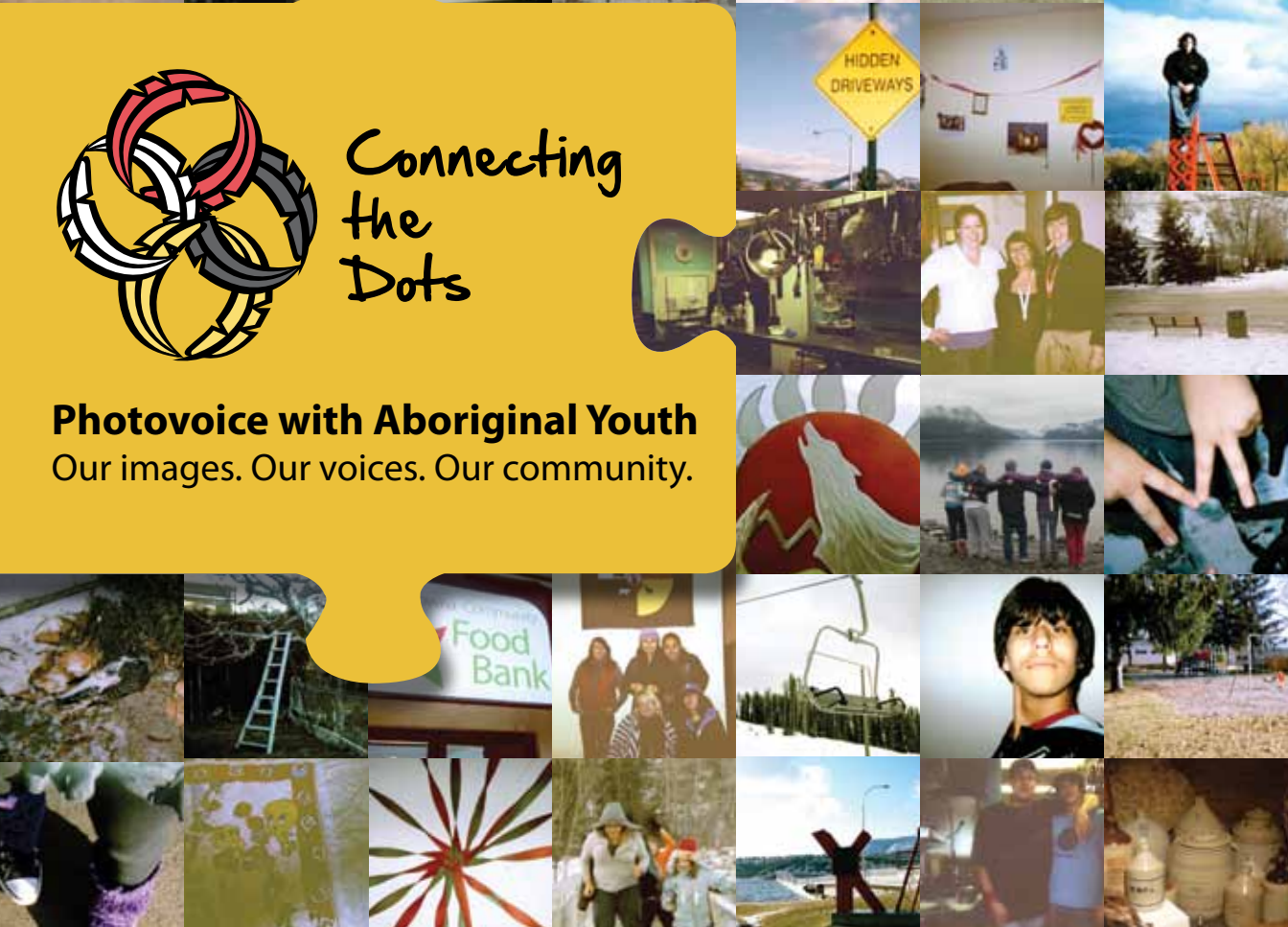




Connecting the Dots

Photovoice with Aboriginal Youth

Our images. Our voices. Our community.



