Since this is a third-party software, your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, researchers will put in place several measures to help protect your confidentiality by enabling features in Zoom that allow only permitted participants. Zoom automatically records both audio and video files. Immediately following the interview, the video files will be destroyed. Following transcription, the audio files will be destroyed. The Trint software used to transcribe the interview is encrypted and located in a secure server based in the United States.

All data collection from this study will be destroyed after seven years. Representatives of the University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

**Compensation**

You will be compensated \$30 for participating in the interview.

**Consent**

To indicate your consent, please fill out the consent form.

**Contacts for Further Information**

If you have any questions about your participation in this research, please contact Dr. Claire Crooks, Principal Investigator or Kelsey Huson, Research Assistant.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

**Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.**

**Click the arrow below to go to the consent form**

## Participant Consent Form

**Project Title:** Enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration

**Principal Investigator:** Claire Crooks, PhD, Director of Centre for School Mental Health

Faculty of Education, Western University

**Research Assistant:**

Kelsey Huson, MSc, Research Assistant for Centre for School Mental Health

Faculty of Education, Western University

**I have read the Letter of Information and understand what I have read. The study has been explained to me and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.**

Please check which activities you agree to participate in:

I agree to participate in an individual interview. You may contact me at the email address or telephone number below with details about the interview.

I consent to direct quotes being extracted from the interview for the reporting and analysis of data. To ensure your confidentiality and anonymity, direct quotes will not be linked to identifiable information.

By checking this box and typing my name below, I am electronically signing this consent form.

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**If you consented to participate in the interview, please provide your email address below and telephone number below. This information will be used to contact you about the interview, send a link to the Zoom meeting, and send you an electronic gift card.**

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please click the arrow to the right below to submit**

## Appendix D

### Participant Letter of Information and Verbal Consent Form

**Project Title:** Enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration

**Principal Investigator:**

Claire Crooks, PhD, Director of Centre for School Mental Health

Faculty of Education, Western University

**Research Assistant:**

Kelsey Huson, MSc, Research Assistant for Centre for School Mental Health

Faculty of Education, Western University

### Study Information

You are being invited to participate in this study as a recent participant in the Healthy Relationships Plus- Enhanced (HRP-E) Program training. The purpose of this study is to learn more about trainees' experiences participating in the HRP-E training and explore potential barriers, facilitators, and recommendations for implementing the program for Indigenous youth. This study will also explore participants' experiences with the co-creation and collaboration process, including successes, challenges, and recommendations for further partnering opportunities.

### Study Procedures

You may choose to participate in any of the following activities:

1. You will be invited to participate in an individual **interview** to further share your experiences with the training and the co-creation and collaboration process. Questions will also explore potential barriers, facilitators, and your recommendations for implementing the program for Indigenous youth and further partnering opportunities. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. It is mandatory for the interview to be audio-recorded to accurately capture participants' responses. You will be instructed to keep your video off throughout the duration of the Zoom meeting and the video file will be destroyed immediately following the interview. The information provided in the interview will be reported as summarized group data and will not be linked to your identifiable information. Direct quotes may be used in the reported findings but will not be linked to your identifiable information.

**Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

**Possible Benefits**

There are no personal benefits for participating in this study. The information you provide will help us develop and improve youth programs for Indigenous youth.

**Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate with no effect on your involvement in the project or your role within the organization. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you wish to withdraw your responses for research purposes, you may request to do so at any time by contacting the Western research staff.

**Confidentiality**

All data collected will remain confidential and is only accessible to authorized staff at the Centre for School Mental Health at Western University. Your individual data will not be linked to your name or shared with anyone outside of the research team. The information is reported only as group findings. Your data will be stored in locked files in a locked office at Centre for School Mental Health at Western University separate from your consent form. Electronic data will be stored on a secured server at Western University.

Your informed consent and contact information will be collected through a secure online survey platform called Qualtrics. Your email address and phone number are collected in order to contact you about the interview, send a link to the Zoom meeting, and send you an electronic gift card. Your personal information will be kept separate from and will not be linked to your data. Qualtrics uses encryption technology and restricted access authorizations to protect all data collected. In addition, Western's Qualtrics server is in Ireland, where privacy standards are maintained under the European Union safe harbour framework. The data will then be exported from Qualtrics and securely stored on Western University's server.

