

EVALUATING THE IMPACTS OF AN OUTDOOR ADVENTURE LEADERSHIP
EXPERIENCE PROGRAM IN A RURAL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

by

Mary Josette Wabano

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APPROVED/APPROUVÉ

Thesis Examiners/Examineurs de thèse:

Dr. Robert Schinke
(Supervisor/Directeur(trice) de thèse)

Dr. Patricia Pickard
(Co-supervisor/Co-directeur(trice) de thèse)

Dr. Barbara Ravel
(Committee member/Membre du comité)

Approved for the Faculty of Graduate Studies
Approuvé pour la Faculté des études supérieures
Dr. David Lesbarrères
M. David Lesbarrères
Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Doyen intérimaire, Faculté des études supérieures

Dr. Gualberto Cremades
(External Examiner/Examineur externe)

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ABSTRACT

This research study stems from the findings and results of previous research conducted in collaboration with Laurentian University and Wikwemikong as it relates to youth and sport participation. An outdoor adventure leadership experience program was co-designed and implemented within the community of Wikwemikong for the youth between the ages of 12 – 18 years. The impacts of a 10-day outdoor adventure leadership experience program, five years after the initial intervention is the basis of this research study. The research findings suggest that the 10-day Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience program has demonstrated *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life) thereby having an impact on the overall health and well-being of the youth leaders and their families.

The community of Wikwemikong has demonstrated the commitment to make use of the findings as a result of the research; the findings and recommendations are tangible products used for the betterment of community programs and services.

Keywords

Talking circle, medicine wheel, *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life), indigenous research, participatory action research

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Chapter 1: Introductions	1
Chapter Overview	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Significance	7
Limitations	10
Operational Definitions	12
Band Council Resolution	12
Conversational Interview	13
Culturally Relevant Intervention Method	13
Talking Circle	13
Participatory Action Research (PAR)	14
Mno-bimaadziwin	15
Youth Leaders	16
Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience (OALE)	17
CHAPTER II: Review of Literature: The Wikwemikong Research Experience	18
Chapter Overview	18
Wikwemikong Research Experience	18
Canadian Aboriginal Elite Athlete Motivations and Adaptations:	19
Adaptation Challenges and Strategies of Adolescent Aboriginal Athletes Competing Off-Reserve	19
The Role of Families in Youth Sport Programming in a Canadian Aboriginal Reserve	20
The Aboriginal Role Model Project	22
Development of an Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program	22
Wikwemikong's Unfolding Orientation	24
Research Questions	24
CHAPTER III: Indigenous Methodologies	26

Chapter Overview	26
The Wikwemikong Community	26
Participatory Action Research (PAR)	29
PAR & Locally Driven Community Research	30
Indigenous Knowledge as an Insider	34
Local Community Research Team	36
Integrating Mainstream Approach with Local Indigenous Practice	41
Indigenous Cultural Practices	42
Locally Driven Community Research	44
CHAPTER IV: The Lived Experience & Circle of Life	49
Chapter Overview	49
Mno-bimaadziwin (the good life)	49
Gaps in Practice	50
CHAPTER V: Research Methods: Sharing Through Arts Based Activity and Indigenous Practice	54
Chapter Overview	54
Recruitment of Youth Leaders and Family Members	54
Training and Capacity Building	57
Connection to Mno-bimaadziwin (the good life)	57
Talking Circles with the Youth Leaders	58
Use of Symbols	60
Arts Based Activity	60
Arts-Based Method	62
Sharing Through Indigenous Practice	64
Talking Circles	64
Local Talking Circle Practice	65
Talking Circles with Family	68
Data Collection	69
Data Analysis	71
CHAPTER VI: Results and Discussion	73

Connecting the Story of the Lived Experience of the OALE with the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual – Adapting Mainstream Knowledge with Indigenous Knowledge	78
The Essence of Leadership	78
Building Confidence	79
Making a Commitment	82
Mno-bimaadziwin – the good life	83
Emotional well-being	84
Physical well-being	87
Mental well-being	88
Spiritual well-being	90
Life Lessons	95
Overcome Challenges	95
Learning New Skills	98
Working Effectively with Others	99
Build New Relationships	100
Establish Teamwork	101
Leaving a Legacy	104
Personal Journey	104
Ideas for Program Activities	107
Chapter VII: Conclusions	112
Chapter Overview	112
Conclusion one: Research that is Meaningful to Wikwemikong	112
Conclusion two: Learning can happen at all ages	114
Conclusion three: The community must lead and apply the research	117
Conclusion four: There is a clear place for academic researchers, and also places they should not venture	120
Opportunities for future locally driven research	123
Final thoughts	123
References	128
Appendix A: Youth Leader Consent Form	134
Appendix B: Family Consent Form	137

Appendix C: REB Form	140
Appendix D: Youth Leader 1 Circle of Life	142
Appendix E: Youth Leader 2 Circle of Life	143
Appendix F: Youth Leader 3 Circle of Life	144
Appendix G: Youth Leader 4 Circle of Life	145
Appendix H: Youth Leader 5 Circle of Life	146
Appendix I: Youth Leader 6 Circle of Life	147
Appendix J: Youth Leader 7 Circle of Life	148

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Chapter Overview

Before I begin sharing the intent of the proposed research initiative that has been implemented within my circle of peers, friends, relatives and family members, I would like to inform the readers that this journey has been a great learning opportunity for myself and those who have offered guidance throughout the entire process. It is essential that I begin by informing you that the idea of pursuing my Master's Thesis was suggested by my thesis supervisor; honestly I did not think about pursuing an academic paper or to engage in higher learning until the encouragement came from a member of the academic world. I honestly did not think that I would someday be writing a thesis paper to demonstrate my knowledge and understanding of how we as Anishinabek people facilitate lifelong learning. The talking circle is one way of learning to facilitate change amongst our people. The story is being told through the use of a Circle of Life arts-based method. The Circle of Life tells the story of each youth leader that has learned something while attending the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience (OALE) in 2009, and today this learning has impacted their life in one way or another. This is known as lifelong learning and someday the youth leaders will be reminded of the challenges, successes and lessons learned as they experience life in later years. The Circle of Life reflects the medicine wheel, which has been endorsed by the community; this explanation will be shared in Chapter 4.

Within the current journey of facilitating the community story of the OALE I have an opportunity to educate mainstream learners that we as Anishinabek people and

what we have to share about our ways of life, needs to be respected; therefore the teachings of our ways is specific to our community and cannot be generalized to other First Nations.

The OALE is one example of a program, which has been designed by the people for the people of the community of Wikwemikong. However, the modules within the Wikwemikong Leadership manual can be used as a starting point for other First Nation communities to take the curriculum and apply specific teaching to align with the respective modules. The health and well-being of the youth of one aboriginal community located in Northern Ontario has been examined through a qualitative inquiry, which is being described by the lead author of this thesis. The use of participatory action research by implementation of a talking circle is described in detail as a method to generate data useful for the research team in uncovering the impacts of an intervention – the OALE that has been delivered within the community for the past five years. The OALE program was designed as a health intervention for youth between the ages of 12 -18 to assist the community with enhancing youth resiliency and well-being through participating in a culturally relevant leadership program whereby the youth experience a 10 day canoe trip, along their traditional territory; travelling approximately 116 kilometres as a group. As described in detail by Ritchie, Wabano, and Young (2010), the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience is a program that has evolved from the development of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual, co-authored with members of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve (located on Manitoulin Island, ON) and academic members of Laurentian University (Sudbury, ON). The development of the Wikwemikong Leadership

Manual became the final product of five years of research with a focus on youth leadership.

This co-authorship of the development of the OALE was the beginning of participatory action research with the community members of Wikwemikong taking the research to the next stage of implementation. This final product, the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual has now become infused into the summer program known as the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience program, geared for the youth of the Wikwemikong community.

The OALE program has culture specific principles reflective of the traditions, beliefs and values of Wikwemikong members. The Anishinabek teachings of the people are included in the daily routine of the program. Community youth, elders and frontline workers shared their expectations of the program and expressed their desire to include culturally reflective principles into the framework. The program is delivered experientially - learning by doing has demonstrated a connection to the land and further encouraged use of the oral tradition of storytelling through daily talking circles while on the canoe trip. Knowing that the daily talking circle was a routine activity for the youth leaders while on the 10-day canoe trip, this form of data gathering was the obvious choice and most safe, non-judgemental method of obtaining a clear picture of the impact that the OALE program had on our youth leaders of Wikwemikong. In every talking circle implemented within this research project, the youth leaders, their families and the community research team have learned by doing. The arts-based activity that was introduced as a way to begin the discussion and lead into the research question was accepted by the participants. The youth leaders shared openly and honestly the artwork

that depicted their lived experience, taking them back to the year they participated in the OALE.

Statement of the Problem

The initial academic training by attending the required course study of the Master's program, has somewhat trained me to think about research as a process to identify a problem and establish a research question that would be used as the basis of my research study. However, I struggled with the fact that I needed to come up with a problem, connected to the community in which I reside. For me, research only makes a difference if it can serve a purpose within the community. As part of the academic learning process, I have gained additional insight by reading the literature from Smith (1999) as she explains:

in the research context the terms research and problem are closely linked. It becomes somewhat complicated for indigenous researchers to discuss research, problem and indigenous without individuals or communities switching off because of the history of defining indigenous peoples as....the problem. For many indigenous communities research itself is taken to mean problem; the word research is believe to mean, quite literally, the continued construction of indigenous peoples as the problem. (p. 92)

After reading the literature from Smith (1999), the sub-heading statement of the problem gives me a different perspective of what research means – does one who is conducting research automatically assume that it needs to connect to a problem? In my involvement with this research activity, the activities delivered through the OALE does not strive to address a problem; the research presented does however, address the need to

encourage inclusion of culturally-based activity into the experiential learning through the delivery of the OALE. In addition, the need to involve community members into the research will further demonstrate self-determination of the community members by learning to voice their experience.

In the year 2003, academics from Laurentian University, more specifically faculty from the Human Kinetics department engaged in a research partnership with members of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve with a specific focus on addressing the challenges the elite aboriginal athletes were faced with when participating in sports off-reserve (away from their home community, also known as the First Nation). This research continued into a long-term relationship; gaining commitment from the community to proceed with several new initiatives. One of these emerging projects began in the summer of 2008 - the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience (OALE) Program was first piloted in the community of Wikwemikong implemented experientially through the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual while on a multi-day canoe trip.

With the development of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual (2008), it was evident that this manual was to be used as part of the regular program work plan for the youth of Wikwemikong. Proven within this thesis, I believe this manual became a living document within the youth program. As the previous Program Manager of the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre (receives their mandate under the direction of the Wikwemikong Health Centre), I advocated for continued funding through the existing overall Health Transfer budget from Health Canada and by demonstrating that the program could become sustainable with the existing funding that was received, the program became a part of its annual workplan. The OALE manual has now been used

each year as a training initiative for youth mentors who are hired on a short-term contract by the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre (WNCYSC) and learn by doing, therefore experientially teaching leadership modules to the youth leaders while attending the 10-day canoe trip. This is done each summer as part of the regular program of the WNCYSC. Ongoing training and facilitation practise has been integrated into the staff training plan.

In the later part of 2008, the research proposal developed in partnership with Laurentian University, Professor Stephen Ritchie was implemented first by drafting a detailed plan on how the leadership training was going to be delivered. An advisory committee was established which included youth, elders, and frontline staff of the community of Wikwemikong. The advisory committee reviewed a number of quantitative questionnaires that measured resiliency, mental, physical and emotional determinants of health (Ritchie, Wabano & Young, 2010). To engage the community in the development of the framework to be used for his research, Ritchie co-facilitated along with Wabano, several focus groups within the community of Wikwemikong. These focus groups were held between staff, youth and elders, which then lead to Ritchie developing a community-based framework, which the research would evolve. Through his doctorate work, Ritchie added value to the current OALE manual by introducing guiding principles that would then be utilized while the youth leaders participated in the 10-day canoe trip. Ritchie spent the time to learn about the protocols and value system pertinent to the community of Wikwemikong.

The local leadership (Chief & Council of Wikwemikong) have informally questioned the impact of the 10-day canoe excursion on the overall well-being of the

youth and their families. As an opportunity to learn from research, I felt the need to recommend to the Chief & Council of Wikwemikong that a research project with a specific focus on unveiling the impacts of the OALE could be implemented through my thesis work. The idea of working within my own community alongside the youth, their family members and local support from the community resources would be a natural process to gather and share the story of the lived experience of the OALE 2009. The next step to improving the overall health and well-being of the youth of Wikwemikong is to centralize the voice of our youth and to share their lived experiences of OALE; to learn the benefits gained and what changes are required to further enhance mno-bimaadziwn (the good life). Is there an opportunity for training that will engage youth in enhancing their leadership qualities? If so, what other opportunities are available to present to the youth to further enhance their leadership qualities and to grant self-expression of their own perspectives of living a healthy lifestyle – also known as mno-bimaadziwin (the good life).

Significance

The Wikwemikong Nahndahweh Tchigehgamig (House of Healing) Health Centre undergoes an evaluation every five years as required by First Nations Inuit Health – Health Canada, to demonstrate the need for additional programs/services and to determine the priorities for health programming. The community is directly involved in this process; with feedback obtained through community surveys, talking circles, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, community consultation and review of annual reports. The recommendations shared by the community youth leaders and their family members as a result of this master's thesis will be used as evidence to support the need for

continued funding of the OALE program. For the past five years, the OALE has been made possible through the Brighter Futures program, which is a funding cluster connected to the First Nations Inuit Health Contribution Agreement. Furthermore, the raw data received from the youth and their families as it pertains to suggestions for activities/programs that would benefit the community are also included as recommendations within this report.

The recommendations that have resulted from past research collaboration as it pertains to Wikwemikong and youth sport participation have evolved into a long term relationship; seeking to learn more about the needs of the community and to assist with building a firm foundation for research within the community for the benefit of their own community members. As explained by Schinke et al. (2010), the community would be encouraged to engage the youth in delivering the Wikwemikong Leadership training and to participate in sport; which was the initial onset of the OALE Leadership Training launched in Wikwemikong during the summer of 2008. The launch of the OALE in 2008 was implemented as a pilot project to explore the process of experientially teaching the curriculum as set out within the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual. The 2008 OALE pilot project hired six youth leaders, two team leaders and one project coordinator who worked as a team to test the effectiveness of learning from the leadership manual through an experiential education canoe expedition. The emphasis was placed on learning how to teach the lessons within the leadership manual and to utilize metaphors and/or culturally relevant teachings along with making the connection to the local customs and legends. The OALE program of 2008 was the beginning of a new process of experientially

teaching the modules known as the Wikwemikong Youth Leadership training manual. One male participant from this training group participated in the current research study.

To further support that the community has taken ownership of their research findings, Schinke et al. (2010) described that community members have gained ownership of the tangible results of the research, “as part of the implementation process, community members have already assumed responsibility for the program, manifesting in self-government by Wikwemikong” (p. 161). As a result, the youth leadership training manual has been used on an annual basis with the onset of the OALE program. Youth facilitators who are employed by the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre (WNCYSC) have received training in facilitating the modules outlined within the Youth Leadership Manual. While on the 10-day canoe excursion, the youth facilitators engaged the youth leaders in taking charge of leader of the day, which taught the youth to become more self-confident. The uncertainty is the value of the OALE has on enhancing resiliency and well-being beyond the life of the intervention. The Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience program is a relatively new program offered to the Aboriginal youth within Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. The story of the lived experiences through the voice of the youth leaders is the basis of this research. Secondary, the family of each youth will be invited to share their observations and offer input towards continued programming and/or recommended changes for improved programs/services as it relates to the overall well-being of the youth. As you will learn through the collective analysis of the data received from each talking circle, the community has shared the impact of the OALE on the youth leaders and their families.

Limitations

The concept of limitations is another conflict which I incurred within my own thinking as I am writing this thesis. As defined by Thomas, Nelson, and Silverman (2011), when conducting research, the “possible shortcomings or influences that either cannot be controlled or are the results of the restrictions imposed by the investigator....some limitations refer to the scope of the study which is usually set by the researcher” (p. 60). One limitation that I feel obligated to share is the fact that I am committed towards developing and sustaining an intervention that could create positive changes amongst the youth of the community. However, the sustained intervention is only made possible through the recommendations resulting from the talking circles.

The onset of this master’s thesis has been influenced by the community leadership. Formal academic training and learned experience from past research has also influenced the proposed research. As previously mentioned, I have been a collaborator and co-researcher in earlier research connected to the work that has resulted in the development of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual. Therefore I have not utilized any other training manual to influence the direction of this research. The research study is very specific to a current intervention program that is being delivered by the community of Wikwemikong.

At the time of the initial research that was presented by Schinke in 2003, I did not engage too heavily in the actual research because of my own reservations of research and not too sure about the commitment that I could make to research. My commitment was focused on program delivery for the youth. This previous research may be considered a limitation to this proposed thesis, as the work conducted in previous studies has guided

my learning in conducting research within the community of Wikwemikong. Although I did not have formal training in conducting research, the variety of research initiatives that has been shared within the community of Wikwemikong has granted me an opportunity to learn from the academic members offering their skills and knowledge.

A second limitation is to acknowledge that I was the previous Program Manager for the WNCYSC, and I am the current Health Services Director of the Wikwemikong Nahndahweh Tchigehgamig Health Centre; I feel the need to work towards learning more about the impacts of the OALE and to learn more about how we as a community can contribute new ideas towards developing leadership activities that will enhance the well-being of our community members. Through involvement as a co-researcher in the doctorate thesis of Ritchie, I have learned that our youth leaders improved their resiliency and well-being by participating in the 10-day OALE program. The influence of Ritchie's study has encouraged my thesis presentation. As the principle investigator for this master's thesis, I made the commitment to take on the responsibility of being the lead researcher and work within the parameters that are established by the community. The personal experience of attending the very first 10-day outdoor adventure leadership experience canoe trip during the summer of 2009; and witnessing the changes that occurred within the group along with sensing the overwhelming feeling of pride, has encouraged me to undertake this research. This may also be considered another limitation. However, the experience gained by participating in the 2009 OALE program has contributed towards the acknowledgement that the OALE does have an impact on the individual. Although it might not be recognized by the youth, through a natural process and by being connected with mother earth (natural environment) and practising the

culture of a community, these are methods in which our youth have engaged mno-bimaadziwin (the good life). Throughout the past five years, I have been learning more about mno-bimaadziwin (the good life).

As the community researcher I have included as many local community members to collectively move this research forward. The voice of the people became centralized with no interference from mainstream to direct the research; it is the people of the community of Wikwemikong that have provided the direction in which the research is conducted and the data gathered, shared and disseminated. For me, a clearer understanding of participatory action research has been learned by me; by continuously engaging the members of Wikwemikong in the research process and placing their voice at the forefront. A continued process of engaging the community members in providing guidance throughout the research is a reflection of the members taking ownership of the research. This research has not been presented as my research, but rather a community initiative, to learn more about the impacts that the OALE has on the overall health and well-being of our youth leaders, family and community. At the end of the day, the story being told will continue to educate one another on ways that the medicine wheel (see description on page 15) guide the individual.

Operational Definitions

Band Council resolution. A formulated motion made at a duly convened Chief and Council meeting whereby the elected leadership of the community make a motion to support a particular issue (i.e. event, research, mandate of services, funding approval, funding request, project submission) which is often supported once a presentation is made to the leadership. All duly elected Chief and Council sign a formal document to

support the request put forward. In accordance with the Indian Act (1996), the “power conferred on the council of a band shall be deemed not to be exercised unless it is exercised pursuant to the consent of a majority of the councillors of the band present at a meeting of the council duly convened” (p. 3).

Conversational interview. An interview with one or more persons in which a focused discussion occurs with a specific topic introduced to the person (s); keeping in mind the intent of the discussion and to obtain information to answer specific questions to gain knowledge on a specific topic. The conversation is not to be intentional, but to allow the discussion to be taken in a direction which allows for information sharing amongst the person (s) within the discussion. The question(s) to be presented should allow the individual members to offer their insight, thereby sharing their lived experience.

Culturally relevant intervention method. Each cultural/ethnic group would define their own intervention method that is reflective of the cultural background of the study group. In the case of this research proposal, the intent was to use the talking circle as the culturally relevant intervention method to facilitate a conversational interview with the youth leaders. The talking circle is known amongst the First Nations people as a non-intrusive, culturally focused and is considered to be a safe tool for sharing and gaining knowledge about a specific topic.

Talking Circle. A circle can occur with a small group or large group of people and can take place in a specific location where the privacy of the people involved is protected and respected. The initial intent of this research was to invite an elder and/or natural helpers of the community of Wikwemikong to provide a teaching on how to

conduct a talking circle, thereby respecting the culture of the people within Wikwemikong. The talking circle is normally conducted in a circular format with all members sitting in a circle and the discussion takes place with members offering feedback to the question being asked; the conversation moves in a clockwise format allowing each member to speak one person at a time. An object, such as an eagle feather, talking stick or rock, can be passed from the member speaking to the next to indicate the respect shown to each member offering input to the topic. The talking circle is usually unstructured in the sense that the group is allowed to speak freely to the issue/problem or event; providing as much feedback and sharing the impact that the event has place upon the individual. The circle continues as long as the participants are willing to share their experience. Once the discussion has ended, the talking circle is then concluded.

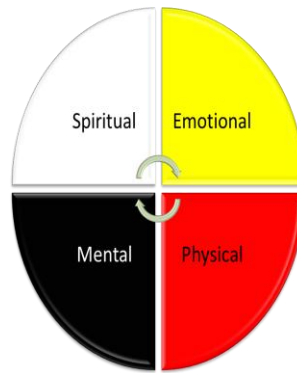
Participatory action research (PAR). PAR is described by Frisby, Reid, Millar, and Hoeber (2005) as working from the ground upwards and empowering community members through their active involvement in the research design, development, implementation, analysis and dissemination; using outcomes of the research for the benefit of the community. The need to investigate a specific issue/problem that the community identifies is essential to gaining interest from the community members in engaging and embracing the research. In the research by Schinke et al. (2010), the study involved mainstream academics, post graduate students and community coresearchers. The integrated approach increased the likelihood that the research process continuously considered the input of community members throughout the entire project. The community members and community coresearchers were directly involved in the discussion of the data that was collected and together the research team determined the

validity of the data collected. The voice of the community was shared through the story of the research findings.