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Connecting the Dots Coordinator, and Trixie Ling, Connecting the Dots Project Manager

Pictures and narratives by youth from the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society

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About Connecting the Dots

Connecting the Dots (CTD) is an innovative community-based project that seeks to promote the mental health of urban Aboriginal youth and families in three urban Aboriginal communities in British Columbia: Kelowna, Port Alberni and Quesnel. The project is led provincially by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) BC Division and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCA AFC), and implemented locally in the three urban Aboriginal communities through

Friendship Centres and CMHA branches. By working in partnerships and building relationships, the project can bridge the gaps between urban Aboriginal services and mental health services, and promote holistic well-being for urban Aboriginal youth and families. The project is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada and is one of the Innovation Strategy projects for mental health promotion.



Connecting
the
Dots

The project has three main goals:

1. To build and sustain a long term partnership between CMHA and Friendship Centres;
2. To improve urban Aboriginal mental health through implementing the Communities that Care (CTC) prevention model;
3. To adapt the CTC model to be culturally relevant in an urban Aboriginal community.

The project uses a model known as Communities that Care (CTC), an evidence-based community prevention system to promote positive health outcomes. The CTC model is linked with a population health approach that recognizes that many determinants of mental health are outside the control of an individual, and must be addressed at a structural and programmatic level across various sectors. Through CTC, the project mobilizes the community to enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors influencing mental health. Protective factors, such as family connectedness, cultural identity, connected to school, life skills and competencies, help build resiliency for youth to cope with life challenges. On the other hand, risk factors such as family conflict, alcohol, abuse and loss of cultural identity will negatively influence youth's mental health.

Working within an urban Aboriginal context, the project recognizes the importance of increasing cultural competency and adapting CTC in a culturally safe, appropriate and relevant way to improve urban Aboriginal mental health. The Aboriginal approach to wellness and healing prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing and culture as a means of prevention. The goal of working in a respectful way with Aboriginal people includes having a genuine respect for traditional cultural approaches to decision making, holistic healing and community building. The project makes cultural adaptations to research, training and community development by incorporating cultural practices such as food sharing, talking circles and Elders' participation in community activities. The process and outcomes of this project will determine the effectiveness of using the CTC model to promote mental health in urban Aboriginal communities.

For more information about Connecting the Dots:

www.cmha.bc.ca/connectingthedots

facebook.com/connectingthedotsbc

twitter/ctdbc

Kelowna Project Partners

The Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society (KFS) is a non-profit urban Aboriginal organization that provides a range of community services in the Central Okanagan. These services include health and wellness, employment, housing, education, homelessness outreach, early childhood development, youth programming, poverty law, and many more. While many programs focus on the needs of urban Aboriginal people, KFS services are open to the entire community. The Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society is the only Aboriginal organization in British Columbia providing contracted services to the immigrant community.



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The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Kelowna Branch is a multi-service organization that promotes the mental health of all through public education, community based research, influencing public policy and, providing direct services and supports. The branch provides education and support to the community regarding mental health and mental illness, while paying particular attention to children, families and caregivers. CMHA Kelowna does this by assisting people to navigate complex health and social services, and providing opportunities for education and information to people of all ages the tools to achieve and maintain mental health.



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Kelowna
Mental health for all

Amanda Swoboda, Project Co-Coordinator

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Provincial Project Partners

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) BC Division, a provincial charity and community leader for more than 50 years, promotes the mental health of British Columbians and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. CMHA BC accomplishes this mission through advocacy, education, community-based research and services, as well as providing support to 19 CMHA branches across BC that serve over 100 communities. CMHA shares a national vision of mentally healthy people in a healthy society.



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
British Columbia
Mental health for all

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The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) is an umbrella organization for 25 member Friendship Centres across the province providing services to BC's urban Aboriginal population. The mission of BCAAFC is to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people by supporting the activities of Friendship Centres in BC.