Interviews will be facilitated through the use of a third-party online video conferencing software called Zoom. Since this is a third-party software, your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, researchers will put in place several measures to help protect your confidentiality by enabling features in Zoom that allow only permitted participants. Zoom automatically records both audio and video files. Immediately following the interview, the video files will be destroyed. Following transcription, the audio files will be destroyed. The Trint software used to transcribe the interview is encrypted and located in a secure server based in the United States.

All data collection from this study will be destroyed after seven years. Representatives of the University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

**Compensation**

You will be compensated \$30 for participating in the interview.

**Consent**

To indicate your consent, please fill out the consent form.

**Contacts for Further Information**

If you have any questions about your participation in this research, please contact Dr. Claire Crooks, Principal Investigator or Kelsey Huson, Research Assistant.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

**Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.**

**Click the arrow below to go to the consent form**

## Participant Verbal Consent Form

**Project Title:** Enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration

**Principal Investigator:**

Claire Crooks, PhD, Director of Centre for School Mental Health

Faculty of Education, Western University

**Research Assistant:**

Kelsey Huson, MSc, Research Assistant for Centre for School Mental Health

Faculty of Education, Western University

1. Do you confirm that I have read you the Letter of Information, that you understand what I have read, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction?

Yes

No

2. Do you agree to participate in an individual interview?

Yes

No

3. Do you give permission for direct quotes to be extracted from the interview for the reporting and analysis of data? To ensure your confidentiality and anonymity, direct quotes will not be linked to identifiable information.

Yes

No

Participant's name:

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**If you consented to participate in the interview, please provide your email address below and telephone number. This information will be used to contact you about the interview, send a link to the Zoom meeting, and send you an electronic gift card.**

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

By checking this box and typing my name below, I am electronically signing this verbal consent form.

Your name (person recording consent):

---

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please click the arrow to the right below to submit the consent form.**

## Appendix E

### Phase 1: Interview Protocol and Questions for YTC staff & community members

Interviewer introduces self.

[Introductory script]. Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview today. We're interested in collecting your experience and wisdom based on your recent involvement in the HRP-E training. After the interview, we will transcribe it and share it with you to give you the opportunity to revise it if you wish. Everything you say will be kept confidential and identifying information will not be used in any reports. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. **To begin, how would you describe the overall delivery of the HRP-E training?**  
(May follow up with: Are there any specific examples that stands out in your mind that you would like to share?)
2. **How would you describe the HRP-E training materials and content?**  
(May follow up with: Are there any specific examples that stand out in your mind that you would like to share?)
3. **From your perspective, what were the biggest successes of the HRP-E training?**  
(May follow up with: What went well either about the training or the process?)
4. **What challenges were encountered during the HRP-E training?**  
(May follow up with: What was difficult either about the training or the process?)
5. **What recommendations would you have to modify/change the HRP-E training or the process to meet the needs of Indigenous program implementers in your communities?**  
(May follow up with: What recommendations would you have to modify/change the HRP-E training delivery? What recommendations would you have to modify/change the HRP-E training materials and content?)
6. **What recommendations would you have to modify/change the HRP-E program or the process to meet the needs of Indigenous youth in your communities?**  
(May follow up with: What recommendations would you have to modify/change the HRP-E program delivery? What recommendations would you have to modify/change the HRP-E program materials and content?)
7. **What advice would you give to other settings planning to implement the HRP-E for the first time with Indigenous youth in your communities?**
8. **Is there anything you would like to share?**

## Appendix F

### Phase 2: Interview Protocol and Questions for Key Informants

Interviewer introduces self.

[Introductory script]. Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview today. We're interested in collecting your experience and wisdom based on your role as it relates to healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth in order to further inform the co-creation and collaboration process between the Yellowhead Tribal Council (YTC) and the Centre for School Mental Health (CSMH) at Western University. After the interview, we will transcribe it and share it with you to give you the opportunity to revise it if you wish. Everything you say will be kept confidential and identifying information will not be used in any reports. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. **To begin, how would you describe your role as it relates to healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth?**  
(May follow up with: How might you be involved in implementing healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth?)
2. **From your perspective, how might healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth address community needs?**  
(May follow up with: How might we ensure that the programming is locally relevant? Are there any specific examples that stand out in your mind that you would like to share?)
3. **Are there any program features that you believe are necessary for successful implementation of healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth?**  
(May follow up with: Are there any specific features (e.g., Elder involvement, Indigenous language) that are necessary to have an impact and benefit the youth?)
4. **What challenges might be encountered during the implementation of healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth?**  
(May follow up with: What might be difficult about the implementation of healthy relationships programming for Indigenous youth?)
5. **From your perspective, do you believe the implementation of healthy relationships programming can have an impact and benefit Indigenous youth?**

(May follow up with: If so, what might this impact and benefit look like? If not, how might we enhance healthy relationships programming to increase the likelihood of having a greater impact and benefit for Indigenous youth?)