Throughout this research thesis, the youth leaders were involved by sharing their lived experience through the talking circle. The youth leaders guided the direction in which the research would unfold. The lessons learned, the challenges observed and the success of the intervention has been shared as truthfully as possible. The research question(s) facilitated the discussion with guidance received from the elders and members of the community.

Mno-bimaadziwin. For many people of Wikwemikong, their first language is Ojibway and English as a second language. The translation of mno-bimaadziwin is *the good life* in the Ojibway language. As Anishinabek people of Wikwemikong, the medicine wheel is used to teach the children, youth and adults as a way to evaluate an individual's position within the medicine wheel. The medicine wheel is a culturally relevant tool that holds teachings within each direction of the universe, placing the four components of well-being throughout: east/emotional, south/physical, west/mental and north/spiritual.

Figure 1. Mno-bimaadziwin (the good life)



The elders and natural helpers of the community share the teachings of the medicine wheel. One cannot define mno-bimaadziwin through simple terms, but it can be explained through a descriptive interview of the youth. Each person has his/her own definition of mno-bimaadziwin; for some it can be associated with his/her value system and how one uses his/her everyday life to apply the lessons learned and grow from the experience. The important thing to remember is that we are all gifted with a story to share and through this sharing of our experiences we can offer an understanding of ways to balance our lives – emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually.

Youth leaders. All youth who participated in the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program which included one member from the 2008 OALE and six members from the 2009 program are considered to be the leaders of the ten day canoe excursion who are encouraged to learn from each day and honoured upon completion of the ten day outdoor leadership experience. At the time of the initial year of program implementation in 2009, the youth ranged in age from 12 – 18 years old.

Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience (OALE). The Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience is a ten day canoe expedition that is co-developed with and for the community members of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. The canoe expedition begins in the community of Wikwemikong, travelling by vehicle to the French River, Ontario, where the youth leaders and trip guides launch their canoes to travel the French River, to Georgian Bay, along Beaverstone Creek, Point Grondine, along Collins Inlet, to Killarney Bay and homeward to Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. This 10-day canoe expedition takes our youth along their traditional territory, learning many stories about the history of our people; experientially learning the modules within the Wikwemikong Leadership manual; along with gaining self-reflection into their own well-being. The youth leadership experience allows for self-empowerment, building upon their self-esteem and self-confidence.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature: The Wikwemikong Research Experience

Chapter Overview

Over the course of eleven years, Wikwemikong has been involved in a mutually respectful relationship with academic researchers from Laurentian University. As Schinke et al. (2010) describes the relationship building amongst academic researchers and community coresearchers within one Aboriginal community, this relationship began its journey with the onset of the research pertaining to the study of elite athletes and their adaptation to elite sports off-reserve. Since then, the collaborative relationship has continued to embrace research to meet the needs of the youth within the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. Together, research has been conducted with and for the benefit of the community. An overview of the experience shared between academic researchers and locally community members of Wikwemikong has demonstrated elements of establishing PAR methodology within an Indigenous community.

Wikwemikong Research Experience

Several members within the community of Wikwemikong have gained experience and knowledge in carrying out research with members of their community; with training and capacity building shared by members of Laurentian University. More recently, in the literature shared by Schinke, Smith, and McGannon (2013), an overview of practical ways of engaging community research is explained by establishing and identifying a list of criteria to consider when working within an Indigenous community. The following criteria have been suggested as a guide for conducting community research; this guide is to be considered as it has demonstrated to serve as a meaningful process for the

community of Wikwemikong: community driven research, localising research practices/methods, decentralized university academics, prolonged engagement and consultation, community capacity building, project deliverables, and project sustainability (Schinke et al., 2013). I have provided examples of several collaborative research initiatives as evidence to support the criteria as listed above to support Wikwemikong's research experience in partnership with the Human Kinetics department within Laurentian University, Sudbury.

Canadian Aboriginal Elite Athlete Motivations and Adaptations. This was the first research initiative that was presented to the community of Wikwemikong, which was supported by the community leadership. Members of Wikwemikong played a key role as co-researchers in this study to assist with recruitment of elite athletes who had been a competitor in sports off-reserve. The research study focused on how the elite Aboriginal athlete prepared for their competition. As explained by Schinke et al. (2009) the "main purpose of the study was to determine the pre-competition and competition practices of elite Canadian Aboriginal athletes" (p. 161). The introduction to research as it related to youth and sport became more than just a short-term research partnership. This initial research initiative grew into a long-term research relationship; one that has proven to be a successful journey towards meaningful research with useful 'end products' that have been used by the community of Wikwemikong for the benefit of the community members.

Adaptation Challenges and Strategies of Adolescent Aboriginal Athletes

Competing Off-Reserve. Members of the community of Wikwemikong voiced the need to learn more about ways in which the community could support youth athletes who leave

the community to compete in elite sport. As a result of the initial research initiative presented in 2003, one major outcome that resulted in the findings was the recommendation to develop a youth leadership manual.

Through the research by Schinke et al. (2006), the findings describe two categories of adaptation: “self adaptation and adaptive environment” (p. 441). Together the academic researcher and the community champions have worked to share the story about the challenges faced by aboriginal elite athletes and share ways in which the aboriginal athletes had to overcome the challenges. A significant amount of time spent learning about the cultural difference between the mainstream academic researcher and the aboriginal community collaborators was one of the highlights of the research. As time evolved, the research continued with the community coresearchers; one end product achieved is the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual. Together, the academic researcher(s) and community coresearchers prepared a final document that has been experientially used through the 10 day outdoor adventure leadership program. This is a prime example of making the best use of your local and external resources and putting tangible products to use for the overall benefit of the community.

The Role of Families in Youth Sport Programming in a Canadian Aboriginal Reserve. The community of Wikwemikong encouraged one another to become immersed into the research, thereby taking ownership for the end result. Within the literature, Schinke et al. (2010) describes Linda Smith’s methodology of involving the community in designing the research and working towards addressing a community issue. With the community being directly involved in the entire process, the research then empowers the community and the members to embrace ownership of the final result of the research

findings. This has been further demonstrated through the voice of members of the Wikwemikong community who have co-authored the research experience through vignettes:

- i) Portrait Vignettes completed with nine coresearchers of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve: were used to tell the story of the community's involvement in research and to learn from past challenges, thereby sharing lessons learned and offering a renewed process of conducting research within one First Nation.
- ii) Community Composite Vignette co-authored to support decolonizing methodology; to describe a community's voice therefore providing clear expectations of research being conducted within a First Nation community. Here the community members worked together to share their view on criteria that an academic researcher needs to consider when proposing research within an Indigenous community. An indigenous methodology to consider would be to involve the community membership as lead researchers, thereby giving the community ownership of the research. Several members of the community of Wikwemikong vocalized their apprehension to participating in research, mainly because of the fact that in the past, mainstream researchers came into the community, led the research, took the data, and at times did not disseminate the results. This negative experience had the community feeling distrustful of any new research. With the commitment shared by Schinke et al. (2013), this new way of doing business within the community of

Wikwemikong as it relates to research, has been described in several academic writings.

The Aboriginal Role Model Project. The Medicine Wheel, much like the Mandala is also known by the community members of Wikwemikong as the Circle of Life. In her academic experience, Blodgett et al. (2013) has learned an innovative way of interviewing and gathering data to support an investigation into the experience of youth athletes who participate in elite sport on/off-reserve. Through the use of an arts-based method, the participants were able to express their thoughts and experiences by drawing within a circle; a conversational interview followed the completion of the artwork, with a thorough discussion about the athletes experience was described much like storytelling. Blodgett et al. (2013) further described that the mandala facilitated the participatory action research, to learn about the lived experience of young athletes who relocated to urban area to pursue their dream.

As evidence to support the statement “community proposed research tends to pave the way for more relevant research questions and culturally safe methodologies” (Schinke et al., 2013, p. 463), the community of Wikwemikong has embraced an additional research opportunity which is presented through the work of Stephen Ritchie based on the refinement of the OALE program.

Development of an Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program. Since the development of the program in 2008, the community of Wikwemikong has hosted approximately 170 youth through the successful completion of the 10-day canoe expedition which has been supported through a collaborative arrangement with a doctoral student connected to Laurentian University (School of Rural and Northern Health). The

question: “Does the OALE program enhance resiliency and well-being of youth in a northern First Nation” was the research question that applied to the OALE intervention. Final dissertation of Stephen Ritchie (PhD Candidate) has been completed. The questionnaire that was utilized in his research pertained to mainstream content; with no reference to spiritual well-being.

In his study, Ritchie et al. (2010) used a mixed methods approach through a qualitative and quantitative process. As explained by Ritchie et al. (2010): “during July and August 2009, a total of 43 youth from Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve participated in the six OALE programs (intervention) that were delivered experientially during a canoe expedition homeward in the traditional territory of the community” (p. 6). As reported by Ritchie et al. (2010) the results of the pre and post questionnaires clearly indicated that the youth experienced an improvement in their resilience, which were a result of the OALE program. This finding has been presented at various conferences by Ritchie, Wabano, and colleagues - an invitation to attend various conferences by submitting an abstract. The preliminary findings of the quantitative data from the pre/post questionnaires of the OALE were presented at the Ontario Hospital Association Conference (2011), an oral and poster presentation at the 4th International Meeting on Indigenous Child Health (2011), Native Mental Health Conference: Practical Approaches to Opioid Abuse and Children's Mental Health in First Nation Communities (2010). All presentations provided an opportunity for the coresearchers of Wikwemikong in partnership with the academic mainstream researcher(s) to co-present the results of the research as it relates to the ‘promoting resilience and well-being through the OALE’ program.

Wikwemikong's Unfolding Orientation. The local input of the community had guided this research thereby making the research meaningful and applicable to the community priorities. There are several steps that need to be incorporated into the research process in order for this project to be considered and applied within the community of Wikwemikong. As told by Blodgett (2010), it is important to explore meaningful and culturally appropriate research methods when working within an Aboriginal community. As previously reported (Wabano, 2011) the need to examine the impact of the good life five years post the OALE intervention is the basis of the implementation of the talking circles. This culturally relevant intervention method has been described by Picou (2000) as an acceptable process in gaining knowledge and allowing the participants to share their thoughts and experiences in a safe non-judgemental environment. The proposed method, through the use of a talking circle with the support of an arts-based activity to encourage self-expression, was presented to the community. This culturally relevant intervention method has not been previously implemented in any manner with the youth of the community; nor have the adults/elders engaged in any form of study pertaining to the impact of the good life on their families as it relates to the implementation of the OALE program. The process of involving the family members in learning and sharing their views on the impacts of the OALE are described in detail; as the story is expressed by the youth leaders and their family members by asking the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. Do the youth and their families believe that the Wikwemikong OALE has impacted their overall well-being (mno-bimaadziwin – the good life)?

2. Do the youth and their families have any recommendations for further program developments as it pertains to OALE?

CHAPTER III

Indigenous Methodologies

Chapter Overview

There is support from literature that expresses the need for Indigenous methodologies to be considered when engaging in research within an Indigenous community. As described by Blodgett et al. (2013), in her work, “aboriginal researchers contributed experiential and cultural knowledge to the project, guiding forward an Indigenous methodology that was rooted in local protocols, values, traditions and ways of knowing” (p. 316). As a community member of Wikwemikong and lead researcher in this current study, a review of the local Indigenous methodology will be described in this chapter. The local protocols, values, traditions and ways of knowing are well known to the local community research team. In addition, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the use of PAR and how it has been presented with the current research thesis.

The Wikwemikong Community

The Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve is home to 3018 members living on-reserve; which is located in the eastern part of Manitoulin Island, Ontario. The community is comprised of Odawa, Ojibway and Pottawatomi First Nations people who are rich in their traditional culture, language and spiritual beliefs. The programs and services that are delivered within the community are made possible through federal and provincial funding. The local leadership consists of one elected Chief and twelve elected Band Councillors who have the responsibility of ensuring programs and services are delivered based on the funding agreements. All funding agreements are signed by the

elected leadership; however the implementation of each funded program is under the authority of respective administrators. The programs that are administered by the community are as follows: cultural/language, economic development, education, financial management, governance, health, housing, lands/resources, public works and infrastructure, and social services. As of August 2012, the Wikwemikong Community Comprehensive Plan has been finalized by each program department to ensure the community priorities are addressed within each organization's workplan. This document is of great value for each program offered within the community, as each department is held accountable for responding to the needs of the community. As the community engages in research initiatives, one can refer to the benefits listed within the priorities of this community. One priority that lends support to the proposed research is clearly identified in the Wikwemikong Comprehensive Community Plan (2012): "To develop and deliver a comprehensive set of programs and services that emphasize prevention, a holistic approach to health and healthy lifestyles, and that meet the different needs of our women, men, children and elders" (p.34). This priority weighs heavily on the mandate of the programs and services offered through the Nahndahweh Tchigehgamig Wikwemikong Health Centre. The research thesis findings will further support the priority needs of the holistic approach to health and healthy lifestyles.

The research proposal required the support of the local elected leadership. To demonstrate respect for the leadership and to ensure commitment to the project, as a member of the community and the lead researcher, I took the lead in presenting the project at a meeting with the Chief and Council. The presentation provided an overview of the purpose of the research, the benefits of working with local champions; identified

key community members who would be invited to become more active members in the research process; and to genuinely express the interest of co-learning more about the impacts of the OALE with our youth. Here the local leadership had an opportunity to offer their input into the implementation of the research. Direction received from my thesis supervisor was taken to heart therefore as the community lead researcher, it was felt that the establishment of a community research team will be the first point of order to ensure the members of Wikwemikong co-design, co-implement, co-analyze, and co-present the findings of the research. This thesis proposal was presented to the Wikwemikong Chief & Council who accepted the research proposal through Band Council Motion #293-2013:

293-2013 A.E. Maniwabani

Robert Corbiere

WHEREAS, Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve recognizes and supports the need to evaluate the overall impacts and benefits of the Outdoor Adventure leadership Experience program that is currently offered through the Brighter Futures Program – Nahdahweh Tchigehgamig Wikwemikong Health Centre;

WHEREAS, the opportunity exists for Wikwemikong to enter a partnership of participatory action research which addresses the ‘impacts of the Outdoor Adventure leadership Experience program’ and to determine the priorities for youth leadership opportunities; by which research will be coordinated in collaboration with Mary Jo Wabano, a Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve band member and a Master’s student in the Human Kinetics program at Laurentian University;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve Council agree and support this proposed thesis. A final report on the research findings shall be reported back to the community during an open forum.

Without this BCM, the research would not have been conducted within the community.

The support of the local elected leadership demonstrated the priorities of research and the commitment from the community members in the importance of learning about findings

of the research being implemented. Once again, a mutual respect is demonstrated not only by the community lead researcher by making a commitment to share the results through an open forum but also by having the elected leadership support the proposed research by a member of the community.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

In the past, mainstream academic researchers imposed their research upon First Nations people, without making the commitment to work with the members. The resistance from community members was rightfully expected knowing that there would be little consultation and/or inclusion of community resources to assist with the planning, designing, implementation and dissemination of the research results. Smith (1999) posed the following questions:

Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interest does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will results be disseminated? (p. 10)

The community of Wikwemikong has taken the approach of being self-determining and building capacity in our community members; thereby ensuring that all research initiatives are community-driven. A decolonizing approach within this research has been embraced and demonstrated without labelling the research as an indigenous decolonization theory. The community research team expressed the need to advocate on behalf of the community and demonstrate their knowledge and skills by supporting the research at every possible stage of implementation. At no point did the community research team request for support from the mainstream academics to guide this research.

All the lessons learned become a part of the lived experience of working towards the good life. The support of Smith (1999) in her literature prompts an understanding that, decolonization however does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understanding theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (p. 39)

This is further supported by the community research team by acknowledging that “its an accomplishment, you can change the rules.....you can do it the Indian way, why make me follow their standards” (Elder 1, October 15, 2013). A learning curve has taken place within the community of Wikwemikong to ensure that research has an end result for the benefit of WUIR members. The primary purpose of this thesis is to present a community story of impact of the OALE and the story is inclusive of all members connected to the research study. This research is for the sole benefit of the members of Wikwemikong.

PAR & Locally Driven Community Research

In the case of this proposal, I (Mary Jo) am a community member of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve; taking responsibility of transferring knowledge of being involved in the practical applications of research within a First Nation. I have demonstrated commitment towards involving the community members and sharing the experiences of community research with a shared common goal of change. The change would be directed towards overall well-being of the youth of our community. It is anticipated that the findings of this proposed research will support the evaluation of the effectiveness of the OALE program and to provide evidence of the need for continued services for the upcoming First Nations Inuit Health five (5) year community health plan

for Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, through the Wikwemikong Health Centre. A final report of this thesis will be presented to the elected leadership (Chief & Council) to have the final acceptance and inclusion of the recommendations into any document to support funding opportunities. Being involved in the aboriginal health care field has provided me an opportunity for exposure and sharing of the research findings connected to the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program. The experience of working collaboratively with the community along with capacity building and knowledge sharing amongst the academic researcher has been co-presented at various conferences; reinforcing the learning that has taken place and sharing the responsibilities of presenting the results of the research completed within the community of Wikwemikong.

The qualitative methodology of participatory action research (PAR) has many tools to offer for data gathering. How does one decide which tool or method as the main instrument for gathering data? What experience is required to effectively implement the research method? Are there any limitations to the method selected? How trustworthy are the findings and who determines that the data is valid? Is the term 'validity' applicable within our culture? Who benefits from the research? In the work presented by Blodgett et al. (2011), the use of the portrait vignette of nine community members tells the story of how a community has experienced research in the past and offers insight on ways that research can benefit the community when the members of the community are directly involved in the entire process. Further described by Blodgett et al. (2011), "by engaging in PAR and praxis, the intent through the current work was to empower Aboriginal co-researchers from one Reserve and come forward and voice local research experiences and recommendations in their own words" (p. 8). As each vignette was shared, Blodgett et al.

(2011) further elaborated that the use of vignettes as a storytelling mechanism has permitted the co-researchers to describe their lived experience as it related to research within the community. In addition, Blodgett et al. (2013) described the use of an arts-based method to “facilitate PAR and generate knowledge that is more deeply connected to the lives of Aboriginal community members” (p. 317). This model was used as the framework for the research presented by me; with and for the community of Wikwemikong. Similar, an introduction to the mandala as the art-based method was used as a cultural acceptable method, one that would allow the individual to speak freely and express the experience by use of art to describe the lived experience involved in the research study.

Based on the experience of the Wikwemikong community, PAR has been described as involving the community members in all aspects of the research; with the introduction of the research idea, building the foundation of the idea with community members; including the community members who are beneficiaries of the research or those who have been impacted by a community issue/concern. The research question and process to obtain the data are co-designed with the community and lead researcher. The format and process by which the research is implemented is through the collaborative relationship with the members of the community. The community members have control and ownership with the research process; the lead researcher engages with the community members to learn the cultural practices of the community as demonstration of respect for the members and the community protocols.

Through PAR there is mutual sharing of knowledge, understanding community practices; mutual capacity building; and empowering the research participants to take a

lead role in the implementation of research. This is further explained in the work conducted within the community of Wikwemikong, as described by Schinke et al. (2010): “the Wikwemikong members provided contextual knowledge to facilitate the development of appropriate questions; proposed relevant research methods and an overarching PAR approach” (p. 161). The members of Wikwemikong were involved in all aspects of the research being conducted; which included the framing of specific questions that were presented during the talking circles with the youth and adult community members. The data was transcribed and themes coded with the input of the community co-researchers. Schinke et al. (2010) further describes that the “intent was to forefront the views of the Aboriginal co-researchers throughout the coding, thus supporting de-colonizing practises, all the while enhancing authenticity” (p. 161). Reaffirming this practice, Schinke et al. (2009), described the process by which the data is reviewed as a group with direct community involvement, therefore understanding and sharing of the terminology of the language/context of the wording. To demonstrate the importance of the involvement of community members in their own research, Schinke et al. (2009) provided a direct quote from a coresearcher from Wikwemikong (Duke Peltier)

Wikwemikong’s standpoint is taken into direct consideration at each meeting.

Our group sees the benefits upon completion of the research. The intent through our discussions is to provide a closer transparency of how and why our work is unfolding as it is. (p. 315)

The context of the story being told is authentic to the community of Wikwemikong; thus, providing trustworthiness to the findings of the research with involvement of the community members. In addition, we must also acknowledge the fact that PAR allows

for the academic researcher to “reposition oneself and redistribute power” (Schinke et al., 2013, p. 464), therefore community members are encouraged to take ownership of the research and guide any future research needs and/or priorities.

As a result, this collaboration has left a positive impression on the community with an end product of data that can be shared with other aboriginal communities. With respect to Wikwemikong and Laurentian University, the research collaboration has offered ongoing positive relations along with demonstrating mutual respect.

Indigenous Knowledge as an Insider

Through participatory action research, the community has engaged in a collaborative relationship with the academic researcher to foster a culturally relevant intervention method. As the academic researcher, I have found this entire process generate confusion with my own beliefs. To live in my own community and gain the experience from outside researchers by participating as a community co-researcher has its benefits but at the same time has its challenges. The benefits weigh heavily on learning as much as I could from the various research initiatives that have been implemented within the community of Wikwemikong. The challenges have been associated with the learning the skills and knowledge in my role as an insider researcher. The term insider has given me a renewed approach to learning from within my own community. Faith Maina, (2003) described her experience as a researcher within her own community, circle of colleagues; implementing research with the support of community members and by involving the practitioner and the participant in a collaborative process to ensure the research is implemented with the ongoing involvement of all parties. As further explained by Maina (2003), she explains that

Kushner and Norris (1980), argue that the task of understanding can only be successfully pursued when provisions are made for people to move from merely articulating what they know (i.e., providing us with data) to theorizing about what they know (i.e., creating meaning) (p. 220).