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Photovoice with Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society's Youth Group

In Kelowna, the Connecting the Dots Coordinators, Sheila Lewis and Amanda Swoboda, adapted the Communities that Care model in the urban Aboriginal community by using storytelling and visual representation instead of a youth survey to collect risk and protective factors among Aboriginal youth. While the Connecting the Dots Coordinators appreciated the scope that the survey would provide locally for the community, the team wanted to push data collection with youth, and particularly with urban Aboriginal youth, a bit further. The local coordinators asked themselves if there was an alternative way to gathering the risk and protective factors while simultaneously giving back to the youth who participated in such an effort.

Photovoice emerged as a possible tool to collect data by engaging youth as co-researchers and empowering them to participate in the shaping and reflection of their community.

Photovoice is the process of using group dialogue and photography by providing cameras to community members to allow them to become recorders and potential catalysts for social change. Photovoice can be a tool to inform, engage and organize community, particularly marginalized community, to prioritize their needs and identify solutions.

According to Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997), developers of the Photovoice method, there are three main goals of Photovoice: "(1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issue through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policy makers." By linking needs assessment with community participation, people become advocates for their own and community's well-being.

Photovoice is an adaptable methodology used widely in health promotion as an approach to community-based Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is a collaborative form of research that facilitates community action and social change. PAR has a strong potential for decolonizing the research agenda and practices in Aboriginal research.

The Kelowna Connecting the Dots Coordinators were able to use a Photovoice manual developed by the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (2009) and modify the content to fit with mental health promotion. The coordinators piloted Photovoice with the Ki-Low-Na Friends Society Youth Group over a period of 12 weeks. In the early stages, the coordinators held workshops that covered camera use, ethics, power, and concepts of community-based research. Participation with the youth varied anywhere between 11 to 14 youth. Youth took pictures that reflected their sense of belonging and identity in the community. At the conclusion of the effort, the youth were encouraged to develop and promote a Photovoice Exhibit Gala, which took place on May 10, 2012 at Okanagan College in Kelowna. The wider community of Kelowna and the community that supported the youth were invited to come to the Exhibit Gala and be witness to the visual representation of urban Aboriginal youth voice.

References

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behaviour*. 24, 369-387.

Palibroda, B., Krieg, B., Murdock, L., & Havelock, J. (2009). A Practical Guide to Photovoice: Sharing Pictures, Telling Stories and Changing Communities. *Project #157*. Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence.

Connection to Indigenous Storytelling

Since Connecting the Dots serves an urban Aboriginal population, the Kelowna Coordinators had to gain support from the community through methods that could be traditionally recognized. Photovoice is a form of a storytelling through visual representation. Storytelling is a common practice in many Aboriginal communities and is integral to imparting understanding of one's role in their community.

While Photovoice is not a traditional method, nor is it recognized as a cultural method, the elements and practices of Photovoice share a resonance with many aspects of traditional storytelling in Aboriginal communities. Storytelling is a way of transmitting knowledge and ways of being. Through storytelling, community members learn more about values that are expected as a member of the community. Photovoice is able to convey expectations of the community through visual and narrative representation, thus the method can be more readily accepted and adopted by Aboriginal communities.



Photovoice Exhibit Gala

May 10, 2012 at Okanagan College in Kelowna

Sheila Lewis (left) and Amanda Swoboda (right), Kelowna Connecting the Dots Coordinators with Trixie Ling (middle), Connecting the Dots Project Manager



Members of the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society Youth Group who participated in the Photovoice project



▲
Videographer Jody Hill interviewed youth and captured the event on video

▶
Elder Richard Jackson Jr. performed the opening drum song and prayer



▲
Two Photovoice participants shared a laugh during the show

Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society Board Director Gilly Alook with Connecting the Dots Coordinator Sheila Lewis and two youth





◀ City Councillor Gerry Zimmerman spoke on behalf of the Mayor of Kelowna



▲ Attendees of the event checked out colourful and thought-provoking displays



◀ "Take time out for Aboriginal mental health" cards containing mental health tips and traditional sacred medicine were distributed at the event

ASHLEY



▲ Me and Cheese

Actually, there's a Mac and Cheese, and they're my pets, my comfort, and my way of finding stability in a chaotic time in my life. My pets show my sense of humour and my capacity for love and affection.