6. **From your perspective, do you believe this research partnership between the YTC and the CSMH can have an impact and benefit the youth in YTC communities?**

(May follow up with: If so, what might this impact and benefit look like? If not, how might we enhance this partnership to increase the likelihood of having a greater impact and benefit for the youth?)

7. **From your perspective, in what ways could we ensure that this project is co-created and collaborative with community members?**

(May follow up with: Throughout the partnering process, how might we ensure that your contributions are taken into consideration? How might you feel invested in this project? Are there specific parts of the project that you feel should be more collaborative?)

8. **What advice would you give to other research settings planning to co-create and collaborate with Indigenous community partners?**

9. **Is there anything you would like to share or speak about?**

## Curriculum Vitae

# HUSON, KELSEY

## SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- 8+ years experience in various fields, including health research and evaluation
- Strong leadership and communication skills developed through working as part of multiple teams in a managerial or coordinator role
- Advanced training and knowledge of program planning, implementation, and evaluation
- Extensive experience conducting focus group and individual interviews
- In-depth knowledge of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods
- Proficient in Microsoft Office programming

## EDUCATION

McGill University, Montreal, QC

**Doctor of Philosophy in Counselling Psychology**

**2021-2025**

Thesis: “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on traditional healing and cultural substance use treatment for Indigenous peoples”

Western University, London, ON

**Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology**

**2019-2021**

Thesis: “Enhancing youth healthy relationships programming in Indigenous communities through co-creation and collaboration: A feasibility study”

University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON

**Master of Science in Public Health and Health Systems**

**2013-2014**

Thesis: “Examining the Hospital Elder Life Program in a Rehabilitation Setting: A Mixed Methods Evaluation”

University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON

**Honours BA with Specialization in Psychology**

**2008-2012**

Minor: Gerontology

Graduated with Cum Laude

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Child and Youth Development Clinic – Western University

**Graduate Student Clinician (Part-time Internship)**

**August 2020-Present**

Responsible for providing high-quality individual and group psychological services to children and youth from three to 18 years of age, as well as their families. Under the supervision of registered psychologists who are experts in their field, services provided may include intervention, consultation, treatment, and assessments.

Middlesex-London Health Unit – Program Planning & Evaluation

**Program Evaluator (Temporary Contract)**

**July 2020-December 2020**

Responsible for consulting, leading and collaborating with program staff and community partners in the planning and evaluation of public health programs and services; engaging in knowledge seeking (e.g., literature searches, environmental scans) and knowledge synthesis; developing program and evaluation recommendations; disseminating results in the form of presentations and written reports; providing evaluative consultations; and assisting with other assigned tasks, such as COVID-19 data support.

Fraser Health Authority – Population & Public Health Observatory

**Evaluation Specialist**

**April 2019-September 2019**

Responsible for providing consultation to program leadership; leading planning, research, evaluation, and outcome measurement; working with existing and external data sources and developing new processes; designing practical evaluation models; making evidence-based recommendations regarding programs, care delivery and impacts on services and resources; conducting evaluation and research projects through various methods; facilitating the development, implementation and maintenance of ongoing evaluation processes; providing reports based on evaluation analysis; offering support, mentorship and expertise to others undertaking evaluation processes; developing and preparing research proposals and grant applications, working with funding agencies to identify and secure funding; serving as a subject matter expert on standard methodologies related to program evaluation, assessment, study design, and research methodologies; and representing FH on internal and external committees.

York Region – Child and Family Health Division, Public Health Branch

**Program Evaluation Analyst (Temporary Contract)**

**November 2018-April 2019**

Responsible for coordinating, planning, analyzing and evaluating programs and processes for the Public Health Branch; providing expertise, leadership, facilitation and guidance in the design and implementation of evaluation methods; supporting knowledge transfer and decision-making to promote evidence-informed practice across the Public Health Branch; recommending strategies and policies to support effective program planning and evaluation; and evaluating alignment of programs and processes with business and strategic plans.