This further supports the process used in this research implemented with our community research team by engaging the community member right from the beginning, involving the community resources to provide input into the research process. The community members were also involved in analyzing the data and working together to share their understanding of the lived experience. The awareness that I have gained in learning about the medicine wheel and the placement of the four quadrants of well-being has its benefits to the outcome of this thesis. As a respected member of my community, the research team that accepted the invitation to assist with the study were very supportive in accepting the process of sharing the story of the lived experience by incorporating the findings through the use of the medicine wheel. The overall impact of the OALE has been demonstrated by using the four quadrants of health and well-being, thereby demonstrating an insider opinion of the impact of the OALE; keeping in mind that the research team, youth leaders and family members all contributed towards the story being shared.

As an insider researcher, there was less reliance on local community resources to engage the community in the research. Time was not needed to get to know the people or to become aware of the protocols of the community as I have been a longstanding community member of Wikwemikong and fully aware of the steps required to pursue research in the community of Wikwemikong. I also have inside knowledge of how to

contact members within the community by knowing who the youth leaders are and which family they are connected. This has been to my advantage as a community member as I tend to believe that I have established a trusting relationship with the members of my community and the mutual respect has been demonstrated by those who have fully engaged in this research initiative. It is my belief that this process would not be fully attainable if the research was done with an outside community or another First Nation.

The knowledge of the community story is shared as authentic words of the participants; translated by the community research team by using the medicine wheel to share a visual of the impacts gained as a result of the OALE. The transcription of each talking circle was viewed as rich data received from the community members. The transcription of each story is connected to the arts-based Circle of Life. Each member of the community research team has been instrumental in making sense of the transcribed data. A decision was made earlier on in the research process to share the data by labelling and placing the key concepts onto the medicine wheel; thereby presenting the impact of the OALE by using the Anishinabek culturally relevant tool to demonstrate how the OALE has affected the overall well-being of the youth.

Local Community Research Team

As the community lead researcher, I have insider knowledge about the expectations of the community of Wikwemikong when research is implemented *with* and *for* the community. This has been learned by being involved in community research initiatives since 2003. Through a collaborative process, a community research team has been established who are all members of the community of Wikwemikong. The

members consist of one male elder, one female elder, one youth worker and me, as the community research lead.

The male and female elder are members who have experience in past research projects connected to youth leadership in Wikwemikong. For the purpose of this research project, it should be explained that an elder is considered to be someone who has cultural knowledge and awareness of the language, customs and beliefs associated with the membership of Wikwemikong. The role of an elder in this research study has been defined as a member who can offer experience in their working knowledge of the Anishinaabe medicine wheel and one who would be able to share their understanding of balancing the four quadrants of health and its association with health and well-being.

At the onset of the research study, all members of the community research team were provided with tobacco requesting their commitment and participation as contributing members for this research project. Several meetings of all members have been coordinated throughout the implementation of the research as a mechanism for the members to provide direct input into the process. As a follow-up to each talking circle, the research team was invited to provide feedback to ensure ongoing involvement in the next steps to analysis of the data and making recommendations in involvement of the youth leaders and their family members. The youth leaders and their family members were also involved in the review of the data and sharing the impacts of the OALE. The involvement of the community research team members, the youth leaders and their families has proven to be a true element of PAR; the research has direct input from the community. The members have embraced the culturally relevant method as a mechanism for sharing the lived experience of OALE. To further support the concept of

participatory action research, the community voice is being heard and has provided the direction of the research, with guidance and support from the lead community researcher.

In gaining insight as it pertains to the topic that is being examined, it was anticipated that the information shared by the youth would help provide further direction in program design and delivery of the OALE. Has the OALE had an impact on mmo-bimaadziwin of the youth and their families? Are there any lessons and/or teachings that we can share with the local leadership who will advocate for additional resources to support ongoing program development surrounding the OALE? Are there any recommendations being made by the youth leaders to further support or enhance their leadership training? These were some of the questions that led to the development of the research questions.

There have been some challenges with the PAR process in the sense of making every attempt to involve the community research team in every step of the research. The initial intent was to involve an elder in every talking circle, to offer a balanced approach to the conversational interview. However, this did not happen, as each talking circle was scheduled based on the availability of the youth leaders and/or their family. The impromptu approach was taken; therefore the talking circles were implemented with or without the elder present. The elder did not express any offense to being excluded from any session. The idea of accepting that the research needs to be flexible which is supported by the experience as described by author Maina (2003), has more meaning to me as a community researcher. The entire research process involved being flexible and available based on the schedule of all members connected to the process.

One lesson learned as I have engaged in this master's thesis is to embrace patience and accept the fact that the research process will fall into place and the steps of coming full circle to completion of the research will occur as it was meant rather than the standard method of following a linear timeline. The mainstream linear timeline was an internal battle that I struggled with; but it was a teaching that I had to learn and embrace the natural process that event of completing this research thesis would unfold when appropriate. As I have also come to learn, that PAR is like our circle of life; the process is never –ending. The cyclical process is carried forward as our lifelong learning within the medicine wheel. The learning and transfer of knowledge gained from this master's thesis will continue as the findings and recommendations are taken into a new level of use within the community. As a community member of Wikwemikong, and a champion to ensuring that data is used for the benefit of the community, a priority will be placed on the recommendations described by the youth leaders and their family members.

The research is done *with* and *for* the community rather than *on* the community participants. The Participatory Action Research model is described in detail by various authors (Blodgett et al., 2011; Dickson, 2000; Frisby et al., 2005; Holkup et al., 2004; Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008; Meyer, 1993; Picou, 2000; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). The method is learned, shared and accepted between the community co-researchers and the academic co-researchers; balancing the power between the two groups rather than the researcher being in total control, decision are mutual; working together to address a social issue or problem. Absolon and Willett (2004), support this framework by stating that “today the game has changed. We Indigenous people own our own knowledge. We make up the rules. We set our own goals. We know who we are and what we need to do

for our own sake” (p. 11). In addition, Absolon and Willett (2004) expressed that “methodologies such as community-based research and participatory action research have provided a launch pad for the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies and community participation” (p. 11). This reference further supports the process of using PAR as the method used to learn from the members of Wikwemikong; respect for knowledge sharing has been mutual.

As a community member that has been involved in community based participatory action research, the skills, knowledge and hands-on training that I have learned by doing only makes sense to share this knowledge with members of the community in which I belong. As a band member of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, the capacity development has been established by being a collaborator, co-researcher and/or a co-investigator in one or more local research initiatives connected to the community of Wikwemikong. Furthermore, through this research study the community has demonstrated ownership, control, access and possession of the research findings. The community research team members provided ongoing guidance and direction for the research study. It is felt that the members of the research team and those members who participated in the research study appreciated the time and commitment that I (research lead) have made to the community to focus my thesis on the impacts of the OALE and to share the findings to the community at large. There has been a demonstration of mutual trust as this research was conducted. As the lead researcher, I have the knowledge and thorough understanding of the OALE program and how it has evolved. The training component that is required to build on the capacity of the local

youth is also an area that has been discussed at a program level for the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Service program.

Integrating Mainstream Approach with Local Indigenous Practice

Blodgett et al. (2011) describe, through the use of PAR that the, mainstream researchers can move beyond ventriloquism and speak on behalf of others, rather through the use of vignettes, those marginalized can then be given the opportunity to come forward and tell their stories in a way deemed meaningful, grounded in their lived experience and the larger cultural context.

(p. 8)

The nine portrait vignettes proved to tell the story from the perspective of the community in its experience of research being conducted within one aboriginal community. This lived experience has prompted a composite vignette which depicts a collective story of all nine portrait vignettes. The shared vignette co-authored by community coresearchers and mainstream academics is described in detail by Blodgett et al. (2010), one that “reflects a summarized account of community members’ experiences engaging in research with mainstream academic and includes some initial recommendations for future researcher” (p. 69). As one group, the community coresearchers and mainstream academics came together to coauthor one composite vignette – with the main content expressed through the voice of the community. As a result, the community’s cultural context was embedded throughout the vignette, thereby incorporating the cultural of the community into the title of the work with the use of the Ojibway language - “Naadmaadmi – which translates into helping each other towards a mutual goal” (p. 69). The language and the use of community members voice to share their story of the lived experience of being involved

in research has evolved into a continued effort to help one another fulfill additional research initiatives *with* and *for* the community of Wikwemikong. The process is cyclical, therefore adapting to changes as the research occurs (frequent meetings between the academic co-researcher, the community co-researcher(s) and other research team members are required to address any challenges that arise); analyzing the data as a group; disseminating the findings; and making recommendations for future use of the data; empowering the research participants and/or community members by being directly involved in the developing, designing, implementation, analyzing data and disseminating the findings.

The examples provided above have clearly indicated the shared responsibility of engaging in research, for the mutual benefit of the group(s) committed to the results of the data gathered.

Indigenous Cultural Practices

Earlier research that has been conducted within the community of Wikwemikong in partnership with Laurentian University provided further investigation within the context of the pre-requisites to conducting research with emphasis on incorporating indigenous cultural practices. As described by Schinke et al. (2009) the,

community of Wikwemikong was willing to proceed passively at first and support the researchers' colonial agenda; the proposal for research funding was completed by mainstream researchers. As Duke affirmed below....the approach that was taken is the initial proposal was one that was intrusive in a person's inner space.

In hindsight, the process could have included cultural norms and practices when

requesting that information be shared with the researchers. The passing of Semaa (tobacco) is customary when requesting the sharing of knowledge. (p. 313)

Through direct involvement and a willingness to learn from hands-on experience, the mainstream coresearchers took the time to learn more about the indigenous cultural practices of Wikwemikong. Together, both cultural practices (mainstream and indigenous) have come together to understand and respect the voices of the community.

Based on the firsthand knowledge and experience of research collaboration the sharing of cultural practices between mainstream academics and local community culture of Wikwemikong, Schinke et al. (2009) emphasized the goal is to “transition away from mainstream research practices and toward indigenous research strategies among the Wikwemikong” (p. 301). In their work (Schinke et al., 2009), the coauthors described the movement from “mainstream approaches such as semi structured interviewing, hierarchical content analysis, data matrices, and numeric frequencies in categories” (p. 301) to a more “community proposed research project, community meetings, talking circles, community proposed terminology, community involvement in the analysis of data, and the integration and ownership of the results” (p. 311). The practical experience gained through a shared research role within the community of Wikwemikong has uncovered many lessons learned in engaging research through the lens of an indigenous perspective. The community research experience is further demonstrated in chapter VI; which describes the involvement of the community research team in the data analysis review and concept identification.

The role of the elder is widely respected within the context of Anishinabek practices whereby an elder is normally a person who is well respected and willing to

share his/her knowledge with the people. A newly accepted practise is to offer a gift of tobacco when visiting an elder; at this time, a discussion about the work to be done is all that is required by the person offering the tobacco. The elder can either accept or decline the tobacco; if the tobacco is accepted, the elder has then accepted the responsibility of the work to be done. If the elder does not feel comfortable in performing the duties being asked, an alternate resource is recommended by the elder. Prior to offering the tobacco, the person who is providing the offering would seek advice from the community members as a referral to a community elder. Many questions can be posed to the elder, such as obtaining a clear description of the purpose of a talking circle and the use of a talking stick/eagle feather to conduct the talking circle.

The medicine lodge which is located in the Wikwemikong Health Centre has been established to provide a safe haven for community members to gather and discuss personal issues; community issues and/or to host various ceremonies that are specific to the people of Wikwemikong. This was the preferred location to host each talking circle for the purpose of this research.

Locally driven community research

As a commitment to learn from one another, the community research team has engaged in the entire process of developing, designing and implementation of the research followed by analyzing the data and disseminating the findings. This process involved several community research team meetings, one of which provided the group an opportunity to draw their own Circle of Life and share their lived experience of the OALE. This opportunity has provided the research team with appreciation of the individual experiences. The varying degrees of experience have provided a unique

analysis of the initial data received from each talking circle. One might consider this process a limitation and that a bias viewpoint might affect the results of the research. This process demonstrates community culture where the voice of the people is respected and valued. As the lead in this community research, the respect of the community research team has been embedded throughout this process. Time and patience have been two elements that have guided me in this project. The time devoted to attend the academic portion of the Master's program; and the patience from the academic supervisor and thesis committee to implement the research study. Although I have been involved in many community research projects since 2003, there was no heavy expectation placed on the youth leaders and their families to meet certain timelines; as a matter of fact, the schedule for each talking circle was at the discretion and availability of the youth leaders and their families. Similarly, the involvement and attendance of all community research team members at every talking circle was not mandatory.

The approach taken in achieving this research study has been demonstrated as respecting knowledge of the community members engaged in the project. Without standardizing a process, the steps taken to conduct each talking circle varied. In the first circle, an elder offered a smudge and prayer to begin the circle; providing a teaching on the sharing of knowledge. The second talking circle was conducted without the traditional smudge/prayer, but allowed for an unscripted dialogue with the youth leader in the presence of an elder. A third talking circle was conducted solely by the community research lead without the traditional smudge/prayer. All three talking circles were coordinated and implemented based on the availability of the youth leaders and were held in the medicine lodge within the Wikwemikong Health Centre. The medicine lodge is

equipped with a fire pit and although it was presented in the initial research proposal that the fire would be an option for each session, this did not occur. Once again, the protocol and agreement of how each talking circle would occur should have been collectively determined by the community research team. As the community research lead, I made the decision to proceed without the fire. In my opinion, the absence of a fire did not inhibit the sharing around the talking circle. However, for future reference, a fire keeper would be a requirement of the community resources as part of the community research team if this was the expected protocol to follow as a part of conducting the talking circle. The fire keeper is a skilled resource person, who is male and has learned the responsibilities of being a fire keeper. Time to include this teaching and training into the research project was not included in the research implementation. However, this would be one recommendation coming from this research, is to take the time to train a group of young men to learn this role. One family circle was completed in a public environment at the choice of the family.

In addition, Picou (2000) clarified the process by which the talking circle is used as a culturally relevant method for “sharing onself, one’s experiences, feeling and thoughts....a social activity that can be tailored to a variety of audiences and social situations” (p. 83). The talking circle was used as a method to discuss an environmental issue that affected the Alaskan Native people in the year 1995, as a way to talk about the impacts of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Members of the community were invited to attend the talking circle by way of poster advertisements. The participation was strictly voluntary. The design of the talking circle and structure of the process of implementation was determined by the members of the community; thereby taking ownership of the

process and intervention. In the work presented by Picou (2000), the talking circle is described as a culturally based intervention strategy utilized to “promote collective empowerment of local residents through the participatory research model. By designing, organizing, promoting, and participating in the talking circle, members of the Native Village of Eyak become active participants in this transformation process” (p. 93). This is encouraging to learn the power and strength that a talking circle can have in directing future developments of a community and guiding the well-being of the people. The talking circle can not only provide solutions to issues/problems; but also lift the spirits of the people and give hope by coming to an understanding that life situations occur for a reason, and that there is a lesson to be learned in all that we experience. In the case of the Alaskan Native people, they learned more about their own cultural practices; along with learning to plan, organize and implement the talking circle as an intervention to address a community problem.

The community of Wikwemikong has the capacity to deliver their own research with some guidance and support from a nearby academic institution – Laurentian University. As one small community has engaged in research through a participatory action process, the collaboration has evolved into a meaningful relationship; one that has transferred knowledge and skill to the community members as a means of building capacity and empowering the community members to implement their own research using their own culturally relevant intervention method.

As the principle investigator of this research in collaboration with local community researchers, we continue to learn the required academic skill and protocols to ensure that an ethical process is practiced. Thereby, the learning curve has moved from

step by step process to a hands-on practical approach. The uniqueness of this research study is that I have had the opportunity to involve a youth worker who has been directly connected to the OALE since its pilot project in 2008. His experience as a youth leader then and gaining knowledge on teaching the experiential lessons of the OALE manual have provided an insider view of the impacts of the OALE. The lessons learned in 2008 and the transfer of this knowledge and experience into the research study enriched the story being presented as the lived experience.

CHAPTER IV

The Lived Experience & Circle of Life

Chapter Overview

The connection between the stories of the impact that the OALE as experienced by the youth leaders and their family members are described in this chapter, which is expressed through the examples of the Circle of Life arts-based method. The knowledge and skills learned by participating in the OALE have been described through the use of the medicine wheel.

Mno-bimaadziwin (the good life)

To further develop the framework of a culturally relevant intervention method of gathering data within the Aboriginal community, the researcher has the responsibility of learning the meaning of mno-bimaadziwin (the good life), in order that the value system, customs and beliefs are respected and honoured. In her dissertation, Toulouse (2001) shared a teaching from one elder within her community. An elder of the Sagamok First Nation describes bimaadziwin as a “value and describes the responsibilities of those who learn about life and to share these life teachings with others. The gift of learning and sharing our experiences becomes a responsibility” (p. 19). The use of oral tradition was one of the main sources of data gathering including narrative storytelling and visual anthropology for the dissertation as presented by Toulouse (2001). The native language translation associates the good life with maintaining balance in life.

Several authors have described the meaning of mno-bimaadziwin (the good life) as being responsible for sharing life’s experience and teachings with one another and learning to balance one’s life – emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. The

medicine wheel teaching is incorporated into our everyday life, learning to find a balance of all four quadrants and maintaining that balance within our own being, which support previous research (Benton-Benai, 1988; Hart, 1999; Rheault, 1998; Ritchie, 2009; Toulouse, 2001; Young & Nadeau, 1999). This shared experience of various research studies has enhanced the understanding of the term *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life), and how it relates to the Anishinabek people, as accepted in the community of Wikwemikong. The elders of Wikwemikong have contributed towards their application of the term *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life) as follows: “find something to believe in; do fun things together; never be afraid to say ‘I’m sorry’, (Mishibinijima, 2011). To ensure the research team has a full understanding and sense of meaning of the term *mno-bimaadziwn*, the time to learn more about the teachings of the Anishinabek of Wikwemikong is an ongoing learning process which I have had the opportunity to spend time beginning this process.

As proposed throughout this research, the application of the culturally relevant intervention method of the talking circle will be shared and demonstrated as a connection to the term *mno-bimaadziwin*. The lessons learned and transforming this knowledge into enhancing one’s way of life thereafter will be further described by the words of the youth leaders and or their family members.

Gaps in Practice

The Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience program has relevance only to the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, with the development phase of incorporating the Wikwemikong Leadership manual into an experiential learning process based on the 10-day canoe expedition. The OALE program was developed to address the leadership

needs for the youth of Wikwemikong. However, there is a potential to extend this youth leadership experience to other First Nations within the local area and to other First Nation communities who express an interest in participating in the program. To date, there have only been two other nearby First Nation communities that have registered youth members to attend the summer program.

There is little supporting literature that connects an experiential learning to *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life) and the positive impact(s) that this type of program would have on the youth. The main intent of the implementation of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual into the 10-day OALE canoe expedition was to experientially teach the youth the skills and knowledge to enhance their individual leadership skills. The 10-day journey removed the individual from their comfort zone (home environment) and took the youth out to a more foreign yet familiar environment. The life of living in the natural environment was part of the everyday experience of our ancestors; today this lifestyle is overlooked due to the fast life that we are encouraged to live.

Sport and recreation has continued to be a gap in service available to the youth of the community of Wikwemikong. Based on past research conducted within the community in partnership with community co-researchers and academics from the Human Kinetics department at Laurentian University, the findings have demonstrated the need for implementation of structured recreation programs for the youth. As described by Schinke et al. (2010), the talking circles conducted with the youth, elders and family members of Wikwemikong have clearly expressed that the role of the family is essential to the success of the youth athlete. Not only does the family have a direct impact on the success of the young athlete, but the support received from the community has also

attributed to the overall success of the youth involved in organized sport. This is supported by the voices of the youth, through the talking circles; and continues to receive support through the findings of this research.

By involving the community members as coresearchers as part of the previous collaborative research coordinated with key members from Laurentian University, it is evident that the community itself has demonstrated their ability, knowledge, skill, capacity and trust to work amongst their own people; the research capability is possible within their realms of the community members themselves. As a member of Wikwemikong, I have had an opportunity to share my hands-on knowledge of research and work with those members of the community who were willing to gain insight into research. As mentioned by the elders of our community and those of other First Nations communities, the sharing of our knowledge and skill is known as *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life). It is through the oral sharing that we have learned from our children, parents, grandparents and elders of the community. The oral tradition also known as storytelling and the visual sharing through artwork depicts alternative methods of educating our people towards *mno-bimaadziwin*. The involvement of community into academic research has proven to benefit the youth of Wikwemikong, through the development of the youth leadership manual which is comprised of six modules: The Essence of Leadership, Connecting to Aboriginal Roots and Culture, Creating a Personal Vision, Cultivating Persistence and Success, Working Effectively With Others and Leaving a Legacy (Leadership Manual, 2008). The modules have been used as a framework to design the OALE and incorporated as part of the day-to-day learning that occurs while on the 10-day canoe trip. The adult youth facilitators have learned to teach the content of

the modules, by utilizing the cultural teachings into the learning of each module. The youth leaders then learned to take on the leadership role as each person assumed the leader of the day. The youth facilitators then became the mentor of the youth. This transfer of knowledge and skill while on the 10 day canoe excursion became the focal point of enhancing the leadership skills of the youth. However, there is no concrete evidence that this learning has impacted the overall well-being of the youth or the need for ongoing training and program development for youth – hence the need to position the research questions.