This is my Way

Youth need exercise. That isn't why we walk everywhere. Usually our feet are our only mode of transportation.

One-step-at-a-time.

Make your own path, it's okay to be different, no matter how hard or gravelly the path may be.

Empty Chair Lift

Some youth and children don't get the opportunity to try new things; most of these chairs should not be empty. There are some youth who can't afford to go to places like Big White and other places.



DANICA

Open Up To Your Nation ►

This picture represents barriers to learning about our culture. People are closing the doors on knowledge, they're stopping us from learning about our nation. Nation is important because it's part of us. I am concerned that by not knowing my nation, I may not know about myself.



We Aren't that Different, After All ►

When you look at this picture, you see four brown people and one white person. You may think they're all different, they're actually all the same. They're ALL Native.

STOP RACISM!





▲ Display of a Certain Culture is Not Always True

This display was put up at the Kelowna Museum, but to me I think it was put up because people imagine that all Aboriginal children get taken because of drinking. This is not always true. I am concerned about the stereotype of drunk Aboriginal people being displayed in the museum.

D'ANDRA



▲ Hidden Lifeways

When I think about my picture of the drive-ways, I think of family, no matter what, there's always a branch, a family member that is hidden or ideas that are hidden.
(the location of the sign is right outside my foster parents house, the irony is not hidden from me)



▲ Nature is Telling

The pic with the leaf(s) is awesome! I almost stepped on this when I was walking and that is the day I got back together with my ex. I guess Nature is saying some things don't matter, who or what. Nature is telling you something either that or, the small leaf is a child the big leaf is the parent and they are branching off. The child could grow up to be bad or to be good, either way they still will have secrets just like my picture of the hidden driveways.

ELICIA

Leaders of Tomorrow

I am a youth.
I have a goal.
I am your future.
I believe in Canada
Today I am left on the outside, but
tomorrow I will be leading the ~~inside~~ Nation.
We must help Canada before we can help other
countries.
WE HAVE A VOICE!!

Leaders of Tomorrow

I am a youth.
I have a goal.
I am your future.
I believe in Canada.
Today I am left on the outside, but
tomorrow I will be leading the Nation.
We must help Canada before we can help
other countries.
WE HAVE A VOICE!!





'We Stand Together'

My friends and I stand before a man made lake. We talk about our relationship with nature and how man has finally conquered nature. One day we will rise again and serve nature the way we should be serving it; with respect, just like our Elders told us to.

I WILL MAKE MY ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT LESS.

▲ We Stand Together

My friends and I stand before a man made lake. We talk about our relationship with nature and how man has finally conquered nature. One day we will rise again and serve nature the way we should be serving it; with respect, just like our Elders told us to.

I will make my ecological footprint LESS.

GRACE



▲ Avô

(Grandma in Portuguese)

She's my Grandma. Her home and yard look old-fashioned to me, and yet I see she plants her own food, cleans her clothes without modern machinery—she lives simply and she teaches me. She's my connection to an older generation.

Ancient Clothes Line

Avô dries her clothes using the sun, she plants her food using the soil, and she collects rain water to nourish her garden. All of this looks ancient to me. Yet it's sustainable and traditional.



Tree and Ladder

I see an old way of life. This is Grandma's Garden. Her love comes from the ground like Mother Earth.

LARSON



▲ 3 Ways to Go

Shoes, Skateboard, and bus pass are ways to get away from problems, even if it's only for a little while, but at least it's long enough to blow off some steam. These are my ways of getting around; youth have very few ways of getting around.

Transportation is everything!