## Jays Care Foundation

### **Program, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist**

**May 2017-November 2018**

Responsible for supporting the design and growth of the monitoring and evaluation system and processes for all programs for marginalized children and youth across the country; assisting in the research, design, training, delivery and supervision of programs; supporting the programs team in all data collection, analysis, learning activities, and capacity building initiatives; preparing and reviewing regular narrative partner reports; defining and implementing the key program performance indicators; developing strategies to increase data use and demand within implementing partner programs; designing tools and data collection processes; supporting the design and completion of each program's year-end impact reports; ongoing tracking of developments in grant/program changes and progress in order to advise and recommend tools and strategies to increase program performances and result; performing regular field visits to ensure quality data collection procedures; ensuring donor and partner data queries are addressed in an accurate and timely manner; program training and facilitation; coaching and mentoring; program implementation; partnership building; and other administrative duties.

## Telfer Place Retirement and Long-Term Care Home

### **Director of Recreation (Temporary Contract)**

**November 2016-May 2017**

Responsible for the overall management of the Recreation department in a large, 250-bed long-term care and retirement home. Tasks include developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating resident activities and programs; scheduling, tracking, administering and scoring resident assessments; ensuring quality and risk management initiatives, managing the recreation budget and monitoring expenditures; community and outreach initiatives; communicating and promoting resident participation; ensuring participant satisfaction; assisting in labor relations and contract negotiations; maintaining accurate records; recruitment, selection, orientation, training and supervision of recreation staff and volunteers; encouraging employee engagement, motivation and development.

## School of Health & Life Sciences and Community Services, Conestoga College

### **Research Coordinator**

**January 2015-November 2016**

Responsible for leading and coordinating several multifaceted projects, including the selection, training, and supervision of team members. Tasks include conception and study design (e.g., needs assessments); ethics application; participant recruitment; data collection, analysis and interpretation (quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods); knowledge dissemination; coordinating workshops, education and training sessions; curriculum development for the School of Health & Life Sciences and Community Services, etc.

## **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

Western University, London, ON

**Master's Student, Counselling Psychology**

**September 2019-April 2021**

- Research interests include enhancing health and well-being for vulnerable populations, community-based participatory research, program planning and evaluation, mental health promotion, education and training, and knowledge translation.

#### *MA Thesis*

- Primary data collected using individual interviews, observations, and meeting minutes from Indigenous staff, researchers, and community members (educators, Elders, youth).
  - Working with Yellowhead Tribal Council (AB)

#### **Research Assistant, Centre for School Mental Health (*led by Dr. Claire Crooks*) September 2019-August 2021**

Responsible for supporting CSMH's national partnerships with Indigenous communities, including Yellowhead Tribal Council in Alberta and local organizations across Middlesex-London. Additionally, I am responsible for assisting with research projects, including the conception and study design; ethics application; participant recruitment; data collection, analysis, and interpretation; knowledge dissemination; trainings, workshops and educational opportunities.

#### **University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON Master's Student, Public Health and Health Systems January 2013-December 2014**

- Research interests include health and well-being across the lifespan, program planning and evaluation, mixed methods research, interprofessional collaboration, education and training, and knowledge translation.

#### *MSc Thesis*

- Primary data collected using focus group and individual interviews, as well as secondary data analysis of patient outcome measures and caregiver self-report questionnaires.
  - Worked with Grand River Hospital – Freeport (ON)
- Other research projects include a) Examining the Hospital Elder Life Program in Acute Care and Rehabilitation Hospital Settings from the Perspective of the Volunteers, b) TVN-funded Knowledge Synthesis on Patient Engagement, c) Waterloo Wellington LHIN-funded Patient Experience project.

#### **Abstract Reviewer, Canadian Association on Gerontology May 2015-November 2016**

Responsible for reviewing abstracts submitted to the Health and Biological Sciences division for presentation at the Canadian Association on Gerontology's Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting.

#### **Research Assistant, Geriatric Health Systems Research Group (*led by Dr. Paul Stolee*) January 2013-December 2014**

Responsible for assisting with research projects, including the conception and study design; ethics application; participant recruitment; data collection, analysis and interpretation (quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods); knowledge dissemination; coordinating workshops and education sessions.

