Creations of Confidence: Writing Workshops to Promote Youth Self-Esteem and Expression

Presentation for NLCAHR: Arts & Health

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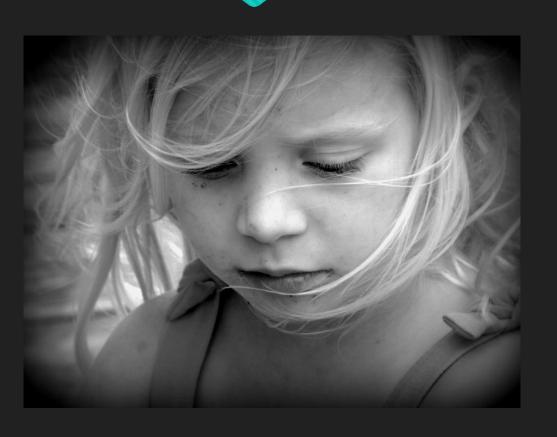
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Introduction

- Community of Shea Heights-Blackhead, NL
- Concerns of untreated mental illness in this population
- Young population: almost 1/3rd of residents under age 24*
- Lower SES: Average couple family income 30% less than provincial average*



Background



- Today's Canadian youth are increasingly at risk of mental illness*
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in Canadians ages 15-24*
- Many young people don't receive timely intervention
- Only 1 in 5 children who needs mental health services receives them*
- Shea Heights Community Alliance established in 2012 to address this problem in Shea Heights-Blackhead

Shea Heights Community Alliance

- O Founded in 2012
- Shea Heights Community Board, Shea Heights Community Health Centre, and St. John Bosco School
- Mission: "Promote community health and well-being in Shea Heights, with a focus on the community's youth"
- Past initiatives: Drama Program, Shea Heights Youth Council, Visual Arts Program (2016)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-choHW9tYo





The Role of the Arts in Mental Health

- Arts interventions have been of recent interest
- To assist treatment of depression, substance use, neighbourhood violence, and general life stressors
- Emotion-Regulation Theory* of creative writing
- Writing about stressful experiences can help to regulate emotions**
- Creative writing has also been shown to influence identity development and self-esteem***

*Lepore et al., 2002

**Kliewer et al., 2011

***Chandler, 1999

Research Question

O Do creative-writing based arts interventions, delivered in 5 sessions over the course of a month, increase the self-esteem and expressive abilities of students in grades 6-9 at St. John Bosco School?

Methods

- Study took place at St. John Bosco School, Shea Heights
- Participants were students in grades 6-9, recruited through posters and school newsletter
- 5 creative writing sessions delivered over the course of a month: March-April 2017
- O Participants wrote poems, short stories, and journals throughout the course of the program
- Pre-Program and Post-Program surveys assessed self-esteem, expressivity, and attitudes towards mental health



Survey questions: Self-esteem and expressivity

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		\odot		<u>=</u>		<u>:</u>
I feel good about myself	0	0	0	0	0	0
I can speak up in a group	0	0	0	0	0	0
I am able to do things as well as most other people	0	0	0	0	0	0
I would talk to someone if something was bothering me	0	0	0	0	0	0
I like most things about myself	0	0	0	0	0	0
I can help others come up with good ideas	0	0	0	0	0	0
I can express my feelings about things that are bothering me	0	0	0	0	0	0
I can share my feelings creatively	0	0	0	0	0	0

Survey questions: **Attitudes** toward mental health & mental illness

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		\odot	<u>:</u>	<u>=</u>	<u>:</u>	
It would be embarrassing to have a mental health problem	0	0	0	0	0	0
If I had mental health problems, I would not tell any of my friends	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anyone can have mental health problems	0	0	0	0	0	0
I know where people can go to seek help for mental health problems	0	0	0	0	0	0
A person with a mental health problem is able to be a good friend	0	0	0	0	0	0
Students with mental health problems shouldn't be in regular classes	0	0	0	0	0	0
I would talk to someone with a mental health problem	0	0	0	0	0	0

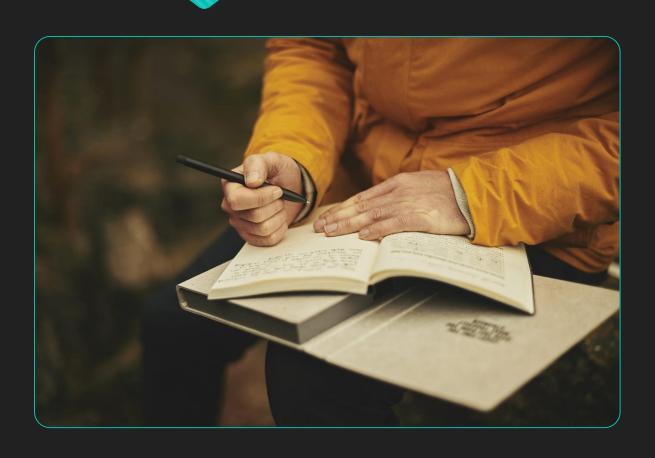
O "What 3 words come to mind when you think of mental health?"

Data Analysis

- Analysis took place in May-June of 2017
- Pre-Program and Post-Program surveys were analyzed, independently and together
- Survey answers ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree)
- The answer to each question was scored from 1-6
- Mean and Mode were calculated for each question

	Strongly	Agree	Somewhat	Somewhat	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree		Agree	Disagree		Disagree
			•••	•••		<u>•••</u>
		\bigcirc				
)	
I feel good about myself	0	0	0	0	0	0
						_

Results and Discussion



- The Pre-Program survey showed high levels of baseline self-esteem, as well as positive attitudes towards mental health
- All parameters, however, showed an improvement between pre-program and post-program
- Improvements on self-esteem, expressivity, and attitudes towards mental health

Conclusion

- Creative writing can help improve selfesteem, expressivity, and attitudes toward mental health in young people
- This study supports the effectiveness of arts interventions
- It was a small-scale study, so statistical significance is not possible
- Future research should implement these concepts using a larger population and longer timeline



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