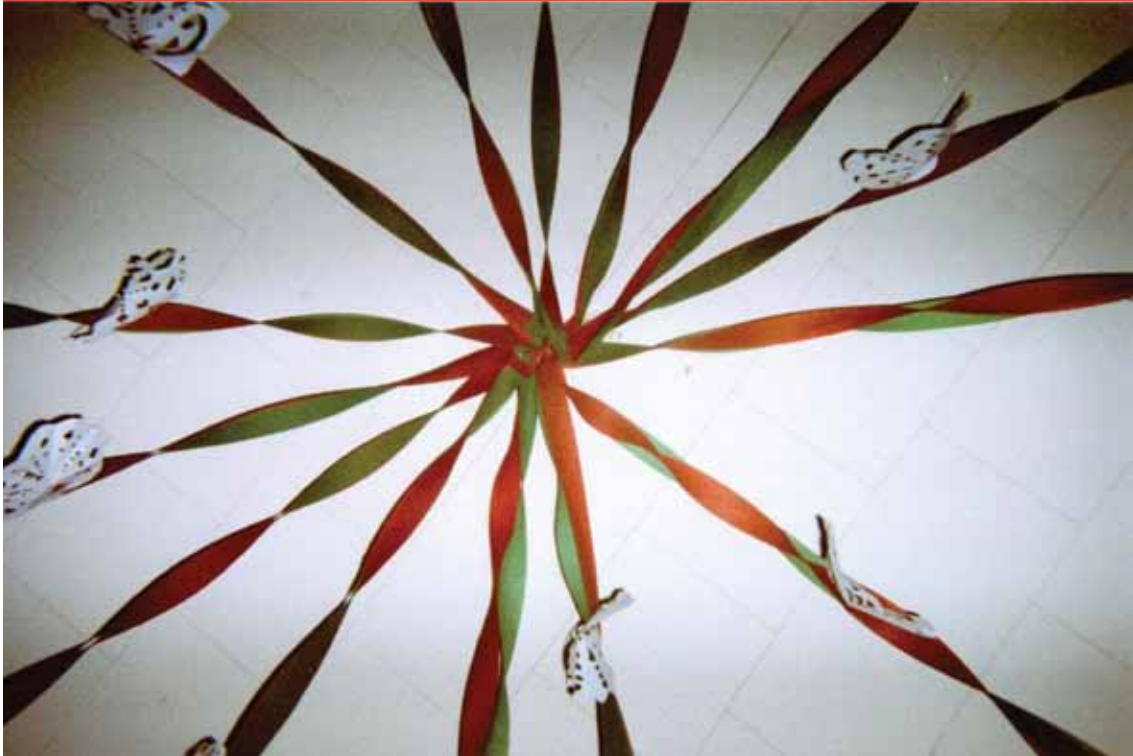
▲ Eternal Friendship

No shelter, exposed safety, planning for transportation, bus often full which means a lot of exposed waiting.

PATWIN

▼ Celebrate Culture

Circles have meaning in my family's life. Doesn't matter how the circle is used, all of it is in celebration. Celebration of culture, diversity, and unity.





▲ Where the Children Went

Today, this park is rarely used by children or youth. There's adult-oriented housing surrounding this park and at night stuff is going on that make the park unsafe.

A forgotten place for youth and laughter.

SHAWNTELL



◀ Adoption Centre

A place for animals to be sheltered while waiting for a 'forever family'. All creatures need homes and need to be loved. Youth volunteer here, we are good people and can provide comfort to our animals.

Necessary Resource ▶

Many families struggle with food security; even I've had to use the food bank. This is an important and necessary resource in our community, it helps people in need. This is where our families have to turn to when they run out of food or money.





▲ Symbol of Love

Walking in the park I saw that someone had made a 'symbol of love' in the snow. We have to love, we come from Mother Earth. Love can be found anywhere, love needs to be found, be careful and watchful of your surroundings —you may find a symbol of love.

TEEFALL



▲ Dead and Discarded

This bird is no longer able to be free and fly wherever it wants to go. Nobody cares about dead animals. Sadness, we need to care for all creatures—this is how we treat nature?