CHAPTER V

Research Methods: Sharing through Arts Based Activity and Indigenous Practice

Chapter Overview

Just when one feels that you have learned all there is to learn about conducting research in a community, I felt that this entire process of working within my own community to learn about the lived experience of the OALE has provided me with a great deal of knowledge in how to walk beside local community members and learn together. The learning involved accepting the challenges put before you; finding a balance between mainstream expectations and being honest in sharing the story told by the community through use of existing tools that have been a part of our Anishinabek ways.

Recruitment of Youth Leaders and Family Members

The youth leaders from the first year (Ritchie, 2009) of the OALE program were invited to attend a talking circle session. The initial invitation letter described the purpose of the research, who would be invited to participate, confirmation of date/time and location of the session and supporting documentation that allows the research to be implemented within the community based on community leadership support and a statement that ethics approval from academic institution was received.

In total, there were 43 youth who participated in the program five years ago; I anticipated that a minimum of 5 youth and maximum of 10 youth will commit to participate in the talking circle. An initial letter was sent to all youth whom I had addresses for; inviting each youth leader to participate in the research. In accordance with the request to respond, only 9 youth initially agreed to participate. However, only 6 youth who were youth leaders during the 2009 OALE responded and attended the talking

circles. Other attempts to make contact and/or follow-up with more youth leaders were made, with no response from additional youth leaders.

The initial proposal stipulated that each parent/guardian of the youth leaders would be invited to participate in a separate talking circle. However the talking circles were only scheduled with the youth leaders, with three sessions held in total. Within each youth leader talking circle the invitation was extended to the youth leaders asking if they would be interested in participating in a family talking circle. Only one family expressed an interest. To be inclusive of all interested family members, this involved any of the following members - one or both parents/grandparent/aunt/uncle/sibling. It was anticipated that a maximum of 5 – 10 parents/guardians would be recruited from the community of Wikwemikong. The priority was to achieve the talking circles with the youth leaders then to proceed with the same format for the families. In total, 6 family members participated in this research which included three parents, one grandparent, one aunt and one sibling (related to one youth leader).

The community research team made the recommendation that youth leaders who were part of the initial 2008 OALE Pilot project be invited to participate in a separate talking circle. The purpose of this session was to gain additional insight as to the impacts of the OALE; along with asking for additional input into more specific questions that could be included as part of the talking circle. The information shared by the youth leader assisted the community research team with enhanced understanding of the impacts of the OALE. The feedback from the youth leader also provided confirmation that the research questions and the process by which the youth leaders would be probed to share their lived experience were supported as follows:

You having that experience, you know that they wrote those journals, you know they went on the solos, and then knowing that you did that too, you guys, whether you were on the same trip or not, you shared an experience. You really did. And by just talking and giving those prompts, you know, here you remember those journals.... It's more just the way the style that you use; it's the discussion and you talk a little more and intuitively the right questions will come out. But if you have to actually write something down I think just kind of getting, them to recall maybe where they were at emotionally at the time, maybe physically, , kind of what was going on in their life before, and maybe not getting them to share specifically what is going on now. I believe they would start to see a connection from the trip to their life right now. (Youth leader 7, male, age 29)

To begin the talking circle, general expectations of the session were described in detail. Each participant was presented with a verbal description of the intent of the research, the confidentiality of the information collected and it was reiterated that the participant may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. After the verbal presentation of the process, all members were asked to sign a consent form that allowed for the participant to engage in this process. A general statement that the use of audio recording devices was presented to the group, informing the purpose of the audio recording to ensure that the information shared would be captured in its entirety. Every member who participated in the research signed a participant consent form and has been kept on file.

Training and Capacity Building

Connection to mno-bimaadziwin (the good life). An elder's knowledge that is shared and passed on down from generation to generation enhances lifelong learning amongst the youth of Wikwemikong. Time has been spent with an elder by the community lead researcher to ensure that there is an understanding and association between the teachings and mno-bimaadziwin. To understand the meaning of 'the good life' and to share this understanding through the stories of the youth will strengthen the impact of the OALE upon the health and well-being of the youth and their families.

The research team, Rita G. Corbiere, Chris Pheasant, Jesse Peltier and I have participated in sharing circles to build capacity and share recommendations in the path in which the research would proceed. As an initial expectation of myself it was felt that the protocols of conducting a talking circle needed to be learned and respected by all members. However, every talking circle was conducted in varying ways; but all youth leader sessions were held in the medicine lodge. The very first youth leader talking circle began with a smudge and prayer by one of the research team members. An eagle feather was held by the elder but was not circulated to each member. As previously shared, an object can be used to allow each member the time to speak without interruption. The talking circle proceeded in a manner by which each youth leader shared their experience of the OALE based on their involvement in the program during the summer of 2009. All youth leaders and adult resource participants completed their Circle of Life activity then proceeded with the youth leader who volunteered to share their lived experience. The teaching of a talking circle was not integrated in each session. Deviation from the initial process to include a cultural teaching did not hinder the essence of the activity. The

practice of respecting one another during a talking circle comes naturally; there was no requirement to provide a cultural teaching at every session.

At the onset of the research, the intent was to offer the cultural teaching to the youth workers of the Youth Centre; to learn how to conduct a talking circle. As local champions who engage in youth development initiatives, it was proposed that at least one of the four workers who were employed by the Youth Centre would assist with co-facilitating the implementation of the arts based activity and co-facilitate the talking circle as part of this research study. However, the youth workers were not involved in the entire process; only one youth worker was involved in the research process. This same person assisted by offering input into the research design, how the research would be implemented, review and analysis of data and ways to report and receive further feedback from the youth leaders and family members on the data being presented.

The community youth worker who was directly connected to delivering the OALE program has extensive knowledge about the structure of the ten day canoe excursion; along with understanding and connecting with the cultural awareness of the youth. This may be considered as a limitation or demonstrate bias with the assumption that the facilitator might steer the data analysis into a direction of preferred outcomes. However, the prior experience of the youth facilitator has provided the knowledge base of the experience being shared; therefore able to connect themes and explored ideas, experiences and understanding of mno-bimaadziwin. The connection to the medicine wheel was one that made sense to the youth facilitator.

Talking Circles with the Youth Leaders. To begin the process of generating discussion with the youth leaders, the intent of the research was presented to the group:

both research questions were shared with all members within the talking circle. The following questions were framed based on the feedback from the community research team: a) How has the OALE experience of 2009 impacted the well-being of you? (mno-bimaadziwin – the good life) and b) Do the youth and their families have any recommendations for further program developments as it pertains to OALE? The first question was presented to the youth leaders, first by granting the participants to take the time to draw within the Circle of Life to share their personal story of how the OALE has impacted their overall well-being. Here each youth leader proceeded with crafting their own piece of art-work which was used as a starting point of understanding the lived experiences and the impacts of the OALE. Following the creation of the arts-based activity, the youth leaders shared their story. The youth leaders reflected on their prior experience of attending the OALE, with detail on their lived experience. This sharing of knowledge was facilitated through a talking circle, one that created a rich understanding of each individual's perception of living a balanced life. Upon completion of their sharing of the first question, the second question was presented and once again each person offered their insight.

The OALE program framework has established the three main goals as items in which the youth leaders would learn throughout the duration of the ten day canoe excursion: prepare youth as leaders, enhance resiliency and well-being and promote culture and community. As part of the initial research proposal, I was being overzealous in proposing to capture all that I could. At no time did the research focus on these three goals as the main intent was to learn about the impact of the OALE on the well-being of

the youth leaders. There is no discussion from any of the data coming from the talking circles to make any connection to the three goals.

More recently, there is supporting literature that describes the usefulness of talking circles in guiding the direction of a program and/or development of strategies to complement existing community interventions, one of which previously described through Picou's (2000) work. The next section describes the method used to obtain the knowledge of the people; the knowledge is shared through the storytelling of the lived experience based on the 10-day Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience. The talking circle provided all participants with a venue to share the benefits of being involved in the ten day canoe expedition; and the research has learned from the youth leaders and their families the impacts of the overall well-being of the youth. The recommendations and learning received from this research will provide the program planners and health administrators with the evidence to support continued funding for youth leadership training.

Use of Symbols

Arts Based Activity. Each person was offered an opportunity to draw an object or abstract; or write a word that would best describe their memory of a most significant component of the OALE program. This arts based method is a modified version of tools used by other authors known as "dream collage" (p. 54) as described by Coholic and Lebreton (2007). To give a better understanding of the purpose of the dream collage; in her study, Coholic and Lebreton (2007) used this method to encourage the participants to cut out pictures from magazines that are associated with the dreams of the participants. Each participant then created his/her own collage and asked to interpret the symbols used

in the collage. To be more concise, Coholic and Lebreton (2007) explained that “participants can also be asked to relate some of the dream elements to parts of themselves” (p. 55).

The mandala as described by Henderson et al. (2007), “generally refers to any art form that is executed within a circular context” (p. 149). As further explained, the use of a mandala offered a venue for the participants to express emotional well-being along with the connection to healing of post-traumatic stress disorder; “as the mandala drawing were viewed as a creative means of traumatic disclosures that would symbolically organize and integrate emotions and experiences, while serving the same function as writing a narrative” (p. 149). To substantiate the use of mandala art, Elkis-Abuhoff et al. (2009) confirms that the “mandalas can serve as a coping skill for psychological changes experienced by as individual, promoting growth, strength, and healing within its creator” (p. 232). The creation of the mandala can assist the individual to recovery, whether it is to overcome trauma or illness.

A combination of the dream collage and the mandala has been modified as part of the OALE research; the youth leaders will be given the time to create their own piece of art work and make its connection to the research question(s), through the creation of art. A form of this method was used in this research, to offer a way that would prompt the youth to share a visual image of the lived experience of the OALE. The two samples of arts based therapy were used as a starting point of sharing a significant memory connected to their lived experience of OALE. In this project it made sense to utilize art work and create a story as Anishinabek people we are the original storytellers. Storytelling is our natural way of sharing life experiences and offering our knowledge to

the children and youth. As Anishinabek people, the artwork is a reflection of an individual's spirit; the teaching of honesty, respect, love, bravery, truth, wisdom and humility seem to naturally flow as the lived experience of the OALE story is being told.

The Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinabek people are known as the value system of everyday living. These teachings connect to each quadrant of the medicine wheel as we learn by doing and accept the lessons in life. Lavallee (2007) explains an indigenous research framework that is used through the medicine wheel which "offers a different approach, focusing on the interconnectedness between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual and the interconnectedness of all living things ...through the use of the sharing circle and a method called Anishnaabe Symbol-Based Reflection" (p. 130). This combination of using the medicine wheel teaching and offering an activity to participants to use symbols, artwork or object created, was described to reflect the participants' connection between the experience and its association with the medicine wheel. A sharing circle allowed each participant to share their description of the impacts of the program on their own health and well-being. The Anishnaabe Symbol-Based Reflection is an example of the creativity of qualitative research as the process and methods used have been designed collaboratively, respecting the input in the tools to be used to gather data, for the benefit of the program being evaluated.

Arts-Based Method. To begin the talking circle, the youth were provided with an opportunity to create their own artwork as a visual story based on their memory of the experience. The arts-based activity was completed in three steps. In part one the arts-based activity was introduced to the youth leaders as the first activity prior to the initial

talking circle. The youth leaders were asked to draw a sketch of the most significant learned experience encountered while on the OALE trip and to utilize symbols and/or color and that this picture would later be utilized as a descriptive element of their lived experience. As an alternative to drawing, a supply of still photographs was expected to be available from the collection obtained through the initial OALE program held in 2009 but this was not the case. A scanned digital photo of the youth leaders' art work has been taken by the community lead researcher and stored for future reference. Also, the members of the research team renamed the mandala arts-based activity to be more culturally appropriate to our community, therefore re-named as the Circle of Life. This activity has been used to encourage participants to reflect on their lived experience and share their art work through telling their story.

The arts-based method has been used to encourage the youth to visually describe their leadership journey in a more creative and descriptive manner, explaining the benefits of the OALE as experienced, reflecting on their leadership development and impacts on their health and well-being *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life).

In part two, the arts-based method has been explored through describing the meaning of the artwork with each member describing through words. Each talking circle took place in the medicine lodge. The medicine lodge has a natural circular seating format. The absence of a fire in the medicine lodge did not negatively impact the sharing of the youth leaders. However, a talking circle around the campfire would have re-create the experience of attending the OALE, thereby helping to elicit participant narratives from the youth and those who know them best. In reference to the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual, the final module of the manual encourages the youth

to give back to the community which can be accomplished through this activity and presented back to the community at the homecoming celebration. The initial OALE trips held in 2009 granted time for youth leaders to share a significant moment or memory in which the person felt had an impact on their resilience and/or well-being. This sharing upon their return of each trip in subsequent years has not been fulfilled; therefore the need to include this component upon each homecoming celebration should be considered. For future trips, the youth facilitators can implement the art-based method in the final evening of the OALE trip to gain insight as to the success of the program.

In part three, when there was nothing more to be said in the talking circle, the youth leaders were asked to consider where they are in terms of leadership development and to offer insight into further development of leadership training that would enhance their skills. The sharing of challenges, successes, ongoing leadership development, goal setting and goal attainment are mechanisms to assist with identifying recommendations for ongoing program implementation and/or to make changes to the existing program services for youth. This information is shared as part of leaving a legacy in chapter 6.

Sharing through Indigenous Practise

Talking Circles. As described in detail, Picou (2000) shares the use of a “culturally based intervention strategy, the talking circle which promoted collective empowerment of local residents through the participatory research model” (p. 93); which allows the participants to describe and share their thoughts, feelings and offer solutions to issues, challenges that a community or group is facing within their environment. In an article by Loppie (2007), an explanation of oral tradition is described as being passed down from generation to generation and is considered to be a teaching tool through

storytelling. Additional support for participatory research, as explained by Loppie (2007),

is intimately linked to many indigenous philosophies through the value of local participation, learning through action, collective decision making, and empowerment through group activity. This philosophy also embraces the participation of diverse sense and capacities, including the physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social. (p. 278)

Empowerment of community members has been promoted by including those who are interested in gaining experience in conducting research and learning new skills in conducting local traditional practices. Through the present research initiative, the community members have embraced the opportunity to voice their learned experience and willingly offered recommendations for future leadership initiatives.

Local Talking Circle Practice. The location of the talking circle was agreed upon by the community research team. Several options were presented: the use of the medicine lodge which is centrally located in the community in which the research is being conducted; in the natural environment in the wilderness; or in a private room large enough to accommodate at least 12 people and ventilated to allow the smudge to be used. The medicine lodge is designed to conduct private meetings; can host an open fire and allow for the smudge as the room is ventilated so the smoke exits through a chimney and the fire is contained in a large firestone pit.

The respect and brief description of the smudge is presented by Lavallee (2007) as follows:

smudging of sage or sweetgrass is swept over a room before a ceremony or event; it is then offered to the participants. Participants take the smoke in their hands and wash their head to clear their mind, their eyes so they can see good things, their ears so they will listen, their mouth so they will speak good words and their hearts so they will feel good things. Smudging are examples of integrating core values and beliefs into an indigenous research framework. (p. 133)

The smudge is known by the Anishinabek people of Wikwemikong as a ceremony that consists of burning a natural medicinal plant – sage. An elder is requested to conduct this ceremony, whereby the smudge is offered to each participant as a mechanism to purify one's mind, body and spirit allowing the person to speak from the heart and to be truthful in the sharing of knowledge. As one learns more about the traditions and customs of the Anishinabek people, it is known that the smudge is a ceremony that impacts the spiritual well-being of an individual.

A talking circle is a form of non-judgemental dialogue that allows the participant to speak freely and share their lived experiences with one another (Running Wolf & Rickard, 2003). In some cases, a facilitator has included an object that is passed around the circle to each member as an indication that it is the next person's turn to speak. As one person passes the object (rock, feather, medicine wheel), then this signifies that the person who has passed the object is done sharing (Orr, 2000; Running Wolf & Rickard, 2003). As the person holds onto the object, this also creates the individual with a sense of security.

The talking circle is known to the aboriginal community of Wikwemikong as a culturally acceptable means of allowing those who are gathered to share and discuss a

particular subject or event within an environment in which there is no influence, thereby non-interference in the discussion. The members who participate in the talking circle are granted the time and respect to speak the truth and express their lived experience(s). In this research study, the youth leaders and their family members were allowed to speak freely about their lived experience as participants of the OALE that occurred in 2009. The process of the talking circle was explained briefly to each youth leaders, along with ensuring anonymity of each participant will be protected throughout the research. The use of pseudonyms to replace names within the transcribed data has been used as identifiers; to ensure confidentiality of the members. The Wikwemikong research collaboration with Laurentian (Schinke et al., 2009) has shared the teaching of the talking circle through the words of Duke as:

In Wikwemikong, the circle is symbolic of balance, where no one's opinion is greater than another's. Each voice is equal and each person speaking has an opportunity to be heard by all where the group benefits from the shared knowledge.....the circle allows for equal participation when dealing with issues that have community wide impacts. (p. 317)

Through the PAR process, the use of the talking circle as a method has demonstrated respect for the Anishinabek practices of sharing information and learning from the data gathered. The community members have taken the lead role in designing, implementing, analyzing and reporting the findings of the research. By asking for input from the community research team, this has positioned what the community wants to gain from the research that is being proposed; how will I have worked with the community; what skills, knowledge and capacity we have shared as a team for the benefit of the target

group; that the research has been developed from the bottom-up; with the community members having input towards the development of the research. As a true advocate of building upon our own existing resources, the focus has been structured around accessing the input and encouraging the participants of our own community champions.

As an indigenous member of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, I am passionate about learning the impact of the OALE program on the lives of the youth of our community. For many years, our ancestors have shared life's lessons, values and beliefs through storytelling which includes the use of art work. A visual demonstration of the life of our people is seen through the pictographs on the walls of the rocks along the Collins Inlet (nearby Killarney, Ontario) observed during the 10-day OALE canoe excursion. The use of visual art work in the research study was a natural fit; one that resonates with the culture of the Anishinabek people. The most non-intrusive method of engaging the youth into a conversation about the lived experience of the OALE is through the implementation of a talking circle. This too was accepted by the participants, without hesitation.

Talking Circles with Family. As previously mentioned, the same format was utilized and offered as a separate talking circle for the families of the youth leaders. The purpose was to offer the family members an opportunity to share the change that has occurred within their family unit as it related to leadership development and to offer recommendations for additional youth leadership development and training. However, the process for the family talking circle included multiple families with their respective youth. All members were in agreement to participate in a shared talking circle and every member was given an opportunity to learn from one another.

Data Collection

Wilson and While (1998) describe four components of trustworthiness in data collection and reporting the findings. The four components are described as follows: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility: “findings presented back to the participants to confirm that the interpretation of the data is legitimate and a true reflection of reality” (p. 83) through the use of member checking; however this process is mainstream analysis. Based on the lessons learned through the research efforts of Schinke et al. (2009) all members of the community research team were involved in reviewing the transcribed data ensuring the wording was in the context of the community. The community research team, the youth leaders and their family members assisted with the data review and learned from one another the essence of the lived experience as expressed through the talking circles. The transcribed data of the talking circle was shared amongst the community research team; as a group we each reviewed the transcribed data on our own and held a meeting to express our understanding of the data and transferred this data onto the medicine wheel. The mainstream form of coding and determining emerging trends was not used to analyze the content obtained from the talking circles. However, the discussion amongst the community research team involved a thorough review of what was learned, thus shared through the voices of the youth leaders as it related to their participation in the OALE. As a demonstration of respect to each youth leader, the transcribed data was written in its original form.

This method is further supported through Schinke et al. (2009) as explained by Duke “personally I was lost when we started talking coding and emerging trends....being

lost during the analysis” (p. 314). The lived experience from the youth leaders of the 2009 OALE has been expressed by use of our medicine wheel. This will be the beginning of a community story based on the experience of the youth leaders who have journeyed throughout their traditional territory via the 10 day Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program. Several questions were considered when reviewing the data: Can the research make the connection with the experiences shared by each youth leader? Are similar impacts described in detail by each youth leader? Is there any evidence to support that the youth leaders have described living the good life (mno-bimaadziwin) and attributing change to the experience of the leadership training obtained while on the OALE canoe excursion? Furthermore, it is also important from the community to learn from the youth and their family any changes in the current program that are required to enhance youth leadership and training.

Each talking circle required transcription of the data gathered from the audio recorders used in each session. No formal type of software was selected for data analysis; but the use of the medicine wheel to categorize the learning that came from within each youth leader was the basis of the data analysis completed by the community research team, then subsequently presented and determined by the youth leaders and their families for final analysis. To have a rich understanding of the data, the community lead researcher transcribed the data with the exception of the first talking circle. It was the recommendation of my thesis supervisor and other academic professors that I consider contracting the transcription services of the data to an outer source to give me more time to concentrate on data collection. However, I learned by experience that this created a setback to my own learning. I felt that the story being told and writing each story of each

individual youth in its most authentic form – word for word only had more meaning to me if I heard the recorded session and put the words onto paper. Each subsequent talking circle was then transcribed by me.

Members of the community research team were then assigned the task of assisting with highlighting the common themes and words from each session. This form of narrative analysis of data obtained through the talking circles demonstrated respect for the youth leaders and their families; the voices of the people are heard through storytelling.

Data Analysis

The words and themes helped formulate the lived experience. Together the community research team determined the extent of resiliency and well-being that has been achieved along with acknowledging the leadership skills gained and maintained post five years after the initial OALE intervention. In addition, the data has been placed on the medicine wheel and matched with the four quadrants of health in relation to mno-bimaadziwin (the good life). The elders who were connected to the research team provided guidance in determining the connection between the experiences of the youth leaders as it related to mno-bimaadziwin. Three members of the community research team, Rita G. Corbiere (elder), Jesse Peltier (Youth worker) and I applied meaning to the transcribed data with specific concepts to translate our individual understanding of the story being told by the youth leaders. In addition, the key concepts that were derived from each individual story of the youth leaders were then shared with the youth leaders and their family members and the same process of placing the key concepts onto the medicine wheel was completed by the members present. The final product of this

exercise is demonstrated in Figure #2 as the Circle of Live - the Lived Experience of the OALE. This process provided multiple perspectives from members of the research team and the youth leaders and their family members. As determined by the research team a community story as told by the youth has been used to co-author the lived experience of the youth leaders. To give the story more authenticity, direct quotes have been used to express the impact of the OALE on the youth leaders. The Circle of Life artwork of each youth leader is located within the appendix. Although the initial OALE 2009 research had a specific focus on whether the intervention enhanced the resiliency and well-being of the youth, the talking circles have provided a detailed account of the lived experience and its impact on the health and well-being of the youth and their family in connection with *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life).