University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON

**Research Assistant, Brain and Mind Research Institute** (*led by Dr. Vanessa Taler*)

**November 2011-December 2012**

Responsible for data collection using standardized measures (e.g., MoCA) and data input.

**Research Assistant, Brain and Mind Research Institute** (*led by Dr. Claude Messier*)

**September 2011-April 2012**

Responsible for data input, analysis and interpretation (quantifying qualitative data) for the research team.

**Research Assistant, ICEEFT** (*led by Dr. Susan M. Johnson*)

**October 2010-May 2011**

Responsible for transcribing qualitative data from couple therapy sessions following structured guidelines.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

**Part-time Instructor – “Aging in Place”**

**Fall term 2015**

*Responsible for teaching the collaborative BScN course offered through McMaster University and Conestoga College: Aging in Place (COLLAB2T03).*

**Guest Lecturer – “Health Services and Health System Challenges for Seniors”**

**Fall term 2015**

*Gave a 1-hour presentation (with discussion) on health services and health system challenges for seniors in Canada: Adult Development and Aging (PNUR1165)*

University of Waterloo

**Guest Lecturer – “Program Evaluation”**

**Winter term 2014**

*Gave a 30-minute presentation (with discussion) on program evaluation in health settings: Social Determinants of Health (HLTH 260)*

**Guest Lecturer – “Evaluation Ethics, Standards, and Competencies”**

**Fall term 2013**

*Gave a 30-minute presentation (with discussion) on evaluation ethics, standards, and competencies: Evaluation, Qualitative, and Survey Methods (HLTH 344)*

**Guest Lecturer – “The Physiology of Alzheimer’s Disease”**

**Spring term 2013**

*Gave a 30-minute presentation (with discussion) on the physiology of Alzheimer’s disease: Development, Aging, and Health (HLTH 210)*

**Teaching Assistant – “Social Determinants of Health” (HLTH 260)**

**Winter term 2014**

**Teaching Assistant – “Evaluation, Qualitative, and Survey Methods” (HLTH 344)  
Fall term 2013**

**Teaching Assistant – “Development, Aging, and Health” (HLTH 210)  
Spring term 2013**

## AWARDS

McGill University  
Richard H. Tomlinson Doctoral Fellowship  
**September 2021 – April 2024**

Faculty of Education’s Dean’s Excellence Fellowship  
**September 2021 – April 2023**

Indigenous Graduate Excellence Recruitment Award  
**September 2021 – April 2022**

Western University  
Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master’s Program (SSHRC)  
**May 2020 – April 2021**

University of Waterloo  
CAG Student Travel Grant Award  
**October 2014**

Applied Health Sciences Graduate Experience Award  
**May 2013 – April 2014**

University of Ottawa  
Admissions Scholarship  
**September 2008 – April 2009**

## PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS

**Huson, K.**, Stolee, P., Pearce, N., Bradfield, C., & Heckman, G.A. (2016). Examining the Hospital Elder Life Program in a rehabilitation setting: a pilot feasibility study. *BMC Geriatrics*, 16(1), 1.

Heckman, G. A., Boscart, V., **Huson, K.**, Costa, A., Harkness, K., Hirdes, J. P.... & McKelvie, R. (2017). Enhancing Knowledge and InterProfessional care for Heart Failure (EKWIP-HF) in long-term care: a pilot study. *Pilot and Feasibility Studies*, 4(1), 9.

Boscart, V.M., Heckman, G.A., **Huson, K.**, Brohman, L., Harkness, K.I., Hirdes, J.P., McKelvie, R., & Stolee, P. (2017). Implementation of an interprofessional communication and

collaboration intervention to improve care capacity for heart failure management in long-term care. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 31(5), 583-592.

- Boscart, V., McCleary, L., **Huson, K.**, Sheiban, L., & Harvey, K. (2016). Integrating Gerontological Competencies in Canadian Health and Social Service Education: An Overview of Trends, Enablers and Challenges. *Gerontology and Geriatrics Education*, 0(ja), 1.
- McNeil, H., Elliott, J., **Huson, K.**, Ashbourne, J., Heckman, G.A., Walker, J., & Stolee, P. (2016). Engaging older adults in health care research and planning: A realist synthesis. *Research Involvement and Engagement*, 2(1), 1.
- Elliott, J., McNeil, H., Ashbourne, J., **Huson, K.**, Boscart, V., & Stolee, P. (2016). Engaging older adults in health care decision-making: A realist review. *The Patient*, DOI 10.1007/s40271-016-0168-x.
- Lafortune, C., **Huson, K.**, Santi, S., & Stolee, P. (2015). Community-based primary health care for older adults: a qualitative study of the perceptions of clients, caregivers and health care providers. *BMC Geriatrics*, 15(1), 57.