The forgotten voices.

▼ The Path Least Travelled

I can see many paths in the snow tracks. They have new beginnings and different directions. Fresh tracks can help find a new start. Can't see where they lead and the tracks will melt, the way can be lost. Seems that's how life can be, lots of different and changing directions.





▲ Food and Community

Kitchens are the heart of the city and society. They represent team work and bring community together, we couldn't live without kitchens. Food is important! People living on the streets need and benefit from a soup kitchen. Not only homeless use soup kitchens, all sorts of people now use soup.



◀ A Real Problem

Here we see the old bridge next to the new bridge. I am reminded of how money has been misused to usher in the new. Youth are new, why aren't the same efforts put into bringing us forward?

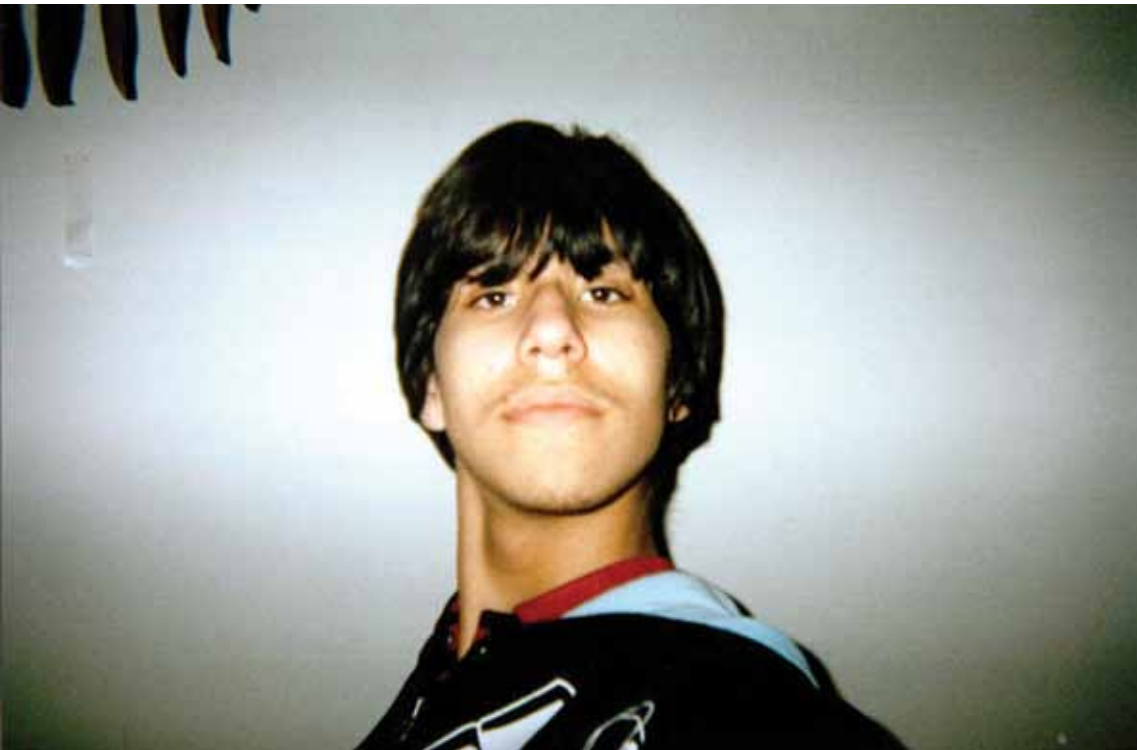
This is negligence of a real problem.



◀ Head in the Clouds

This is a self-portrait. My head appears to be in the clouds. Good ideas are thought of by youth, youth ideas are important and yet youth ideas are pushed aside—head in the clouds—Youth are over stereo-typed about drugs, being lazy and not having an opinion.

TINGO



"Me"

I am me. I have tons of self-esteem.
I am accepted and loved.