Further as described by Blodgett et al. (2011), “PARthrough partnership, community members and academics contribute unique strengths to a more holistic research process while also sharing mutual responsibilities to enhance understanding of a local phenomenon” (p 2). Together, as the research has been proposed and implemented, the community coresearchers and I have worked collaboratively in reporting the findings of the story being told. What hold importance in the research findings are the testimonials provided by community members impacted by the experience. The community members that have contributed towards this story being told comprised of one youth leader from the 2008 OALE who has also been an assistant leader on several OALE trips; four male youth, three female youth, one grandparent, three parents, one sibling and one aunt; along with the research team.

CHAPTER VI

Results and Discussion

The OALE program established success and credibility from a partnership between members of Wikwemikong and researchers from an outside academic institution – Laurentian University. The relationship between the two entities has grown from the unknown expectations from the outsider researcher to establishing a mutual respect for working towards a common understanding and goal – to engage in research that will benefit the membership of Wikwemikong. The research experience that has been gained by many community members of Wikwemikong has been transferred into a commitment from insiders to conduct research within the community, with and for the benefit of the overall well-being of the membership. A direct quote from the Wikwemikong Community Leadership Preparation Training Manual expressed the value that the Wikwemikong community placed in the ongoing leadership development of its members:

Group commitment: In order to benefit the most from this training experience, each of us must commit fully to reflect on our lives through this training process so we can help prepare ourselves to be the best we can be in all that we do, and so that together we can have a positive impact on others in our community. (p.5)

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the deductive analysis process. Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative analysis can begin through a deductive process when drawing upon an existing framework also intended to extend what is already known through earlier discovery. The framework chosen for this analysis was based on the modules set out in the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual (2008).

Within the aforementioned approach, a participatory action research method was utilized to centralize the input of the youth leaders, their family members and the community research team. This process provided an opportunity for the community to share their voice – giving meaning to the data from the perspective of the community. Through the use of an art-based method, previously described as the mandala activity implemented by Blodgett et al. (2013), this was a clear demonstration of an effective and appropriate method to incorporate as part of the participatory action research method. The community research team of Wikwemikong adapted the mandala activity and re-named the process as a Circle of Life exercise to capture the experience of each youth leader in art format. Upon completion of the artwork, a talking circle took place with the youth leaders to learn about the impact of the OALE. As a follow-up to the initial talking circles with the youth leaders, talking circles took place with the community research team to determine the key concepts that were being highlighted throughout each personal journey of the youth leaders. In addition, to demonstrate respect for our indigenous knowledge and ways of learning, a unique process was utilized to apply a cultural understanding of the impact of the lived experience. A local Anishinabek framework was used to connect the key concepts to the cultural values of the community. For the purpose of this research, the medicine wheel framework was one of the tools used to describe the overall well-being of the youth leaders. The medicine wheel was used to describe the impact of the OALE as it related to module two of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual. Each quadrant represents a different focus of well-being: yellow represents emotional well-being, red represents physical well-being, black represents mental well-being and white represents spiritual well-being. To summarize the impact on

the overall well-being and explore mno-bimaadziwin (the good life), the key concepts were placed on the medicine wheel within the health quadrant that seemed to resonate with the theme. It is evident that the OALE has impacted the youth leaders in their overall well-being (emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually). To show respect for the learning shared by the youth leaders and their family members, a visual diagram of the medicine wheel is one method in which the key concepts of the data was identified then later analyzed and aligned and connected to the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual and subsequently connected to our cultural ways.

It is important to re-state that research is valued only if it is going to have meaning for the community. Similar to the academic work completed by Blodgett et al. (2010) in developing a community composite vignette the story of the community's research experience becomes one voice. The use of the medicine wheel and connecting the experience of the youth leaders through their voice and aligning their lived experience with the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual seemed to be the most appropriate method to explain the impact of the OALE on each youth leader. The value of this research is making the connection between the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual and how the modules align with the data collected from the talking circles. I have taken the position to assign each module as themes with the supporting data described through the words of the youth leaders based on transcribed data: 1) the essence of leadership, 2) mno bimaadziwin (Living the Good Life) previously identified as connecting to aboriginal roots and culture, 3) life lessons (previously identified as cultivating persistence and success), 4) working effectively with others, and 5) leaving a legacy. If the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual is designed to provide an opportunity for leadership

development and if the OALE has been the teaching environment to launch the leadership manual, then it is only fitting to learn whether the youth leaders have gained leadership skills while attending the OALE. The only module not supported with data from the youth leaders is module four – Creating a personal vision; therefore I will not reference this section of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual.

Each transcribed talking circle was reviewed by the community research team with key concepts identified and confirmed by the community research team. Later on, the key concepts were shared with the youth leaders and their family members to confirm its relevance to their explanation of the impact of the OALE 2009. The key concepts were grouped and placed onto a medicine wheel by all members connected to the research. The placement of the key concepts confirmed that the youth leader's experienced wholistic well-being while attending the 10-day canoe trip as described by the four components of health and well-being within the medicine wheel (see figure 2 in Chapter VII).

The key concepts were then paired with learning objectives within the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual (WLM). The following subthemes have been aligned with the WLM modules: building confidence, making a commitment, recognizing emotional well-being, recognizing physical well-being, recognizing mental well-being, recognizing spiritual well-being, how to overcoming challenges, learning new skills, building new relationships, establishing teamwork and sharing the personal journey. However, the data from the youth leaders does not support all six modules within the WLM. A more thorough research thesis that encompasses more than six youth leaders

would likely demonstrate how all six modules are connected to the OALE; hence learning experientially and demonstrating the impact of the OALE.

As the community lead researcher for this thesis, I have spent the time to learn from the youth leaders and their family members as it relates to their personal well-being in connection to the OALE. In addition, this learning opportunity has also allowed me to realize that the modules within the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual have demonstrated that the youth leaders have learned the essence of leadership. It is also essential that I explain that there has been a re-connection to our cultural values that has also occurred amongst the youth leaders. The overarching theme of the research is to connect the story of the lived experience of the OALE with the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual. The individual themes to support the overarching theme within the chapter are based on an existing western framework embedded with Anishinabek culture intertwined within the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual.

The manual does contain cultural teachings of the Anishinabek people of Wikwemikong but prior to this research there was no evidence to determine the personal learning that has been achieved from the youth leaders. With a heavy emphasis on understanding who you are, where you come from and how this learning can influence an individual's destiny in life, it was important that the research discover how the cultural values and personal learning of the youth leaders developed during the OALE program. This self-awareness, self –realization, persistence, learning to work as a team and to plan for the future are keys components of being a successful leader within the community. Successful leaders define a healthier community.

Connecting the story of the lived experience of the OALE with the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual – Adapting mainstream knowledge with Indigenous knowledge

The knowledge gained by the data review will be presented by means of connecting the story of the lived experience of the OALE with the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual. Basically this chapter will focus on disseminating the data by taking the curriculum as it is written from the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual and determining its relevance to the OALE 2009 experience as described by the youth leaders. Data from one youth leader who attended the pilot project in 2008 has also been aligned with specific themes and sub-themes. The evidence of the lived experience of the OALE is expressed by quotations received from six youth leaders who attended the 10-day canoe trips held during the summer of 2009. Each module as described within the WLM has been used as pre-determined themes supported by subthemes generated from the transcribed text along with an explanation of the significance of the subtheme in connection to each theme. In addition, the data obtained from the community research team, family members and extended family members of the youth leaders has also been included in the results. The process of analyzing the data using the WLM was intentional as this manual has been used as the experiential teaching tool while the youth attend the OALE each summer. This chapter will report the association between the lived experiences of the youth leaders aligned with the modules within the WLM.

The Essence of Leadership

Based on the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual, the definition of this theme is to realize that “we have the ability to make a real difference in our own lives and in the lives of others” (p. 8). The experience of the youth leaders who describe their own personal

memory of attending the OALE in 2009, share various aspects of leadership development. Based on the choices and decisions made, the individual is challenged with learning from the mistakes made, learning from the lessons in life, knowing the difference of how to influence another in a positive way rather than being a negative influence and also taking the time to reflect on the past, present, and plan for the future. The connection between module one and the lived experience of the youth leaders and their families was realized via the subthemes, a) building confidence and b) making a commitment. The youth leaders openly shared how the OALE has made a real difference in their lives and the lives of others. Through the sharing of the youth leaders, this opportunity has provided our community with data to learn that leadership begins with oneself and “is shaped by our experience, culture and the people around us” (Wikwemikong 2008, p. 13).

Building confidence. One Youth Leader talked about the individual challenges of being a participant on the OALE but then shared an experience that addresses building self-confidence. (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16) described an experience of the cliff jumping activity as a new challenge and that the pride felt in being the first one to take the risk. Cliff jumping is known as a fun activity where the participants would jump off a cliff into the water. Prior to this activity, the lead guides would provide a safety check of the environment. This youth leader demonstrated her leadership by recognizing her ability to make the decision to be the first person to cliff jump and to her surprise the rest of her peers followed:

I always wanted to take off my water shoes, but I wasn't allowed. I was always the one getting into trouble. I was the person to jump off the cliff cause they were

way too scared. I couldn't believe that I actually did that. I am actually the 1st one to do things first. I would just tell myself 'I can do it.' I can do it. I will do it, so I just do it. (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16)

The example shared by (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16) demonstrated the self-awareness of her leadership being about herself and understanding that she was the one always getting into trouble but then turning her leadership skills and ability to influence others in a positive way, by challenging herself to be the first one to cliff jump. For her, this was a major accomplishment; she felt very proud to be the first one in her group to achieve this activity. On the other hand, for some their level of confidence is quite positive and the awareness of one's ability to succeed is evident. The leadership abilities vary amongst the youth who have shared their story. The examples within this chapter identify negative and positive experiences with lessons learned from both spectrums.

I think for some people, it just comes naturally to them. They don't think about it..they don't think 'oh should I go do this.' They will just go and do it and other people will just follow. I remember when I went on the canoe trip, everybody wanted to be a leader and nobody wanted to follow. Everyone did it and it was just cool. It was good. Our group was real fast. (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19)

Amongst the building leadership theme (Youth Leader 1, male, age 18) described how he learned to recognize and overcome his fears; his confidence level improved. This learning is described through the following quote: "I think I have been able to get over some obstacles that I experience that looked scary. Almost like some things that I have to do and will try to do my best" (Youth Leader 1, male, age 18). The personal experience of attending the OALE has provided many individual examples of the

learning that occurred for the participants. The sense of confidence of the three youth leaders demonstrate their level of personal growth and further development of their leadership skills. These examples explain the notion of making a good choice and the feeling of ‘doing my best’ are attributes demonstrating the leadership qualities of the youth leaders. Each person is faced with the responsibility of making their own choice and decision that will impact their own well-being, which is essential to self-determination. Another example of the impact of the OALE on the individuals’ personal growth is shared by (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29), as follows:

I definitely see the benefit in going on that program because it made me aware of all these things; now just aware of myself, not just aware of how I affect my community, our country, our people, the world, the universe even the spiritual world, but how everything is, you know, interconnected, thinking about our past, present and future. Like I was saying they can be positive and they can be negative, we all have choices and we make those choices. But if we are aware of how our choices affect our self, our future, our family, the people around us, our well-being, in regards to our mind, body, spirit and emotions, I think that I am more informed, I am more able to consider a lot more aspects other than my needs and desires. I guess in time, like right now in the present.

(Youth Leader 7, male, age 29) has shared insight about the choices being made can affect a person in a positive or negative way, but the point he is making is that the choices he has made, has an effect on everybody within his circle of life. Within this circle of life, he also includes the community, thereby making the suggestion that positive and negative choices do have an impact on the well-being of a community. The youth leaders

have provided examples of their self-awareness to making the right choice. Another personal quality learned while on the 10-day canoe trip was to commit to oneself by fully participating in the journey. Prior to leaving for the 10-day canoe trip, the Youth Leaders were given an orientation of the expectations of all participants.

Making a commitment. (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19) shared how his commitment to continue on with the 10-day canoe trip was his personal challenge and this commitment was a move in the right direction. His experience that was shared addressed the realization that he could accomplish this challenge of attending the 10-day canoe trip. As he spoke of his first day of being on the canoe trip, the feeling of not wanting to be a participant and that he felt that this was something he did not want to attend; he addressed his awareness of a willingness to give up too easily. He then expressed that on day two he decided to move forward and commit to this 10-day journey. This awareness had him realize the commitment he was willing to make for his own personal development. This personal commitment reflected the improvement in his self-confidence which was later realized as he reflected on the experience of attending the 10-day canoe excursion:

But I guess I got my hopes up high cause I was in no shape or form to wanna go on this canoe trip, I just didn't wanna do it at all; so that day or night was a big point for me where everything just turned around because I knew from there on I couldn't turn back. So I guess you can say after this I accepted the fact and that and I just kept pushing forward, so that was a pretty memorable event for me cause I was cold, miserable I just wanted to go home and everything but I knew this was it and that I had to keep on going. It turns out that the second day of the

canoe trip I started “I am on a trip, I accept it, I’m on the trip now”. I have to deal with it; so after that stage I started learning adapting and taking all the new things I can possibly learn. (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19)

Faced with a choice to make and being uncertain of the ability to continue on with the 10-day canoe trip, (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19) finally made a difficult but rewarding choice to commit to the activity. The memorable experience was his ability to make a real difference in his own life journey.

Through the aforementioned examples the youth leaders have expressed individual accomplishments; and their commitment to accepting the challenges placed before them contributed towards their success. As the youth leaders learned to build their self-confidence, face individual challenges and demonstrate that they can successfully complete the 10-day canoe trip; this experiential learning has provided an opportunity for the individuals to take control of their own life. This control is realized by the youth leaders as they make the choice to accept the fact that they are on their own personal journey and to make the best of the each day of learning. For each individual, they have contributed towards a legacy, the building of a stronger community.

Mno-bimaadziwin – the Good Life

The next module within the Wikwemikong Leadership manual has a focus on “Connecting to Aboriginal Roots and Culture”. I have replaced this module with my own cultural learning as it relates to mno-bimaadziwin (the good life) as I have been eager to understand how the youth leaders have learned about their own cultural heritage and whether the youth leaders have demonstrated a connection to their own personal journey and how this impacted their well-being while attending the OALE in 2009. The term

mno-bimaadziwin in the Ojibwe language means ‘the good life’, which is connected to our cultural values as being true to oneself. Upon reviewing the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual, an excerpt from the second module states the following: “You need to know where you came from in order to succeed today and be a better leader for tomorrow” (p. 14). This text was provided by me and is supported through the examples of the self-reflection of the youth leaders. The community research team has challenged me with an opportunity to review all the data and make the connection between the concepts that have surfaced from each talking circle and how these concepts align with our Indigenous knowledge thereby connecting the data to the concepts that describe the medicine wheel.

The theme mno-bimaadziwin (the good life) has been aligned with the four sub-themes defined by the cultural framework – the medicine wheel (emotional well-being, physical well-being, mental well-being and spiritual well-being). The term mno bimaadziwin (the good life) is demonstrated by connecting examples of the experiences of the youth leaders in connection to their own well-being. The examples from the talking circles are shared by the youth leaders to support at least one of quadrants of the medicine wheel and its impact on their lived experience of the OALE. As a demonstration of the youth leaders learning to live a balanced life within the cultural teachings of the Anishinabek people, I will provide an overview of how the OALE connects with the medicine wheel, hence my interpretation of mno bimaadziwin (the good life).

Emotional well-being. As the youth leaders shared their lived experience, the awareness of their emotional well-being was articulated very clearly. In recognizing their

emotional well-being, the participants have demonstrated that they are willing and able to share how the OALE impacted their personal growth. Based on the individual testimonies of the youth leaders, the community research team identified key concepts from each transcribed data and as a group we placed the key concepts within the medicine wheel to describe the emotional impact of the OALE on the well-being of the youth leaders. Within the emotional well-being quadrant of the medicine wheel, various key concepts described the self-awareness that occurred amongst the youth leaders. Some of the examples are described below include building one's confidence, recognizing emotional well-being, making new friends, and appreciation the beauty of nature. The personal affirmations demonstrate the individual emotional growth of the youth leaders:

The things that I didn't like was the heat. I remember one day we were canoeing real long, and I was real crabby after we finished packing up our stuff and putting up our tents. I took an hour nap and they tried waking me up. I started swearing away. I was real crabby. Another good thing out there was getting to know the people. (Youth Leader 2, female, age 19)

The self-expression and acknowledging her negative experiences; recanting as if it was just yesterday clearly shows the emotional impact described by (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19):

I remember being scared, you know. We looked behind us, and it is like all grey, with the rain coming, and suddenly it is all cloudy. It was like we were racing away to get to the nearest land. It really changed from the 1st day or 2nd day when I didn't want to be there. I wanted to go home. I didn't really want to share

emotions out there, and not be able to be sad there. I wanted to go home so badly that I cried. (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19)

The personal description above demonstrated the mixed emotions of being afraid, determined and lonely. (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19) shared her personal feelings of what she recalls from the first two days of the OALE experience.

Positive affirmations and being recognized for personal accomplishments was an emotional ‘high’ for (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16) as she engaged in further dialogue with (Elder 1, male):

I was the person to jump off the cliff cause they were way too scared”. How did that make you feel? (Elder 1, male). I felt loved. I was like all teasing them. I don’t know. (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16) What possessed you to go first? Was it just the challenge? (Elder 1, male). Like I said, well I said I couldn’t do it. Like I wouldn’t do it and I was just like ‘what’? It was like 30 feet high. (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16) Wow! When you hit the water, what did you think? (Elder 1, male). I was just, I couldn’t believe that I actually did that. I thought it looked shallow. It was not. It was just straight down. I couldn’t even touch the ground. (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16) Did everyone follow you after that? (Elder 1, male). Yeah. (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16) You led! Wow! (Elder 1, male). I am actually the 1st one to do things first. Yeah. I would just tell myself ‘I can do it.’ I can do it. I will do it, so I just do it. (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16)

The excitement and pride was felt as (Youth Leader 3, female, age 16) shared her experience. The (Elder 1, Male) encouraged the youth leader to share the intimate feeling of excitement.

Events that occurred while attending the OALE 2009 created a new love for the gifts that we take for granted, there is an appreciation for the daily necessities provided within their home environment. The making of new friends adds sustenance to their lives. The courage demonstrated by (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19) to acknowledge the loneliness of being away from home and the fear of being in the middle of the lake, surrounded by the water; but after day two, this participant accepted the challenge and thrived throughout the remainder of the 10-day canoe trip.

Physical well-being. Some of the key concepts that describe the physical well-being quadrants within the medicine wheel include acceptance of new challenges and recognizing your own physical strength. Acceptance of new challenge and having to keep moving forward even during difficult times is shared by (Youth Leader 1, male, age 18) as demonstrating his bravery. When faced with a scary situation, this youth leader demonstrated that he learned what needed to be done to ensure safety; the lessons taught by the lead guides were effective.

We are just passing Chicken Islands.... We are near the shoals, so the waves are getting pretty rough. Then we went behind this one island and the water was just like black and calm – nice looking. We were out there with other canoes. Everyone ditched us. They were like way out with the waves. So then we decided to go on along a path of our own going right along the shore (Youth

Leader 1, male, age 18). Do you feel you met the challenge (Elder 1, male)? I am still here. (laughter, Youth leader, male, age 18)

While (Youth Leader 1, male, age 18) explained the physical endurance of battling the waves and safely making it to their destination, (Youth Leader 2, female, age 19) highlighted her physical well-being as toning her physical body: “It was pretty cool how we got little arm muscles after the canoe trip. I still feel strong, I guess”.

The physical strength and mentally preparing to face new challenges were challenges experienced by the youth leaders. There is one area within the canoe excursion that really places your reliance on the skill of your canoe partner. This water way takes the travel group out into the open water (Georgian Bay) to face intense rough water. It is essential for the lead guides to teach the youth leaders the skills required to safely get through this section of the route. It is evident that the physical challenges were faced by the youth leaders.

Mental well-being. The mental well-being quadrant is defined as the cognitive learning and knowledge that is shared within the group. This cognitive learning does not necessarily reflect learning based on academic/classroom environment but rather the individual learning that is recognized by the youth leaders. Although the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual was utilized as the teaching tool while on the 10-day canoe trip, the youth leaders were not cognizant of the learning modules that were being implemented. The basis of this quadrant is to learn how to work cooperatively and effectively as a team. “I learned to make a sailboat with the whole group with the canoe” (Youth Leader, female, age 16). The essence of teamwork in the example described what can be achieved as a group when the entire group put forward the effort to plan as one group.

The youth leaders have learned the essential skills required to achieve the 10-day canoe excursion. This learning is shared by one youth leader with the knowledge that he did doubt his abilities to continue on with the canoe trip, but through persistence he was able to adapt to the situation and decided to move forward, making the commitment to complete the program. Skill development and camp craft teaching were essential elements that the youth leaders gained throughout each day of the 10-day canoe trip. As an example, on day one, the youth leaders learned how to pack their own gear, pack the camp gear, balance their canoe with their personal gear and camp gear; paddling strokes and to navigate the canoe; maintaining safety while on/off the waterway; keeping the environment clean and to keep hydrated. The building of community youth leaders has been achieved throughout the delivery of the 10-day canoe trip. The youth leaders voiced their 'first impressions' of being a participant on the canoe trip as being a negative experience. In my opinion, the youth leaders learned to embrace the OALE as an opportunity to learn and experience something new. After all, experiential learning is recognized as an outdoor classroom.