## PRESENTATIONS

- Boscart, V., Heckman, G., **Huson, K.**, McKelvie, R., Hirdes, J.P., Stolee, P. (2017, July). *Improving the Knowledge and Interprofessional Care for Heart Failure in Nursing Homes: A Pilot Study*. Poster presentation at IAGG World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics, San Francisco, California.
- Boscart, V., **Huson, K.**, Sidani, S., Ploeg, J., Dupuis, S., Heckman, G., Costa, A., Luh Kim, J., & Brown, P. (2016, October). *Neighbourhood Team Development in Long-Term Care: Findings from a 3 year descriptive study*. Oral presentation at Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference, Montreal, Canada.
- Boscart, V., Brown, M., & **Huson, K.** (2016, October). *Improving Seniors' Care Transitions and Patient and Caregiver Experience: The PATHway to Aging Well Project - Second Phase*. Poster presentation at Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference, Montreal, Canada.
- Boscart, V., Bush, S., **Huson, K.**, Hummel, S., Cook, C., Voelzing, L., Raasok, M. (2016, May). *Engagement of BScN Students in Long-Term Care*. Poster presentation at the 2016 CASN

Canadian Nursing Education Conference, Toronto, Canada.

Boscart, V., Bush, S., **Huson, K.**, Hummel, S., Cook, C., Voelzing, L., Raasok, M. (2016, May). *Engagement of BScN Students in Long-Term Care*. Oral presentation at the Optimizing the Role of Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners in Long Term Care at Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Kitchener, Canada.

**Huson, K.**, Boscart, V., McKelvie, R., Hirdes, J.P., Stolee, P., & Heckman, G. (2015, December). *Interprofessional Care Processes to Manage Residents with Heart Failure in Long-Term Care*. Poster presentation at the Nursing Home Research International Working Group Conference, Toulouse, France.

**Huson, K.**, Brohman, L., Franco, L., Boscart, V., McKelvie, R., Hirdes, J.P., Stolee, P., & Heckman, G. (2015, October). *Core Heart Teams: Improving Interprofessional Communication for Heart Failure Management in Long-Term Care*. Oral presentation at the Canadian Cardiovascular Congress Conference, Toronto, Canada.

**Huson, K.**, Boscart, V., McKelvie, R., Hirdes, J.P., Stolee, P., & Heckman, G. (2015, October). *Interprofessional Care Processes to Manage Heart Failure in Long-Term Care*. Poster presentation at the Canadian Cardiovascular Congress Conference, Toronto, Canada.

**Huson, K.**, Pearce, N., Heckman, G., & Stolee, P. (2015, October). *Examining the Hospital Elder Life Program in a Rehabilitation Setting: A Mixed Methods Evaluation*. Oral presentation at the Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference, Calgary, Canada.

**Huson, K.** (2015, October). *Heart Failure in Seniors*. Oral presentation at Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Kitchener, Canada.

Elliott, J., McNeil, H., Stolee, P., **Huson, K.**, & the CHOICE Investigators. (2015, May). *Engaging older adults in health care decision-making: Key findings and recommendations from the CHOICE knowledge synthesis project*. Poster/Oral presentation at the Canadian Association for Health Services and Policy Research (CAHSPR) Conference, Montreal, Canada. **\*Top 4 Abstracts – Selected for ‘Rapid Fire’ Presentation**

McNeil, H., Stolee, P., Elliott, J., **Huson, K.**, & the CHOICE Investigators. (2015, May). *Engaging older adults in health care research and policy: Guidelines from the CHOICE project*. Poster Presentation at the Canadian Association for Health Services and Policy Research (CAHSPR) Conference, Montreal, Canada.