▲ Me

I am me. I have tons
of self-esteem. I am
accepted and loved.

Emergency Exit ►

When youth have troubles with friends or family, it is important to look for your own emergency exit.



"Cake on the wall"
These things on my wall are a part of me. They give clues of who I am and what I'm interested in. I have stuff from friends, family and culture. I have stuff from my childhood and stuff from last year. These stuff are like icing on my own personal cake.

◀ Cake on the Wall

These things on my wall are a part of me. They give clues of who I am and what I'm interested in. I have stuff from friends, family and culture. I have stuff from my childhood and stuff from last year. These stuff are like icing on my own personal cake.

TREASURE



◀ My Family

Family is really important to me, to all of us. There are 3 different generations in this picture. Family can be varied, made up of different people—they are safety, warmth, love, distinct, generational—all mine!

Coordinators ▶

The people in my life are amazing and without them there would be nothing. They work good together. Youth care about the people who help them—where would we be without them?





◀ My Grandma Made This

Memories are a really important thing in my life; I have all my things from my baby life.

TYSON C.



▲ Unity

Each finger represents peace, love, grace, hope, and faith. Each finger touches uniting the different sentiments, people, and youth.
NO RACISM!

My Creativity, My Sanity ►

I don't know about you, for me, when I am stressed, angry, disappointed or overwhelmed, I turn to my art. Through art I can achieve good mental health. Drawing is important to youth, it is fun and it helps some youth when they are stressed.

Cross That Bridge Together

The Greenway is a gathering place. Me, my family, my friends, and other youth have crossed that bridge together. Everything we do, we do it TOGETHER!

▼



TYSON S.



◀ Tall and Small

This is me and Danica. I care for Danica as I would care for a little sister. People when they see us may see how I am her brother protector ... she may be small in size but her strength is as great as mine!

▶ Young Men, Leaders of Today

Two people working in a soup kitchen. People have jobs, they need money to get food, and we assist in helping people get food. When people see youth they tend to see laziness and lack of interest, we are overlooked, and still we continue to give to our community.





▲ Wolf Teaches Me

Wolf is strength and community.
For me, Wolf teaches. I am strong.
I am part of a community.
Wolf teaches me.

Acknowledgements

This is where the Kelowna Connecting the Dots Coordinators, Sheila Lewis and Amanda Swoboda, who adapted and piloted the Photovoice effort, get to say thank you and acknowledge the work and collaborations of others that made the Photovoice experience!

The Coordinators acknowledge that all work they do in the community of Kelowna is on Okanagan Nation Territory, land not ceded. We are grateful for the opportunity to be able to participate in the sharing and the learning in this territory.

Thank you to the Public Health Agency of Canada for supporting this project and subsequent adaptations.

We would like to thank the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence for creating a thorough resource with the "A Practical Guide to Photovoice: Sharing Pictures, Telling Stories and Changing Communities." Without this resource, the coordinators would not have been as inspired to pursue this truly reciprocal activity in their community.

Thank you to the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society Youth Group and their Youth Coordinator, Shelly Gervais, and the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society, for sharing their space, sharing their time and sharing their voices.

Thank you to the Canadian Mental Health Association Kelowna Branch, many staff and volunteers donated their time in assisting with the Photovoice production.

Thank you to the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society Elders: Richard Jackson Jr., Dinah Littlechief, and Karen Vircavs. Elders are integral to the well-being of our people of tomorrow!

Thank you to Ann Bell and Gilly Alook from the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society Board of Directors.

Thank you to Micheal Hintringer for sharing his professional photography skills with the youth who participated in the Photovoice experience.

Thank you to Okanagan College for the beautiful and appropriate space to hold the Photovoice Exhibit for the youth and community.

Thank you to Catherine Disberry, Gerry Zimmerman, and Jody Hill for their efforts and recognition of the project in the community.

Thank you to Donna Panitow for designing and doing the layout for this book.

And thank you to our provincial partners at the Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centre for supporting the Photovoice vision and project.



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