The picture I wrote was campsite, I think it was the first day, it was storming, like half the day, it was, the last half of the day, it was storming there was talk of us going back and returning , but I guess I got my hopes up high cause I was in no shape or form to wanna go on this canoe trip, I just didn't wanna do it at all; so that day or night was a big point for me where everything just turned around because I knew from there on I couldn't turn back. I just keep going forward just pushing forward. That is when I learned that I give up on things too easily. I don't have confidence I guess. So I guess you can say after this I accepted the

fact and that and I just kept pushing forward, so that was a pretty memorable event for me cause I was cold, miserable I just wanted to go home and everything but I knew this was it and that I had to keep on going. (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19)

These two examples reinforce the purpose for sharing knowledge amongst one another; essentially this knowledge sharing creates improvements and success, therefore a more productive community. As (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19) expressed his uncertainty of being on the OALE 10-day canoe trip, he came to realize that he had the drive to accomplish this personal journey. Through his persistence and willingness to learn the skills to successfully complete the program, he accepted the opportunity to build on his self-confidence and to keep moving forward. The realization that he tends to give up too easily was powerful lesson to gain.

Spiritual well-being. The definition of the spiritual well-being is difficult to explain but as I have come to understand more about my own spiritual well-being, this quadrant refers to an individual's ability to take the time to self-reflect and to be more aware of the opportunities to strive for in life. This quadrant is misunderstood as a means of connecting with your religious beliefs; the meaning of spiritual well-being is to gain the wisdom to be content with your inner spirit. The OALE program is a spiritual journey of its own.

I think on the third day, we went like into the big open water, so like you cannot see the land except on the side of us. We see water in front and behind us; and we were like right in the middle, the canoes, and behind us, you could see the rainfall

and it was like all grey. In front of us is like all sunlight. It was all light, I never seen rain fall like on the water. (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19)

The fact that the participants are travelling along the waterways, along the traditional territory of the Wikwemikong Anishinabek people; the water teaches the youth leaders to respect the life and spirit within the water by feeding tobacco to the water for safe travels. As a demonstration of innately appreciating the love for the water, the youth leaders freely express their acknowledgment and beauty of the water. “I remember seeing a waterfall. It was pretty cool. The views were pretty nice looking at the water up ahead...looking at our reflection in the water” (Youth Leader 2, female, age 19). The youth leaders also learned to be humble and work with their canoe partner in order to accomplish the crossing of the larger water body. By speaking the truth about the fear of entering the larger water ways especially when faced with high waves, this demonstrated honesty in recognizing ones fear and the bravery in meeting the challenge of achieving the distance of the canoe excursion. The commitment that each youth leader made to complete this 10-day journey attributed to their wisdom and knowledge gained through self-reflection and striving for success.

The appreciation and acknowledgement of the natural environment were echoed by (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19):

For me I think the most favourite part of the trip had to be that one night in Beaverstone Creek. I know it sounds corny, but it just felt spiritual there because I was told it was a spiritual place. I felt a presence there; I just felt like being watched by others. I felt safe, secure. That was my favourite part, that part and eating fish and chips in Killarney.

Through the examples shared by the youth leaders, it was evident that the OALE 2009 created an opportunity for the youth leaders to experience their personal connection to their own spirituality. Another example to demonstrate this connection was shared by (Youth Leader 6, male, age 19):

It was quite an adventure for me. Going through that passage, I was not touched by colonization, it was natural for me. It was pretty touching out there, seeing the actual artwork that was already on the walls, it was interesting to see. The way the rocks were formed, the slopes, you wonder how there were able to stand there. Its that clarity, the water is clear, you can see right to the bottom; easy flow, air clean. I felt being watched as well, but they were just watching me, being protective.

In addition, the spiritual experience was embraced by a family member who expressed her envy to the youth leaders who had that chance to experience something so special: “That was your ancestors, watching over you. That is what it was, watching over you” (Family member 5, grandmother).

Water is one of the most sacred elements of our existence. Water gives life. Prior to travelling the water each day, the youth leaders were given the responsibility of offering tobacco to the water, asking for guidance and giving thanks for life. The youth leaders have referenced the spiritual experience with connection to the water. In addition, the serene peaceful waterway of the Beaverstone Creek has impacted the youth leaders in a spiritual way. This area consists of a traditional burial ground where the ancestors of the Wikwemikong members have been laid to rest. The youth leaders acknowledge this as being sacred ground. The realization and acknowledgement of being

in a place of their ancestors was quite powerful. This spiritual connection has been recognized by the youth leaders. (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29) sums it up quite nicely in relation to the medicine wheel and its teachings of balancing life while on the OALE:

It is basically the awareness; it gave me a sense of pride to know a little bit about our culture, our history, our peoples history, the families that are around and when you go on that trip, you know you stop at different places; and we get told some stories then I have the opportunity to take on that teacher role and give that back to some of our youth. When you are out there you are working hard, there are some hardships, you have fun at times, you have to learn to be like a family, while you are out there – with everyone that is there. I think that was missing from my childhood, and even when I got into my youth age, that all of our community members are our extended family. The rest of nature is our extended family. And I think without going on this trip with that time, it may have taken me a lot longer to learn those things or maybe I might not have ever learned those things. So I got nothing but positive to say about my experiences on that trip.

The emotional well-being is acknowledged by (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29) as ‘having fun at times and experiencing the hardships while on the trip; the physical well-being has been described as ‘working hard’ and as a member who has experienced the OALE, I can relate to the physical component of working hard. The mental well-being has been described as acknowledging his ability to learn about family and the connection to extended family along with his previous comments about learning the history of our people based on the traditional territory in which the OALE travels during the canoe trip. The spiritual well-being component has been captured by (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29)

by stating that “nature is considered a part of his extended family”. He has re-connected with nature; allowing the influence of nature to give him the guidance he needed. Today this youth leader is excited to share the wealth of knowledge that he gained while attending the OALE; for him, the first experience was during the pilot project of the OALE which was delivered during the summer of 2008. Since then, (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29) has participated in other OALE canoe trips as an assistant lead guide. He now has the opportunity to influence change with a positive outlook on life; thereby engaging the youth leaders to appreciate the lessons shared as part of the experiential learning of the OALE.

The next learning module within the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual does not connect with any of the data presented by the youth leaders. As described in the manual, Creating a Personal Vision is achieved by recognizing and demonstrating “the core values that are foundational to what you believe” (p. 23); which are the personal skills and beliefs that guide the personal growth and development of an individual. These foundational beliefs are values known to the Anishinabek people of Wikwemikong as the Seven Grandfather Teachings: love, bravery, honesty, respect, truth, humility and wisdom. The youth leaders did not speak specifically to the ‘foundational values’ throughout this research. Therefore there is no set data to support this specific module. However, one can argue that the core values are embedded within the teachings of the medicine wheel and that our youth leaders have demonstrated the seven grandfather teachings by being a participant in the 10-day canoe excursion.

Life Lessons

Through the voice of the youth leaders, their lived experience of attending the OALE 2009 demonstrated the knowledge gained and the lessons learned while becoming fully engaged and accepting the experience thereby a) overcoming challenges and b) learning new skills. The youth leaders gained new skills through engaging as an active member within the OALE community. The humble acknowledgments of one's feeling were shared by various youth leaders.

Overcome challenges. As challenging as it was to make the commitment to attend and complete the 10-day canoe excursion for many of the youth leaders, the uncertainty of their commitment was observed as their story speaks about the first two days of the experience, but with time the youth leaders accepted the challenge and decided not to give up. The experience of being presented with learning a new skill and challenging your physical strength was expressed by (Youth Leader 2, female, age 19), "When we went to those rapids, it was pretty cool. Someone broke their leg". The youth leaders speak about their self-discipline to accept the fact that they are on this 10-day canoe trip and to persevere through the various obstacles and challenges. The lessons learned while on the canoe expedition has provided the youth leaders with life long memories that reminds them of their ability to overcome challenges and to engage new learning opportunities. This is further supported by the details described by (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19):

I push forward even if I like it or not; I know I have to do it; because I know in the end I will feel accomplished. Take the trip the first day I hated it, I wanted to go home it was storming. I was cold, miserable and I the first day of the trip I just

learned to accept the fact that I am on it this and had a good time; eventually I just made it more fun that I would have before; because before I just wanted to get it over with, don't talk to anyone, paddle , paddle paddle, eat sleep; yah so, I made some new friendships, it just comes to show that even if you don't want to do it to keep on pushing through; and you will gain a lot of experience, friendship, just the feeling of like a very strong sense of like being accomplished in the end, that is what I saw my trip as.

The new experience has gifted each youth leader with exploring their leadership development and enhancing their leadership capabilities. The self-reflection of accomplishing personal goals has been demonstrated by completing the 10-day canoe expedition. Today, the youth leaders are able to reflect and share this learned experience.

The accomplishments acknowledged by the youth leaders reflect their ability to recognize their own weaknesses and gain strength to overcome the challenges as explained by (Youth Leader 1, male, age 18), "I think I have been able to get over some obstacles that I experiences that looked scary. Almost like, some things that I have to do and I will try to do my best". The youth leaders learned about goal setting as described by (Youth Leader 2, female, age 19):

Yeah. It was graduate high school (Youth Leader 2, female, age 19). Again, that is an accomplishment. You may not have learned about graduating from high school while you were on the canoe trip, but you identified goals that you want to achieve in life. Four years later, you can actually say, 'I am a graduate of high school – grade 12'. So there is an accomplishment (Community Lead Researcher).

In addition, one youth leader shared his sense of accomplishment and building self-confidence by completing the 100km canoe excursion. I can't explain the feeling. It was like a sense of success. It was relief. It definitely was success. It was like 'wow, I paddled 100 or so kilometres, paddling'. That is a lot. (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19). Self-realization was echoed by (Youth Leader 6, male, age 19) as follows:

I was already an outdoor person. I didn't mind being outdoors. I didn't mind going out there that long. On our way back, it was a sense of accomplishment to come back there and see everybody, it was a relief. The portaging was fun, hard though.

For the youth leaders to acknowledge their weaknesses and find the path to achieve the end goal is a positive demonstration of achieving one's personal vision. The self-realization of the personal achievements is shared throughout the talking circle process as the youth leaders become aware of their own achievements and accomplishments.

This validated and confirmed the learning that did occur during the OALE 2009, which also reinforced the impact of the lived experience. The youth leader who graduated from high school was reminded that this was a personal accomplishment, one that she should be proud. Each learning opportunity encourages personal growth and guides us towards success even when the lesson learned is through a negative or positive experience. For (Youth Leader 6, male, age 19), his personal accomplishment was making it to the final destination and seeing all the people waiting on the shoreline, welcoming him home. The adrenaline rush that is felt during this homecoming is overwhelming and for the community to be gathered on the shoreline waiting for their loved one to come home, it an emotional experience for all. The entire group shares the

same feeling of success – accomplishing the 10-day canoe excursion. The next theme will highlight the personal challenges faced by the youth leaders and demonstrate their acceptance of the challenge and to focus on completing the program as well as gain knowledge by learning new skills.

Learning new skills. One must keep in mind that the OALE program for most youth leaders was a new experience. The OALE opened a new doorway, one that allowed the Youth Leaders to experience the natural environment. The youth leaders were presented with an opportunity to leave their comfort zone called home. The skill of learning how to perform camp craft as explained by (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19):

Oh yeah, and then making a fire, and cooking over the fire. I appreciate having a stove and stuff like that. But then, when we would get to the land, we would already know what we were supposed to do. We would do it, and just get it done and nobody would have to tell us what to do. We would just do our role of the day kind of thing and alternate. I don't know who came up with that system, but we just did it.

Similarly, the experience is shared by (Youth Leader 2, female, age 19), "I learned how to cook; I really don't know how to cook. I really didn't like canoeing that much, and packing and unpacking those barrels, or whatever". Other skills that were mastered throughout the canoe excursion also included areas such as building their tent, preparing the meals, building a fire and using the outdoor bathroom were all new skills learned by the youth leaders. Learning how to pack the canoe, how to paddle, and the chore of performing a portage were teachings of persistence and success; the youth leaders were encouraged to persevere by the lead instructor, rather than give up. More

specifically, travel skills were described as being learned by (Youth Leader 6, male, age 19), “I was just like 10 minutes down the stream then we had to portage. Just after we loaded everything up, lift everything, then once all the barrels were off to that side, then lift the canoes”. However, in another instance but in a different travel group, (Youth Leader 1, male, age 18) shared his experience of ‘role confusion’:

I know that the year I went, there was kind of confusion, being confused all the time. It seems we would get there and then, ‘okay, who has this stuff?’ I don’t know. I would go looking around everywhere. It would be really confusing talking to everybody and not knowing where anything was. There was no roles.

We found 1 piece of paper that had roles.

To acknowledge and share the inconsistency in learning the roles while on the canoe trip have reason to recommend that future OALE trips should ensure that there is consistency in the intentional learning that is to occur while participating in the 10-day canoe trip.

One of the daily expectations was the adoption of the daily roster. As the roles were put forth, the youth leaders complied and learned how to adapt. The youth leaders learned how to cope with the new environment. To acknowledge their dislike for the new experience, the youth leaders were very vocal about the challenges they faced and turned this challenge into valued experience, thereby a positive outlook on life. The success of completing the 10-day canoe excursion was a personal achievement for all six youth leaders.

Working Effectively with Others

Similarly to the previous module, the youth leaders learned how to effectively work with others. Although the youth leaders were all from the same community, their

social network was not a common circle of friends. For many, the youth leaders met for the very first time as they gathered at the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre to gather and pack their camp gear. Prior to departure day, the lead guides divided the youth leaders into two separate travelling groups. The youth leaders did not have a choice of which travelling group they would be assigned. This process further encouraged the youth leaders to build new relationships and to establish team work. The subthemes of a) building new relationships and b) establishing teamwork are key elements of working effectively with others.

Build new relationships. Each travel group was pre-arranged to ensure that the youth leaders would take the time to generate a new social group. Rules and group chores were presented to all youth leaders to ensure that all members were informed of the need to establish a cohesive community; sharing a balanced workload throughout each day. This was recognized by (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19):

It was easy because they split us into groups before we go out and they try to do it randomly, but my group all ended up being friends already. And there were 3 other people that we really didn't know but we all just talk to each other and from there, we just talked amongst each other.

At the end of each travel day, a talking circle was conducted with each travel group to allow for each youth leader to debrief their learning that took place throughout the day. For most youth leaders, this was their first time spending hours one-on-one with a new acquaintance with no other option but to build a new relationship.

When I first left I felt worried because you know for a fact that I am not much of an outdoors person, then I knew for a fact that I was worried about myself. I am

not really a person to be fine by myself; I always have to be around people. It turns out that the second day of the canoe trip I started “I am on a trip, I accept it, I’m on the trip now”, I have to deal with it, so after that stage, I started learning, adapting and taking all the new things I can possibly learn. We were close knit that is when I was starting to have more fun than being obligated to stay. That is when I realized that ‘you know what this can be really fun’ and it was. I actually turned out fine, more than fine, than what I would have thought. (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19)

Socialization and learning to cooperate within a newly formed group was done intentionally. The talking circles were held every evening, with the first two nights the sharing was very limited. I recall the group dynamic in our travel group while I attended the OALE 2009; the youth leaders refrained from socializing with new members during the first three days of the trip. Every talking circle demonstrated respect of all participants by not forcing the members to share if they were unwilling. By the third day, all members within the travel group were sharing their learned experience for the day. The first two evening debriefing sessions were very limited; most youth leaders chose not to share within the talking circle. The daily talking circles reinforced the teamwork being established. By the third night, most or all of the youth leaders began to voice their emotional, physical, mental and spiritual well-being. By the end of the 10-day canoe trip, it was evident that all youth leaders were comfortable within their newly formed community.

Establish teamwork. Team leader for the day and the creation of a duty roster challenged the youth leaders to establish a cohesive work ethic. The duty roster was

assigned amongst the travel team to ensure the following chores were completed: meal preparation, fire keeper, water duty and camp setup/take down. The daily routine and sharing of chores were life skills learned. The rotation of daily chores provided the group with an opportunity to teach one another the proper way to accomplish the task. (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19) shared her experience of taking on specific chores and learned to work cooperatively with her group members:

And then the bugs...well, not people; but all of us and having a sink to do our dishes. Having people around, your team, and having to get stuff done, other than doing them yourself, and having everything hard. We worked as a team to do dishes; we did dishes in a bowl with water – that is just teamwork. When I was young I never worked as a team, I always did individual things.

The youth leaders were encouraged to ask for help when in doubt. This demonstrated humility amongst one another knowing that everybody was learning new skills and no person was above or below the other; all members were on the same level, learning at the same pace. This learning experience further established the teamwork required to function as a community. One example that comes to mind that describes this sense of teamwork is the portage activity that occurred on day one of the canoe trip. The travel group which I was connected had no choice but to portage a short distance in order to reach the next water passage. All members within our travel group had to learn the different roles of transferring the camp gear through the bush, unpacking every canoe, then re-packing and preparing for our continued journey along the waterway. The coordinating of this activity did require patience and endurance. Every member was held responsible for learning a new skill. Another example of establishing teamwork was

through the assignment of the daily duty roster. Each travel group was divided into several teams to rotate the daily chores.

To further support the establishment of teamwork, (Youth Leader 6, male, age 19) articulated this quite well:

The teamwork basically what I see is three main functions of a community; because when you first started you know you would always have one or two people you know in the beginning none of us really knew each other, so its throughout the 10 day canoe trip we build that strong community and towards the end we all, we are all comfortable around each other, we are all joking around that just proves that to the other, when our parents first saw us, they saw that community build, from when we first met up at the youth centre, they said ok bye; they saw us just stay around our parents; or go with our friends, and there were other kids we could go to and say hi, what's your name. But at the end they actually saw us work together, you know, come together talking stay within the group you know, basically saying our goodbyes and everything.

The experience of making new friendships and building a community while attending the OALE attributes to the learning objective of this particular module. The youth leaders spent 10 full days with one another: paddling through their traditional territory, camping with their ancestors, being exposed to the natural environment and the changes in weather conditions, learning from the ideas and opinions of others and taking the time to accept new members into their circle of life.

Leaving a Legacy

The final theme describes the personal achievement of the youth leaders which is described visually by preparing a circle of life piece of artwork. The intentional activity of asking the youth leaders to prepare a circle of life artwork has influenced the youth leaders to share their intimate experience of attending the OALE 2009. One member who attended the OALE pilot project in 2008 also shared his experience and offered input towards further development of the OALE program. The legacy shared by the youth leaders is through their a) personal journey and b) ideas for program activities. Pride is the feeling sensed as the youth leaders shared their experience of attending the OALE. Each experience is unique.

Personal Journey. Direct quotes to support the subtheme personal journey are not available from the youth leaders. However, the fact that the youth leaders have prepared a visual depiction of the impact of the OALE demonstrates the personal data to support the research and directly relates to the research question. Each piece of artwork is appended within this document. It is evident that the OALE has impacted the overall health and well-being of the youth leaders as explained using the circle of life activity combined with the sharing through the talking circle. To respect the story of each youth leader, their personal journey is taken at face value. The honesty and willingness to share one's personal journey is one of life's sacred teachings – the legacy of each youth leader is now a part of our community story. Through each lived experience, the youth leaders have demonstrated the value of taking a challenge and turning this event into a successful and memorable moment. The youth leaders have enhanced their resiliency; demonstrated their strength to keep moving forward; established a new circle of friends and sense of

community; and through persistence and teamwork successfully completed the OALE 2009 with pride. Although every youth leader was able to identify the many challenges they faced while attending the 10-day OALE, they were also able to share the positive learning that occurred. Based on the intentional learning that was incorporated into the daily activities of the OALE 2009, the youth leaders gained knowledge about camp craft, canoe tripping skills, effective communication skills, building confidence as each new lesson was learned and learning to appreciate the beauty of nature. Each negative experience balanced out with a positive lesson in life. As referenced in the final module of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual, “the youth have the ability to lead now” (p. 51).

One must understand their own strengths and weaknesses and establish the wisdom to acknowledge the strength and weaknesses of others. As described within the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual, “it is a personal journey that involves creating a personal vision” (p. 51). The youth leaders have not only embraced the learning opportunity through participating in the 10 day OALE program in 2009, but also provided back to their community by sharing their lived experience throughout this research. While on the 10-day canoe excursion the youth leaders were given time to reflect during their solo time whereby each person was taken to a quiet place in and around the camp site. A time limit of two hours was granted for this solo experience. It also provided the young person with dedicated time to plan for their future. The solo experience provided the time for the youth leaders to recognize their accomplishments. By recognizing one’s strengths, skills and reflecting on individual accomplishments, the youth leaders have put a voice to their personal ability to face the challenges as presented.

The success of our youth leaders are guided by their own personal development; hence their leadership development. The youth leaders have re-searched their own personal experience and shared this by participating in the talking circles. Each youth leader has shared an understanding of who they are, where they come from by sharing a valuable teaching based on their personal journey. All six youth leaders shared their personal journey voluntarily; with each personal story speaking to their own well-being. The spirit of the personal journey of the youth leaders reflects the impact of the OALE. At one point in their life, the youth leaders were not as confident in sharing their life story; as you have heard throughout the examples provided within each module. Earlier research work completed by Jacklin (2002) reports numerous recommendations that came from the Wikwemikong Youth Needs Assessment as described: “recommendations made by the youth for the types of activities they would participate in should be considered by service providers during their annual planning. Specifically, youth are interested in more sports activities” (p. vii). The value of the recommendations from the YNA 2002 was included in the subsequent years of workplan development within the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre. The results of this information have been used to support the activities that have been planned and continue to be implemented on an annual basis. Once again, through the current research study, the youth leaders have also shared their input as to the programs/activities that they feel should be incorporated into the OALE or as part of the youth programming for the community. The sharing of new ideas for programs and activities is another mechanism used to leave an imprint within the community, thereby leaving a legacy to the community. The influence of the youth leaders is heard through their suggested ideas for programming and activities.