- Huson, K.** (2015, May). *Examining the Hospital Elder Life Program in a Rehabilitation Setting: A Mixed Methods Evaluation*. Oral presentation at Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Kitchener, Canada.
- Huson, K.** (2015, March). *Examining the Hospital Elder Life Program in a Rehabilitation Setting: A Mixed Methods Evaluation*. Oral presentation at Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Kitchener, Canada.
- Huson, K.** (2015, January). *Examining the Hospital Elder Life Program in a Rehabilitation Setting: A Mixed Methods Evaluation*. Oral presentation at Grand River Hospital-Freeport, Kitchener, Canada.
- Elliott, J., McNeil, H., Stolee, P., **Huson, K.**, & the CHOICE Investigators. (2014, November). *Engaging older adults in health care decision-making: Key findings and recommendations from the CHOICE knowledge synthesis project*. Poster/Oral presentation at the International Conference on Integrated Care: 2nd World Congress on Integrated Care, Sydney, Australia. \***Runner-up Best Poster Presentation Award**
- McNeil, H., Stolee, P., Elliott, J., **Huson, K.**, & the CHOICE Investigators. (2014, November). *Engaging older adults in health care research and policy: Guidelines from the CHOICE project*. Poster Presentation at the International Conference on Integrated Care: 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress on Integrated Care, Sydney, Australia.
- Huson, K.**, McCrory, C., & Stolee, P. (2014, October). *Examining the Hospital Elder Life Program in Acute Care and Rehabilitation Hospital Settings from the Perspective of the Volunteers*. Poster presentation at the Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference, Niagara Falls, Canada.
- McNeil, H., Stolee, P., Elliott, J., **Huson, K.**, & the CHOICE Investigators. (2014, October). *Engaging older adults in health care decision-making: Results from the CHOICE knowledge synthesis project*. Poster presentation at the Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference, Niagara Falls, Canada.

## ACTIVITIES

### Research Grant Proposals

1. Contributed to the development of the Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund Grant 2018-19: *The GROW Challenger project*. April 2018. (\$148,852). – **Awarded**

2. **Co-investigator** on the SPARK Fund Call for Innovations 2016: *ASILA: An Innovative Approach to Educate, Engage and Empower Personal Care Providers in Long-Term Care*. October 2016. (\$49,814).
3. **Co-investigator** on the Retired Teachers Foundation Grant: *Preparing Future Healthcare Staff to Care for Frail Older Seniors: Impact of the ASILA Program for PSW Students*. September 2016. (\$24,923).
4. Contributed to the development of the Retired Teachers Foundation Grant: *Knowledge Institute for Evidence Based Gerontology Content in Regulated and Unregulated Nursing Education at Ontario Colleges*. September 2016. (\$24,956).
5. Contributed to the development of the Retired Teachers Foundation Grant: *Increasing HIV Literacy among Pre-Entry-to-Practice Gerontologists: An Intervention Study*. September 2016. (\$24,975).
6. Contributed to the development of the Retired Teachers Foundation Grant: *Frail Aging Simulation Suits: An Innovative Strategy to Promote Empathy and Understanding among Students in the Health Professions*. September 2016. (\$24,990).
7. Contributed to the development of a HSRF Call for Targeted Research Grant: *Nurse led TEAM (inTerprofessional Evidence-based Assessment and Management) for Emergency Department Avoidance in Home and Long-term Care*. November 2015. (\$750,000).
8. Contributed to the development of an OHCRIF Research Grant: *Optimizing the Training of Personal Support Workers to Improve Outcomes of Frail Seniors in Long-Term Care Settings*. May 2015. (\$49,371).
9. Contributed to the development of a CIHR Operating Grant: *Keeping Patients at the Centre: The Keeping PACE Study*. March 2014. (\$1,146,571).
10. Contributed to the development of a TVN NCE Knowledge Synthesis Grant proposal: *Choosing Healthcare Options by Involving Canada's Elderly: The CHOICE Knowledge Synthesis Project*. August 2013. (\$49,926). – **Awarded**
11. Contributed to the CIHR Café-Scientifique proposal: *Managing the Seams: Transitions in Health Care for Older Adults*. May 2013. (\$3,746). – **Awarded**

### Workshops, Meetings, and Events

1. Coordinated the “Culture Change in Long-Term Care in Ontario and across Canada: Innovations and Implementations” Symposium Session at the Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference, October 22nd, 2016, Montreal, QC.
2. Coordinated the “Optimizing the Role of Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners in Long Term Care” Workshop, Conestoga College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning, January 26th, 2016, Kitchener, ON.
3. Coordinated the “It takes a team to care- better chronic disease management” Innovation Café at the Schlegel Research Institute of Aging Innovation Summit, June 24th, 2015, Guelph, ON. (4 20-minute sessions)

