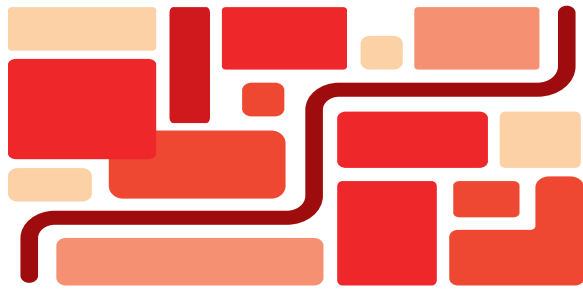


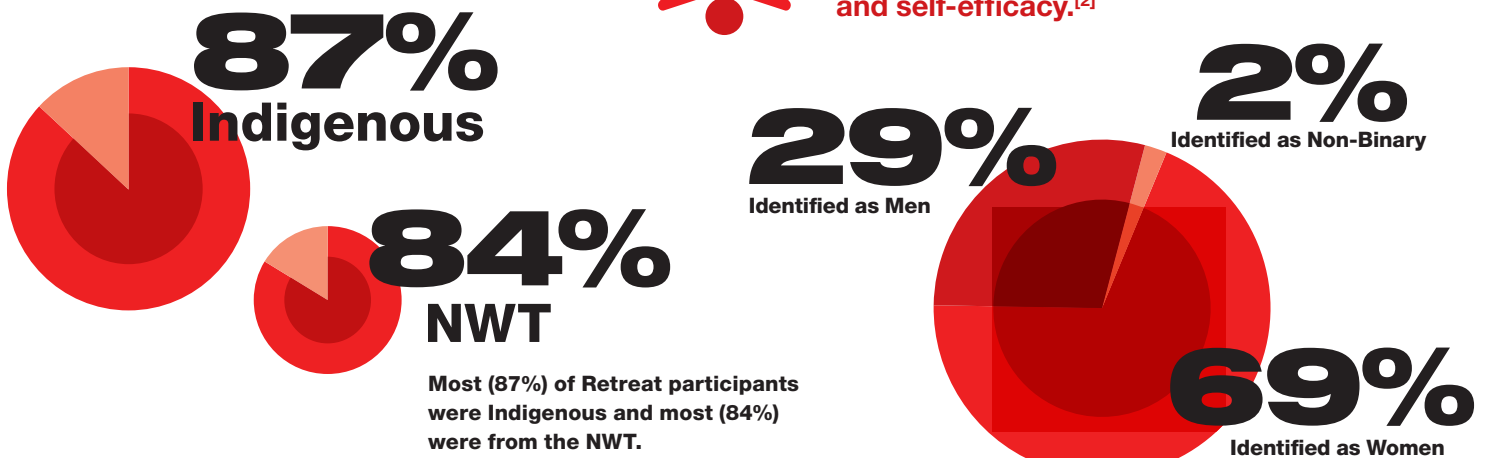
Empowering Northern and Indigenous Youth through Land-and-Art-Based Peer Leader Retreats

What we know from other research:

Positive development and empowerment approaches can strengthen skills and relationships, promote well-being and healthy decision making, and address the impacts of marginalization and oppression.^[1]



Demographics:



Key Findings:

Both leadership and empowerment scores were significantly higher after the Retreat.

Women had bigger gains in empowerment scores than men.

Leadership scores were higher for those who attended multiple workshops or Retreats.

Our Research Questions:

- What do leadership and empowerment mean to Northern and Indigenous youth?
- What are the impacts of land-and-art-based peer-led programming on young peoples' sense of leadership and empowerment?

How We Conducted This Research:

- 286 adolescents aged 13-17 attended FOXY/SMASH Peer Leader Retreats.
- Retreats included sharing circles, grief circles, sexual and mental health education, and community leadership projects.
- Land-based activities included Elder teachings, ceremony, traditional hand drumming, and recreation.
- Art-based activities included digital storytelling, photography, rattle-making, journaling, theatre-based activities, 'Northern Games' (traditional Inuit and Dene storytelling and games), beading, and dance parties.
- Participants completed surveys before, after, and 6 months after the Retreats.
- 24 focus groups were held with 232 individuals (Peer Leaders, Apprentices, and staff Peer Facilitators).

What We Found:



The open, non-judgmental environment of the Retreats encouraged growth and expression rooted in connectedness with each other, facilitators, Elders, and the Land.



Young people spoke and participated more, felt greater connection and self-acceptance, and were better able to express themselves due to their growing confidence.

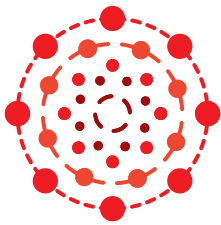


Boys in particular often spoke about social norms that can deter them from expressing emotions and forming meaningful connections with other boys and men.



Participants were inspired to step into leadership roles after the Retreat.

The focus groups highlighted three empowerment-related themes:



1. Social Connections.



2. Increased feelings of confidence.



3. Improved leadership abilities and Role-modeling.

Discussion

- FOXY/SMASH Peer Leader Retreats use positive, strengths-based approaches to cultivate empowerment, confidence, leadership, social connectedness, and to improve the holistic well-being of Northern and Indigenous adolescents.
- Gender emerged as an important aspect of the Retreats, highlighting the potential value of gender-transformative mentorship and programming.

Recommendations

- Prioritize the strengths and knowledge of young people and focus on health and well-being principles (such as respect and trust) over deficit or risk-focused lenses.
- Support land-and-art-based programs that engage the knowledge, lived experiences, and agency of participants.
- Utilize peer-led models to support confidence and connection. Bring adolescents and Elders into connection and dialogue.
- To improve the mental, sexual, and reproductive health of boys and men, implement gender-transformative programming to address harmful masculine norms.

References

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