Ideas for program activities. All youth leaders were provided with an opportunity to offer insight as to program activities that need to be considered to further enhance leadership development within the community of Wikwemikong. Many ideas were suggested. However, the ideas that are being reported are reflective of enhanced program delivery of the OALE. The following is a list of ideas that have been presented by the youth leaders as input for new program activities for the youth of the community: survivalist weekend, different route along with a tier system for the OALE (beginner, intermediate and advanced program) to challenge the youth to achieve different levels of program intensity. As (Youth Leader 1, male, age 18) described his idea:

Imagine being dropped off down south? The French River it is nice, but I have already done it twice and I feel that I have got to do something new. Imagine being dropped off down at the coastline of Orillia and following the whole coastline back? I think those islands are nice. Why don't you make a route that goes from the Sault all the way this way?

In addition, (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19) further supported the idea of developing a tier system for the OALE:

Maybe what you could do with the beginning, like they would start with the beginner and people who have already been on trips, who already knows what to do out there; they would be like a supervisor and be able to pick up on them on who can do what and randomly get chosen from the beginner and intermediate trips to go onto the advanced kind of thing. I don't think the advanced one should be mandatory cause that is a lot.

A choice of attending a more challenging course would then be limited to those who have graduated to a new level of skill. This suggested idea prompts the idea for tier level training that would encourage the community to foster capacity development amongst the youth who are committed to further leadership development. Further training opportunities could be considered that would prepare the youth leader to learn the skills to become proficient in being a lead guide thereby being mentored to take the lead role in the OALE program.

The youth leaders who participated in this research may not have expressed their self-awareness of the learning that took place in an experiential setting through the use of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual. However, as explained by (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29):

I basically learned a lot without knowing that I was learning a lot. But I think that I really believe in experiential learning and when you are out there you are experiencing a lot. And hard not to learn and take something from that experience. Maybe when they think back to it they are like that wasn't really like that positive of an experience for me, you know they might even say that. But I guarantee without even knowing some learning occurred; that seed was planted and can't help but grow, to flows out, and into the rest of our being so sometimes you know we are back, back from the trip, and on the land and we do not spend time to reflect so we don't make that connection until we go out again.

The event of attending one OALE trip might not have an immediate impact on the youth participants but given the opportunity to explore the questions and learn from the leadership manual could have a more positive impact on the overall well-being of the

youth. It needs to be noted that a training session on the delivery of the leadership modules based on an experiential setting should be facilitated amongst the staff in charge of implementing the OALE program. An example that was presented by (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19), is a skill that she learned:

I don't know how to create change, but I remember when I was in grade 6 or grade 7, I did a peer mentorship at the Youth Centre, it was a weekend. It was pretty much training and it was with *name of three community facilitators*.

The above example voiced the uncertainty of training that the youth leader received while in grade 7, but on the same note she was able to identify the training as peer mentorship. As the former Youth Program Manager, I am aware of the peer mentorship program that was offered to the older students in the middle school (grades 7 & 8); to train the youth to become the mediator when conflict occurred within the school environment. The youth leader's opening statement that she does not know how to create change was clearly an understatement; knowing that she has created change by participating in this research. The sharing of her lived experience and offering feedback for youth leadership development training has been valuable input towards the betterment of the programs and services for the youth of Wikwemikong. For future reference, this training should be re-considered as additional leadership development for those students in grades 7 and 8.

Two youth leaders suggested that a simple survey be developed to canvas their peers as a means of gaining the data to develop recommendations for new program activities. (Youth Leader 5, male, age 19) clearly stated the following, "do a simple survey in the schools, like go to every classroom hand out some sheets, write it down on a sheet of paper, ask them what they would want more in the community". A simple

survey can be incorporated into an annual workplan to support the needs of the youth within the community. One way to further encourage youth to become more involved in leadership development would be to take the initiative to design and implement a youth-driven survey through the leadership and guidance of the Youth Workers connected to the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre or through the Community Researcher. The skills and knowledge that are being learned from the Community Researcher can be transferred to the youth who are willing to take on the leadership role of conducting a community survey. The frequency of such a survey can be determined by the community youth. All the requirements of conducting local research will be included as part of the learning process.

The pursuit of a community youth council was also recommended by (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19),

I heard about a youth council and I think they should really do that. I think that is something that they should do. I think it would be really good cause our voices are right there. We would give more input and show the people that live here, they will know what they want.

The development of a youth council would definitely encourage the young people to speak on behalf of their peers. A program designed to empower the youth to speak out, plan, organize and implement programs and activities that meet the needs of their peer group would benefit the community entirely. The Wikwemikong Leadership Manual along with the OALE 10-day canoe trip can be used as one training component to highlight the personal qualities and attributes of the youth council; encouraging the youth

to take the time to reflect on where they have been, where they are today and to plan for the future.

Each module within the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual has been experientially shared and learned as demonstrated by the lived experiences of the youth leaders that attended the OALE in 2009. This chapter has evolved around the experiences of the youth leaders, to demonstrate the impact of the OALE 2009. The next chapter will focus on the benefits of the OALE for the community of Wikwemikong. Family and extended family members of the youth leaders have shared their input as to the impacts of the OALE and offered feedback to improve and further develop the OALE program.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

Overview

Community research is only meaningful if the work implemented has an outcome. To support the work and respect demonstrated within a First Nation community, Jacklin and Kinoshameg (2008) quoted the words of youth of Wikwemikong as research was being conducted in the community - “Only if it is going to mean something” (p. 53). The youth were more than willing to participate in research and have expressed interest in attending the final thesis presentation. What follows are four conclusions I have arrived at based upon the research project. The conclusions are as follows: (a) that research processes and applications must be meaningful to (and in) Wikwemikong; (b) that learning through this youth leadership initiative can happen for community members of all ages in the community; (c) that Wikwemikong, and in fact every reserve, must lead and apply what is gained in their community research projects in order to augment quality of life; and (d) that there are clear places that academic researchers should and should not venture when collaborating with Aboriginal communities on territorial lands. Once these conclusions are briefly discussed, I will conclude with personal reflections.

Conclusion one: Research that is meaningful to Wikwemikong. Members of the community research advisory committee provided their opinions and feedback on the impact of the OALE. Youth leaders and their family members also shared their observations of what has been the lived experienced of those involved in the OALE. Further supported by previous research collaboration with Schinke et al. (2013), “the research has at heart communities who themselves direct research by identifying a

research topic, research questions and methods....community members then claim to tell what counts, what is singled out for attention, what is taken seriously, what requires attention, preceded by what kind of preparation and calculation” (p. 462-463). This research initiative has been primarily coordinated with and for the membership of Wikwemikong with an inclusive summary of the recommendations provided by the youth leaders, the family and community research team. As shared by Schnarch (2004),

community relevance and community usefulness may be the most telling measures of the worth of a study. The question of quality is subordinate. The next point is that a community-driven, community-controlled project is more likely, although not guaranteed, to score highly on those measures. (p. 89)

The findings of the evaluation of the OALE are presented as evidence to address the priorities of the needs of the youth of the Wikwemikong community. Support from the Wikwemikong Comprehensive Community Plan 2013 describes the need to design and implement programs and services with a focus on wholistic well-being, therefore the recommendations for new programming ideas are provided. As quoted by (Female Elder, Community Research Team) during a talking circle, the following describes an understanding of how we make use of the information learned from the youth:

Since these are coming from the youth, then I think they are wide open and we can just put whatever the community needs. I think that is what that is about. We are not going to say is it for this group, or that group, it is wide open. We make it what we want it to be as Anishinabek.

The use of the data needs to be translated and embedded within our own cultural context.

The research only has meaning if the information learned is going to be used for the

benefit of the community. As expressed by the elder, the information learned from the youth leaders and their families cannot be categorized based on mainstream rules.

When we were growing up, we played with all ages, we didn't play just with 18 year olds, 16 year olds, when we were 15 all 15; even the smallest one was in the group and even the father would come out to play and even the mother. It was all ages. And we lost that. (Female Elder, Community Research Team)

Conclusion two: Learning can happen at all ages. In addition, (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29) also supports the above noted statement: "I think that is an excellent point that you just made. You know we have been subjected to this mental thought to think that everything was in categories; we've compartmentalized everything, that just separates everybody from one another". As described, the community needs to take a look at how the programs are delivered and not to separate the groups; learning happens from young to old. (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29) further goes onto to explain the learning that occurs from all ages:

Not only is the young one learning, the older one is learning too. There are all learning to guide, learning to protect; and I think that is another thing that is kind of missing when we are in our community; maybe its not missing maybe its just not like strong enough right now.

Here the emphasis is on the learning that can come from any age group; that we are equal within the circle and that we need to respect the teaching that comes from our children and vice versa.

The position of the community Wikwemikong is to ensure community members are involved in the entire process in order for the research to be meaningful and the

results of the research must benefit the people of the community. Smith (1999) explained that:

in all community approaches process – that is, methodology and method – is highly important. In many projects the process is far more important than the outcome. Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination. (p. 127)

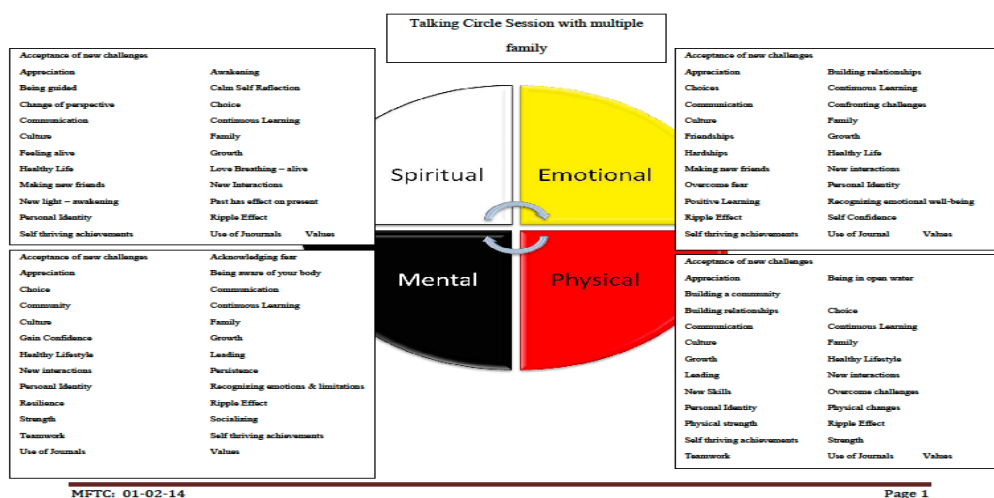
In this research study, the process and the outcome are as equally important. Community participation has been the key focus of this research. The involvement of the community research team offered feedback from each transcribed talking circle which evolved into the identified key concepts listed within the Circle of Life – the Lived Experience diagram. The key concepts were then presented to the youth leaders and their family members as a separate exercise; the placement of the key concepts onto the medicine wheel was completed through a group effort. An example of this process and the importance of the information that is shared have been expressed by the following dialogue which I had facilitated during one of the talking circles:

Most common items placed on the medicine wheel based on the interviews - Does the OALE have an impact on the youth leaders and their families? What would you say? (Community Lead Researcher) Yes (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19) Impacted the individual youth leaders; how the OALE has impacted your life today? This is what is telling us; if we were to do this every year, I wonder what this wheel would look like? We need to continue to tell the story every year.

(Community Lead Researcher) This is just from that one year? It would probably be a lot bigger if it was every year. (Youth Leader 4, female, age 19)

Only 7 youth leaders have shared their lived experience of the OALE; clearly the impact is connected to the four quadrants of well-being within the Anishinabek Medicine Wheel. As demonstrated below in Figure 2 (The Circle of Life – the Lived Experience), the youth leaders and their family members have described the impact of the 10 day Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience program as being wholistic. The question ‘how has the 10 day OALE impacted the youth leaders and their families’ post five years of the intervention’ is described as mno-bimaadziwin (the good life). Rather than using a dot-mocracy process to establish consensus on the impact of the OALE, the data was grouped and placed on the medicine wheel as a larger group; taking every member’s input into consideration, without interference from the community research team. In the event that an item belonged to more than one quadrant on the medicine wheel, then the group was encouraged to place the item in the various areas. Several items have been placed in all four quadrants of the medicine wheel.

Figure 2: Circle of Life – the Lived Experience



The above noted figure does in fact demonstrate the cultural learning that occurred while on the OALE as depicted through its association with the four quadrants of health within the medicine wheel. The visual presentation of the circle of life depicts the good life balanced within the four quadrants of health. There is no right or wrong answer in where each item belongs within the circle of life but it is important to recognize that the OALE does have an impact on the youth leaders, the family members and the community.

Every individual adapted to the change while on the OALE and learned how to make the best of a negative experience and turn it into a more positive one. Two youth leaders have shared their circle of life artwork with a clear description of the positive and negative experiences of attending the OALE 2009. Without knowing the impact of the OALE, both youth leaders were describing the learning that occurred along with acknowledging their own sense of accomplishments. The youth leaders, their family and community have demonstrated *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life) by acknowledging their adaptation to change and enhanced resiliency.

Conclusion three: The community must lead and apply the research. Ownership of the research remains within the community of Wikwemikong. The spirit of the work conducted is for the benefit of the youth leaders, their families and the community. Program changes to the OALE were identified by the youth leaders and their family members. A few common areas that require further discussion to enhance the existing OALE program relate to the duration of the OALE and the route to the current activity. Another recommendation that is provided by (Female parent) is to consider collaborating with the education department and include the OALE as part of the school curriculum:

I wonder if you can have this canoe trip, but something for each season along with the whole survival weekend, or hiking trip, but gear it to each season? So that when the spring comes you know what you are looking for in the spring, you know what is going to be available in the spring? In the summer you know what's available, in the fall and the winter.

More youth would be provided with an opportunity to experience *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life). Through a collaborative effort, a curriculum can be re-established through the use of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual. The suggestion of aligning each season with the delivery of the OALE is one recommendation that will be shared with the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre. A review of the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual will need to be completed in consultation with the Wikwemikong Board of Education to ensure the curriculum guidelines are achieved. However, as suggested by (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29):

Another thing that I do remember about going through the manual was, it was almost written like I would have been taking that at one of my university classes, sitting in a seminar, here is a paper, here is what the discussion is going to be about....it was just the use of jargon the way it was worded the way it was asked it wasn't really culturally appropriate.

The involvement of the community research team, myself and members from the Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre and the Wikwemikong Board of Education can implement a thorough review of each module from the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual and determine how to best deliver the learning objective in an experiential setting. With input from the frontline facilitators and lead guides, along with the

curriculum development team, modifications can be made to the Wikwemikong Leadership Manual to ensure a comprehensive culturally appropriate outdoor adventure experiential experience course is prepared and presented to the WBE for consideration. The modifications to the modules need to be specific to the community culture: with access to the local resources as natural educators who are well versed in the community story, language, customs, values and beliefs. As the research has demonstrated, the community of Wikwemikong has an opportunity to teach the youth many more life skills which includes hand-on activities and visual presentations of how to survive in today's society through learning about the natural medicines and natural ways of living off the land. The OALE program introduces the youth leader to an opportunity for more learning, therefore additional leadership training needs to be considered as a mechanism for challenging the youth leaders towards setting and achieving new goals.

In addition, (Youth Leader 7, male, age 29) further elaborates and explains that it is essential that the manual be incorporated into the OALE as it has been used in the past:

Because if we did not have that manual and we just went on a camping trip, you would have good experiences still, good talks; and some good questions would come up, but by having it there as a guide throughout the trip, it makes the experience more rich and you know a lot more; I really do think that.

The emphasis for each OALE trip needs to remain focused on experientially teaching the learning objectives coming from the leadership modules. Every teachable moment needs to be embraced.

Conclusion four: There is a clear place for academic researchers, and also places they should not venture. First and foremost, the academic researcher cannot generalize and apply the lessons learned to other First Nation community; each community is unique. Jacklin and Kinoshameg ((2008) explain that “Aboriginal people no longer tolerate traditional research approaches; instead, they ask to be involved and insist on knowing how the research will aid the community” (p. 53). The academic researcher has a responsibility to introduce research that will benefit the community. The academic researcher requires patience to learn more about the community priorities. The academic research also has the responsibility to learn the protocols of the Wikwemikong community. It has been my experience through building relationships with academic researchers since 2001 (K. Jacklin), that the academic researcher is willing to share their knowledge and experience with the community of Wikwemikong; the capacity building has been respectfully established. Over the past decade, more and more community members of Wikwemikong have gained the capacity to engage as co-researchers. As a direct result of historical research injustice within the community of Wikwemikong, it is worth noting that “Aboriginal people are taking responsibility for the research process in their communities; now researchers must take responsibility for what was done in the past, what is being done today, and what future generations of researchers will do” (Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008, p. 63). As the lead researcher for this thesis paper, there was less reliance on the academic institution to lead the path in delivering the research process. As a community member of Wikwemikong, the transfer of skills and applying the knowledge from previous research projects was intertwined throughout the project. At no point in time did I perceive myself as the expert in research. The shared

responsibility of telling the story of the impact of the OALE was amongst the youth leaders, their family members and the community research team. As one large group, all shared their expertise by creating the circle of life artwork and mapping the impact of the OALE based on the Medicine Wheel. Together as a community, we learned the impact of the OALE; the impact demonstrates the good life, mno-bimaadziwin.

Complimentary to the capacity building, the sharing of the community protocols with the academic researchers has also occurred. As explained by Schinke et al. (2010),

The project (and this specific study) was proposed by the Wikwemikong, with strategies that will be integrated in the said community for its youth through a self-governed initiative led by sport staff and youth leaders. In addition, community discussions and talking circles were employed in place of interviews and focus groups. Finally, the present research reflects the voices of Wikwemikong appointed coresearchers who were active throughout the research.

(p. 164)

This reference clearly demonstrates the capacity established by members of Wikwemikong to pursue research work and ensure the results of the research are acted upon. The community of Wikwemikong has embraced the need to take action to resolve issues through engagement of various research initiatives.

However, there are some places which academic researchers should not venture. Wikwemikong is strong in its cultural knowledge and tends to safe guard the traditional teachings of the community, therefore ceremony and/or prayers connected to this thesis were not included in the tape recordings. There are opportunities for outside academic researchers to become involved and learn the protocols of the cultural teachings and/or

ceremonies but to actually tape record or video tape the ceremony is not permitted. As a community member of Wikwemikong, I too respect this restriction. As Anishinabek people, we learn by doing; the ceremonial practices are done by learning and doing. The offering of tobacco and the teaching of its significance is another protocol that has been shared with the academic researcher. The tobacco offering is respected and practised by the researcher regardless of the person's position within the research project.

As an insider-research and community member of Wikwemikong, patience is one of the lessons valued while pursuing the research within the community. On several occasions, I was left but no choice to call youth leaders on the day of the scheduled talking circle to confirm their attendance. At times, I was also calling the youth leader minutes before the session to ensure their participation. To demonstrate respect for the time of each participant, an offering of snack or refreshments was also provided. Upon completion of the larger family talking circle, a full meal was shared with all participants. The offering of a meal is part of my own teaching passed down by my mother, father and elders; to feed the spirit of those who have shared their knowledge and to give thanks for their commitment. For the academic researcher, this teaching is becoming more practised as I witness existing research projects whereby the participants are provided with a meal and refreshments as a part of the team meeting or talking circle.

The term focus group is used sparingly now as research is conducted within the community of Wikwemikong. The academic researcher has the responsibility of learning how to conduct a talking circle and to be less intrusive in the questioning of the participants. A script to facilitate a talking circle is not common. The common practise is to let the dialogue occur; allow the participants to voice their story.

Opportunities for future locally driven research

For the community of Wikwemikong, the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience program has the potential to invite future research that will evaluate the daily impact of the OALE in connection with the leadership manual. The circle of life arts-based activity can be completed each day during the talking circle activity with a narrative shared within the group or one-on-one with a youth facilitator. Prior to the completion of the 10-day canoe trip, a final talking circle could be held on the last night. The youth leaders will then have an opportunity to share their personal journey with the entire group. To leave a legacy, it would be ideal if the youth leaders would prepare one large community pictograph sharing their story of the lived experience with an intentional process of ensuring the pictograph is presented during the homecoming celebration. The give back through a verbal and visual story of the lived experience will demonstrate the impact and benefit of the OALE on all youth participants. The same process of placing key concepts onto the medicine wheel can be completed by the youth leaders immediately after they have prepared their circle of life artwork. The youth workers would be responsible for recording the key concepts from each description from the shared story of the youth leaders. The legacy of the lived experience would gift back to the community. The artwork, the transcribed data of each story shared and the medicine wheel teaching would be used as an evaluation and impact of the OALE on the youth leaders, their family and community.

Final thoughts

Overall, the research experience of working within my own community has offered me an opportunity to learn more about the Anishinabek way of sharing our story.

This learning required time to collectively work together as close as possible to ensure that I was being respectful in sharing the research experience. The ongoing theme that was going through my mind was the ‘ownership, control, access and possession’ of the information that was generated *with* and *for* the community of Wikwemikong. The final thesis document is for the benefit of the program and services delivered *with* and *for* the youth leaders, family and community of Wikwemikong.

The stories of the lived experience were transcribed and shared with the community research team. Two of the three community members reviewed each transcription and highlighted their view of what each youth leader learned as each described their Circle of Life artwork. Direct involvement of community members into the actual development of the research being proposed has a greater impact on the results presented; the community takes ownership of the research right from the beginning, making it more likely that what is gained through the project will be integrated within the community. As a community research team, we all agreed to place ideas and concepts of the impacts of the OALE, onto a medicine wheel, to describe the connection to mno-bimaadziwin (the good life) based on the four quadrants of health: spiritual, emotional, physical and mental well-being.