4. Coordinated the Seniors Curriculum Mapping Sessions for the School of Health & Life Sciences and Community Services, Conestoga College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning, June-September 2015, Kitchener, ON.
5. Facilitated the *InfoRehab CIHR Café Scientifique* event, June 3rd, 2014, Waterloo, ON. (50 in-person attendees, including community members, system leaders, health care providers, + 130 live stream participants from across North America)
6. Facilitated the Waterloo-Wellington LHIN Passport Day, March 19th, 2014, Guelph, ON (200 Health Care Providers in attendance)
7. Facilitated the “My Healthcare Forum: Seniors in Control”, June 4th, 2013, Guelph-Wellington Seniors Association, Guelph, ON (200 older adults in attendance)
8. Facilitated the Research Priorities and Planning Workshop, June 24th, 2013, Waterloo Inn and Conference Centre, Waterloo, ON

## Reports

1. McMurray, J., Stolee, P., McNeil, H., Elliott, J., Giosa, J., Prorok, J., **Huson, K.**, Ashbourne, J., Black, S., Lafortune, C. (2014). *Assessing Patient Experience Across the Rehabilitative Care Continuum*. Waterloo, ON: Geriatric Health Systems Research Group, University of Waterloo.
2. Drouin, H., Lafortune, C., Ashbourne, J., Black, S., Bodemer, S., Elliott, J., Harrison, A., **Huson, K.**, McNeil, H., & Stolee, P. (2014). *Managing the Seams: Transitions in Health Care for Older Adults*.

## Review Activities

1. Reviewer, *Journal of Community Psychology*, January 2020.
2. Reviewer, *Psychology in the Schools*, November 2020.

## COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

### James Bay Girls at Bat Project

#### **National Mentor**

#### **May 2017-Present**

Responsible for offering ongoing mentorship for high-risk Indigenous female youth living in remote First Nation communities along the James Bay Coast. More specifically, providing a reliable source of support and connection through community visits to remote communities, regular communication via phone, e-mail, and social media outlets, and linking to external supports and resources. Additional responsibilities include facilitating leadership and life promotion trainings, workshops, and retreats.

### Dr. Jays Children’s Grief Centre

#### **Camp Volunteer**

#### **May 2018-Present**

Responsible for attending annual camps in Ontario and Cree Nation of Mistissini, Quebec to lead grief activities, as well as to provide support and resources for bereaved children, youth and their families.

### **Stand Up to Stigma**

#### **Mental Health Discussion Groups Facilitator**

**September 2013-January 2015**

Responsible for attending regular meetings, planning, marketing, attending events to raise awareness and advocate for mental health, and facilitating bi-weekly mental health discussion groups.

### **Jer's Vision: Canada's Youth Diversity Initiative**

#### **Survey Developer**

**September 2011-December 2011**

Responsible for working together with community partners to identify needs and develop a set of questions and hypotheses to create a professional survey for Jer's Vision.

### **St. Joseph's Catholic School**

#### **Academic Tutor**

**September 2007-June 2008**

Responsible for assisting seventh-grade students in all courses, including Mathematics, English, French, Science, etc., and occasionally led classes under supervision.

## **TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION**

1. **Mental Health First Aid Training**
2. **LGBT2SQ Foundations Course**
3. **Tips and Strategies for Youth to Thrive in Remote and Online Programming**
4. **Question Persuade Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention Training**
5. **Solution Focused Communication Training**
6. **Trauma-Informed Practice Training**
7. **The Working Mind: Workplace Mental Health and Awareness Training**
8. **Peer Mentor Training**
9. **Healthy Relationships Plus – Enhanced (HRP-E) Facilitator Training**
10. **Healthy Relationships Program for LGBTQ2+ Youth Facilitator Training**
11. **Snap Survey Training**
12. **Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2)**
13. **Academic Integrity Workshop**
14. **Yoga Alliance International 200-hour Teacher Training Certification**

## MEMBERSHIPS

Canadian Psychology Association

**Student Member 2020-2021**

Promoting Relationships & Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet)

**Workgroup Member 2020-2021**

Ontario Public Health Evaluation Network

**Regular Member 2019-2020**

Canadian Association on Gerontology

**Regular Member 2015-2016**