Additional literature reveals the tenets of PAR based on research conducted by Frisby et al. (2005) as follows:

the term participatory refers to the formation of partnerships among people with problems to solve, researchers, and those who control public services so all parties can mutually learn about the structural constraints affecting people’s lives and together explore the transformative possibilities. (p. 370)

These tenets have been proven through the use of PAR principles in the ongoing research initiatives between Laurentian University's academics and coresearchers within the community of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. Together, there has been a mutual respect by both cultures; both working together toward the mutual benefits and needs of the community. The community has made the commitment to ensure the results of the research would be utilized to improve existing programs and services of the youth.

Hence the research thesis has examined the impact of the 10-day Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program on the youth and their families, situated in Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. The OALE has grown dramatically within the community of Wikwemikong where it now has included not only the 10-day canoe excursion for youth leaders; but now includes a family-oriented four-day canoe trip. One finding that has been voiced through the talking circles is shared by (Parent 3, male) the following quote:

Just imagine if something came out of this, I am not saying this year, but 5, 10 years down the road, something big; if you can offer this in the open market where you can bring these groups in at the same time create some job opportunities for Wikwemikong, and say this started in Wikwemikong. You know as well as I do that we are in a very high unemployment situation. It would benefit the whole community, not just one program. Different groups can collaborate, health centre, recreation.

At the present time, the OALE has primarily been offered as a community program, with some participation from other nearby First Nation communities. Since the program is fully funded through the Brighter Futures program (as per First Nations Inuit

Health Branch) which is aligned within the First Nations Inuit Health Branch contribution agreement, then the priority is that the program services the community members of Wikwemikong. However, the program does have the potential to market itself to extend the service beyond the needs of the community. It was also explained by another family member within the same talking circle that there has been expressed interest by outsiders who would not mind paying a registration fee to send their child and/or youth on this 10-day canoe trip. The Brighter Futures program does have the potential to extend the OALE to other communities, but a monetary fee would need to be applied; more staff would need to be hired. The opportunities are endless.

The academic experience of going through the process of attending the course study of the master's program in along with the actual hands-on learning experience of being the community lead researcher for this thesis has impacted my overall health and well-being. The term *mno-bimaadziwin* (the good life) and viewing the medicine wheel has brought me full circle; learning the teaching of *mno-bimaadziwin*. I have now spent the last three years working my way through the medicine wheel: emotionally by sensing the excitement of the youth leaders and their family members as they shared their story of their lived experience; physically by travelling back and forth to attend the academic courses; mentally by spending countless days and nights balancing my full-time job, family and school work and focusing on the end result of my thesis; and spiritually by learning to embrace the voice of the people.

For me, the process of obtaining my master's thesis only has meaning if the recommendations and feedback received from the youth leaders, their family members

and the community research team is used for future program development and enhancement. This is the legacy that I gift back to my community.

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Appendix A: Youth Leader Consent Form



Wikwemikong
Unceded Indian Reserve



RESEARCH INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

FOR YOUTH LEADER

Study Title: **Evaluating the Impacts of an Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program in a Rural Aboriginal Community**

Investigators: **Mary Jo Wabano**

Study Period: **July 2, 2013 – May 31, 2014**

Description of the Research:

Since the development of the OALE, the community has not involved the youth leaders in describing the impacts of a ten day outdoor adventure leadership experience program. The main purpose of this research project is to learn how the OALE has impacted the lives of our youth and their families post four years after the initial intervention.

You are being asked to assist by participating in a Talking Circle. The proposed method through the use of a Talking Circle with the support of an arts-based activity to encourage self-expression will be presented. This method will engage your participation and give you an opportunity to voice the your experience and share how the OALE has had an impact on your overall health and well being.

The Talking Circle will be used as a method to gather data that will assist the research team with uncovering the impacts of an intervention – the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience (OALE). The OALE program was designed as a health intervention for youth between the ages of 12 -18; to assist the community with enhancing youth resiliency and well-being through participating in a culturally relevant leadership program.

The next step to improving the overall health and well-being of the youth of Wikwemikong is to centralize the voice of our youth and their family and to share their lived experiences of OALE; to learn the benefits gained and what changes are required to further enhance overall health and well-being. The family members of the youth leaders are also being asked to provide their feedback; however this will be done in a separate Talking Circle exclusive of the Youth Leaders.

The Talking Circle session will be audio-recorded and notes will be taken. The recordings will be transcribed and shared back to the community research team for further discussion. All identifying information in the notes will be removed and replaced with a code to protect your identity. The results from the Talking Circle will be used to describe how the OALE experience has impacted the overall health and well-being of the youth leaders and their families of the community of Wikwemikong. Further evidence will be shared as recommendations for programming specific for youth.

Confidentiality & Risks

Confidentiality is important and demonstrates respect to you as a participant. Rather than using individual names, you will be identified by use of a code. However, all other participants in the talking circle will be aware of your comments during the session. All family members will be asked to keep the information from the session confidential, but there are no guarantees.

Any information that you provide will be stored in a secure location at the residence of the community research lead for a period of two years. The findings from the study may eventually be published in journal articles and presented at conferences, with approval from the Chief and Council of Wikwemikong. More specifically, your personal quotes obtained through the Talking Circle may be included, but your identity will not be revealed. There are no substantial risks involved with your participation in this study.

Benefits and Opportunities

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant, but it is hoped that the information obtained will create more leadership training opportunities for the youth along with recommending additional programs for youth to compliment the existing health services within the community of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve.

Right to Withdraw from Study

Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from it at any time without penalty. You also have the right to have all of your information removed from the study.

Audio Recording of Talking Circles

By consenting to participating in this research, you are also agreeing to being audio-recorded. The intent of the audio-recording is to ensure that all the information shared throughout the talking circle will be captured and transcribed word for word. However, your name will not be used to identify who said what; confidentiality will be maintained.

Contact Information

Please contact Mary Jo Wabano (Community Research Lead) in Wikwemikong at 705-859-1747 (home) or e-mail: mjwabano@laurentian.ca if you are interested in participating in the study or if you would like more information. You may also contact any member of the community research team.

Community Research Team:

Name	Role	Address	E-mail
Mary Jo Wabano	Community Research Lead/Master's Student Candidate – School of Human Kinetics, Laurentian University, Sudbury, ON	1747 Wikwemikong Way Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-1747	mjwabano@laurentian.ca
Lawrence Enosse Or Designate	Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre	11A Debajehmujig Lane, Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-3597	insertname@wikyhealth.ca

Chris Pheasant	Community Resource Elder	Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-XXXX	cpheasant@sympatico.ca
Rita G. Corbiere	Community Resource Elder	Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-3363	
Jesse Peltier or Sherry Peltier	Youth Facilitator	11A Debajehmujig Lane, Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-3597	youthfacilitator@wikyhealth.ca

If you have any other particular concerns with the ethics of this study, please contact Robin Craig @ Laurentian University by calling toll free number 1-800-461-4030 or email ethics@laurentian.ca.

Consent and Agreement

Agreement by youth leader who will participate in the Talking Circles:

I have reviewed and understand this form and I agree to participate in this research study. I know that I may withdraw at any time if I want to.

Youth Leader's Name
(PLEASE PRINT)

Identification Code
Shaded Area for Researcher Use Only

Youth Leader's Signature

Date of Signature

Agreement by PARENT or GUARDIAN: Only required for youth leaders who are under the age of 16 years.

My signature below indicates that I have reviewed and understand this consent form and agree that my child may participate in this research study. I have also ensured that my child understands and is willing to participate.

My child is a: ☐ boy ☐ girl

Birth Month: _____ Birth Year: _____

Parent or Legal Guardian's Name
(PLEASE PRINT)

Relationship to Participant
(PLEASE PRINT)

Parent or Legal Guardian's Signature

Date of Signature

Thank you for your time, interest, and willingness to participate in this research.

Appendix B: Family Consent Form



Wikwemikong
Unceded Indian Reserve



RESEARCH INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

FOR FAMILY MEMBER(S)

Study Title: Evaluating the Impacts of an Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program in a Rural Aboriginal Community

Investigators: Mary Jo Wabano

Study Period: July 2, 2013 – May 31, 2014

Description of the Research:

Since the development of the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience program, the community has not involved the youth leaders in describing the impacts of a ten day outdoor adventure leadership experience program. The main purpose of this research project is to learn how the OALE has impacted the lives of our youth and their families post four years after the initial intervention.

You are being asked to assist by participating in a Talking Circle. The proposed method through the use of a Talking Circle with the support of an arts-based activity to encourage self-expression will be presented. This method will engage your participation and give you an opportunity to voice the your experience and share how the OALE has had an impact on your overall health and well being.

The Talking Circle will be used as a method to gather data that will assist the research team with uncovering the impacts of an intervention – the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience (OALE). The OALE program was designed as a health intervention for youth between the ages of 12 -18; to assist the community with enhancing youth resiliency and well-being through participating in a culturally relevant leadership program.

The next step to improving the overall health and well-being of the youth of Wikwemikong is to centralize the voice of our youth and their family and to share their lived experiences of OALE; to learn the benefits gained and what changes are required to further enhance overall health and well-being. The family members of the youth leaders are also being asked to provide their feedback; however this will be done in a separate Talking Circle exclusive of the Youth Leaders.

The Talking Circle session will be audio-recorded and notes will be taken. The recordings will be transcribed and shared back to the community research team for further discussion. All identifying information in the notes will be removed and replaced with a code to protect your identity. The results from the Talking Circle will be used to describe how the OALE experience has impacted the overall health and well-being of the youth leaders and their families of the community of Wikwemikong. Further evidence will be shared as recommendations for programming specific for youth.

Confidentiality & Risks

Confidentiality is important and demonstrates respect to you as a participant. Rather than using individual names, you will be identified by use of a code. However, all other participants in the talking circle will be aware of your comments during the session. All family members will be asked to keep the information from the session confidential, but there are no guarantees.

Any information that you provide will be stored in a secure location at the residence of the community research lead for a period of two years. The findings from the study may eventually be published in journal articles and presented at conferences, with approval from the Chief and Council of Wikwemikong. More specifically, your personal quotes obtained through the Talking Circle may be included, but your identity will not be revealed. There are no substantial risks involved with your participation in this study.

Benefits and Opportunities

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant, but it is hoped that the information obtained will create more leadership training opportunities for the youth along with recommending additional programs for youth to compliment the existing health services within the community of Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve.

Right to Withdraw from Study

Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from it at any time without penalty. You also have the right to have all of your information removed from the study.

Audio Recording of Talking Circles

By consenting to participating in this research, you are also agreeing to being audio-recorded. The intent of the audio-recording is to ensure that all the information shared throughout the talking circle will be captured and transcribed word for word. However, your name will not be used to identify who said what; confidentiality will be maintained.

Contact Information

Please contact Mary Jo Wabano (Community Research Lead) in Wikwemikong at 705-859-1747 (home) or e-mail: mwabano@laurentian.ca if you are interested in participating in the study or if you would like more information. You may also contact any member of the community research team.

Community Research Team:

Name	Role	Address	E-mail
Mary Jo Wabano	Community Research Lead/Master's Student Candidate – School of Human Kinetics, Laurentian University, Sudbury, ON	1747 Wikwemikong Way Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-1747	mwabano@laurentian.ca
Lawrence Enosse Or Designate	Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre	11A Debajehmujig Lane, Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-3597	Insertname@wikyhealth.ca

Chris Pheasant	Community Resource Elder	Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-XXXX	cpheasant@sympatico.ca
Rita G. Corbiere	Community Resource Elder	Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-3363	
Insert NAME of Youth Facilitator	Youth Facilitator	11A Debajehmujig Lane, Waasa Naabin Community Youth Services Centre Wikwemikong, ON 705-859-3597	youthfacilitator@wikyhealth.ca

If you have any other particular concerns with the ethics of this study, please contact Robin Craig @ Laurentian University by calling toll free number 1-800-461-4030 or email ethics@laurentian.ca.

Consent and Agreement

Agreement by family member who will participate in the Talking Circles:

I have reviewed and understand this form and I agree to participate in this research study. I know that I may withdraw at any time if I want to.

Youth Leader's Family member
(PLEASE PRINT)

Family Member signature

Identification Code
Shaded Area for Researcher Use Only

Date of Signature

Agreement by PARENT or GUARDIAN: Only required for family members who are under the age of 16 years.

My signature below indicates that I have reviewed and understand this consent form and agree that my child may participate in this research study. I have also ensured that my child understands and is willing to participate.

My child is a: ☐ boy ☐ girl

Birth Month: _____ Birth Year: _____

Parent or Legal Guardian's Name
(PLEASE PRINT)

Relationship to Participant
(PLEASE PRINT)

Parent or Legal Guardian's Signature

Date of Signature

Thank you for your time, interest, and willingness to participate in this research.

Appendix C: REB Form



Laurentian University
Université Laurentienne

APPROVAL FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS Research Ethics Board – Laurentian University

This letter confirms that the research project identified below has successfully passed the ethics review by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (REB). Your ethics approval date, other milestone dates, and any special conditions for your project are indicated below.


TYPE OF APPROVAL / New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / Modifications to project / Time extension	
Name of Principal Investigator and school/department	Mary Jo Wabano
Title of Project	Evaluating the Impacts of an Outdoor Adventure Leadership Experience Program in a Rural Aboriginal Community
REB file number	2013-06-04
Date of original approval of project	July 15, 2013
Date of approval of project modifications or extension (if applicable)	
Final/Interim report due on	July 15, 2014
Conditions placed on project	Final report due on July 15, 2014

During the course of your research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment or consent forms may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to the Research Ethics website to complete the appropriate [REB form](#).

All projects must submit a report to REB at least once per year. If involvement with human participants continues for longer than one year (e.g. you have not completed the objectives of the study and have not yet terminated contact with the participants, except for feedback of final results to participants), you must request an extension using the appropriate [REB form](#).

In all cases, please ensure that your research complies with Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS).
Also please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence with the REB office.

Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan James".

Susan James, Chair
Laurentian University Research Ethics Board

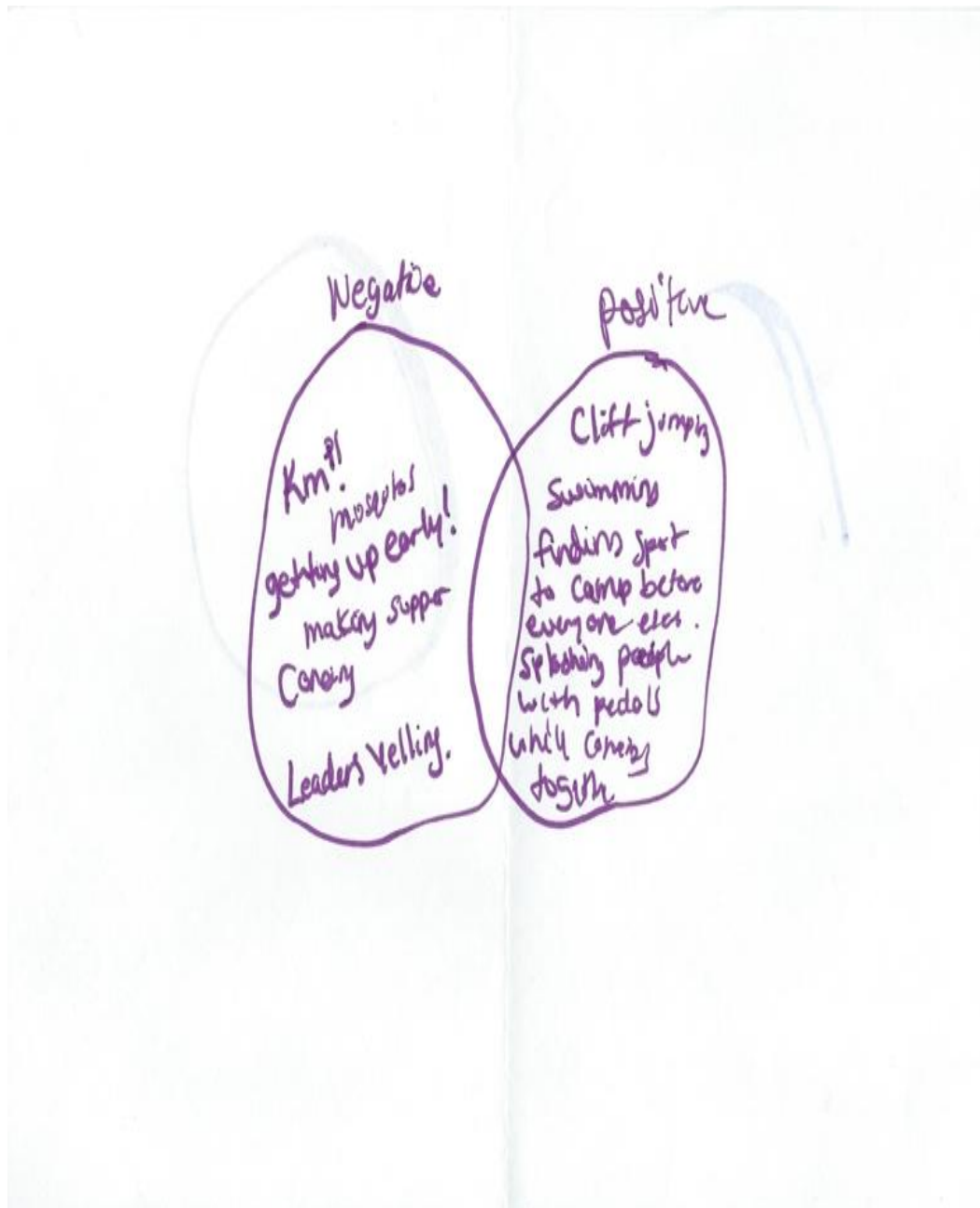
Appendix D: Youth Leader 1 Circle of Life



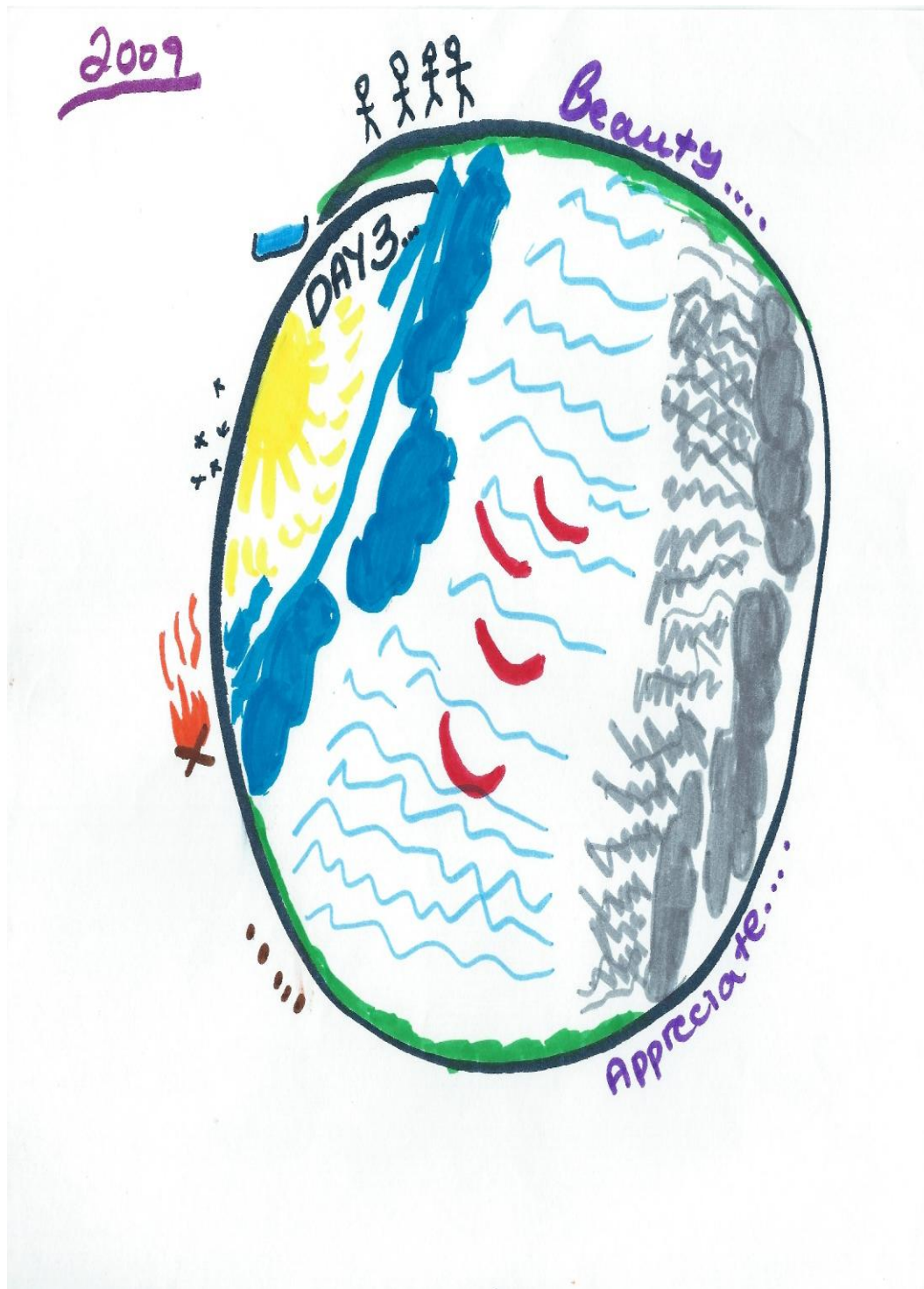
Appendix E: Youth Leader 2 Circle of Life



Appendix F: Youth Leader 3 Circle of Life



Appendix G: Youth Leader 4 Circle of Life



Appendix H: Youth Leader 5 Circle of Life



Appendix I: Youth Leader 6 Circle of Life



Appendix J: Youth Leader 7 Circle of Life

