



SPIRIT OF HEALING

ALBERTA FIRST NATIONS CONQUERING PRESCRIPTION DRUG MISUSE

PhotoVoice: A Youth Perspective

Alberta First Nations Prescription Drug Misuse Strategy

Submitted to: Mental Health & Addictions Sub-Committee, Alberta Region

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Brad Twin, Swan River First Nation

Chelsea Willier, Sucker Creek First Nation

Chelsey Ominayak, Sucker Creek First Nation

Destiny Quinn, Saddle Lake Cree Nation

Kelly McGilvery, Saddle Lake Cree Nation

Nickolas Omeasoo, Maskwacis

Ocean Bruyere, Tsuu T'ina Nation

Robbie Crying Head, Blood Tribe



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Introduction

First Nations Storytelling

*Photovoice is a form of storytelling through visual representation. Storytelling is a common practice in many Aboriginal communities and is integral to imparting understanding of one's role in their community...Through storytelling, community members learn more about values that are expected as a member of the community. Photovoice is able to convey expectations of the community through visual and narrative representation.*¹

Our Treaty 7 Elder Advisor, Dr. Reg Crowshoe teaches us that the western way of validating information is with words on paper, while the traditional way is oral, through words and storytelling. “We use oral implementation practices, common across the board in Treaty areas 6, 7 and 8 to validate information”.² Although PhotoVoice is not a cultural practice, it nonetheless is a way of delivering a story and transmitting knowledge and ways of being.

PhotoVoice

*Photographs are footprints of our minds, mirrors of our lives, reflections from our hearts, frozen memories we can hold in silent stillness in our hands – forever, if we wish.*³

Approaches that not require talk as the first step are often very successful. Many people have inhibitions and feelings of inadequacy about artistic skill, however photography is seen as an approach with many benefits. “Photography is markedly different than other art in that it ‘is the result of the photographer’s decision that it is worth recording.... The language of photography is the language of events’”⁴.

Photography is usually interpreted as factual, a recording of events that have occurred. For the decision maker this has the potential to add validation to the reality of his or her past. People generally do not deny the truth of photography.⁵

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada, (2012). *Connecting the Dots: Photovoice With Aboriginal Youth: Our Images. Our Voice. Our Community*. Retrieved March 21, 2014 from <http://www.cmha.bc.ca/files/Photovoice/index.html#/10/>.

² Elder R. Crowshoe, personal communication, August 1, 2013

³ Weiser, J. (1999). *PhotoTherapy techniques: Exploring the secrets of personal snapshots and family albums*. Vancouver: PhotoTherapy Centre, p.1.

⁴ Berger, 1980, as cited in Glover-Graf, N. M., & Miller, E. (2006). The use of phototherapy in group treatment for persons who are chemically dependent. *Rehabilitation Counselling Bulletin*, 49(3), p. 293.

⁵ Glover-Graf, N. M., & Miller, E. (2006). The use of phototherapy in group treatment for persons who are chemically dependent. *Rehabilitation Counselling Bulletin*, 49(3), P.167



PhotoVoice is an advocacy tool developed by the sociologist Caroline Wang (*Wang & Burris, 1997) and uses the simple method of combining photographs and a story to express a person’s point of view. According to Wang and Burris the three main goals are “(1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issue through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policy makers.” This allows people involved in the photovoice project to become advocates for their community’s well being. Photovoice involves Participatory Action Research, which is a collaborative form of research that facilitates community action and social change.⁶

Using PhotoVoice for this project allows for the voices of the youth from Alberta First Nations to be heard.

PhotoVoice Contributions

The youth were asked to take one photo in response to each question, and accompany their photo with a descriptive sentence of what the photo means to them. The questions posed to the youth for their two photos were simplistic in design, but profound in the youths’ interpretation. The two questions were:

1. How do you see prescription drug misuse/addiction in your community?
2. How do you see wellness for your community?

The following are the results of their individual vision and expression of the core themes of this Strategy. We thank them for their inspiration and courage for sharing their words and their art.

⁶ Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment.

Alex...

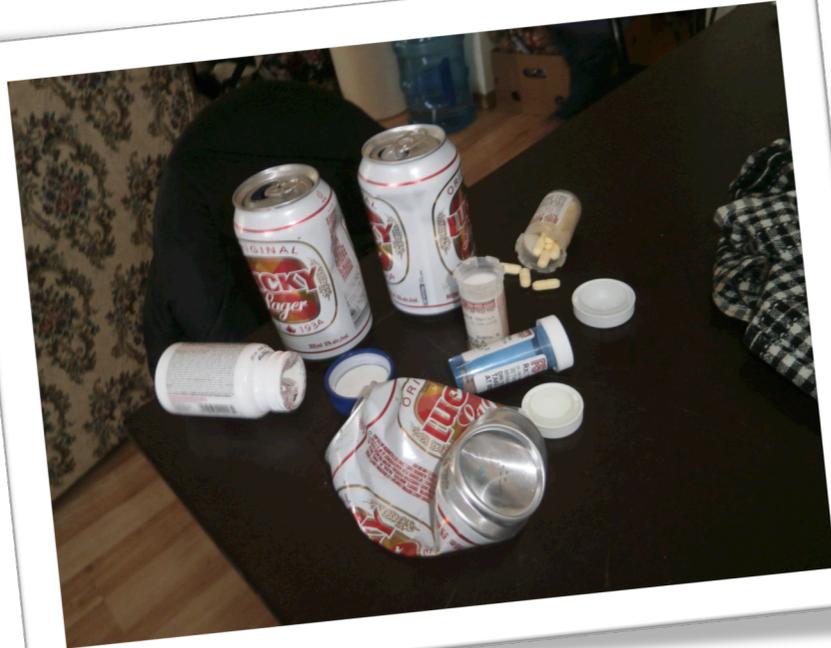
Prescription drug misuse is in all communities.



Wellness in our communities is having afterschool programs for the youth and adults.

Amy...

Mixing drinking and prescription drugs is abusing or misuse of prescription drugs.



This photo shows that enjoying a day outside is showing awareness of being sober and spending time with your family.



Brad...

I see prescription drug abuse as taking pills to ease the pain along with a cup/glass of alcohol.



Wellness in my community is the 7 Habit Wellness Tree in our public school.

Chelsea...



I thought that putting some change in a pill bottle would be a good representation of how prescription pills are expensive and how if you get addicted to them they could cost you your life.

By putting the little angel on a page in a bible I thought it would represent how some people turn to religion to cope with getting through their prescription drugs addiction and during their addiction in general.



Chelsey...

This pictures shows someone exchanging money for prescription drugs. (This happens in our community.)

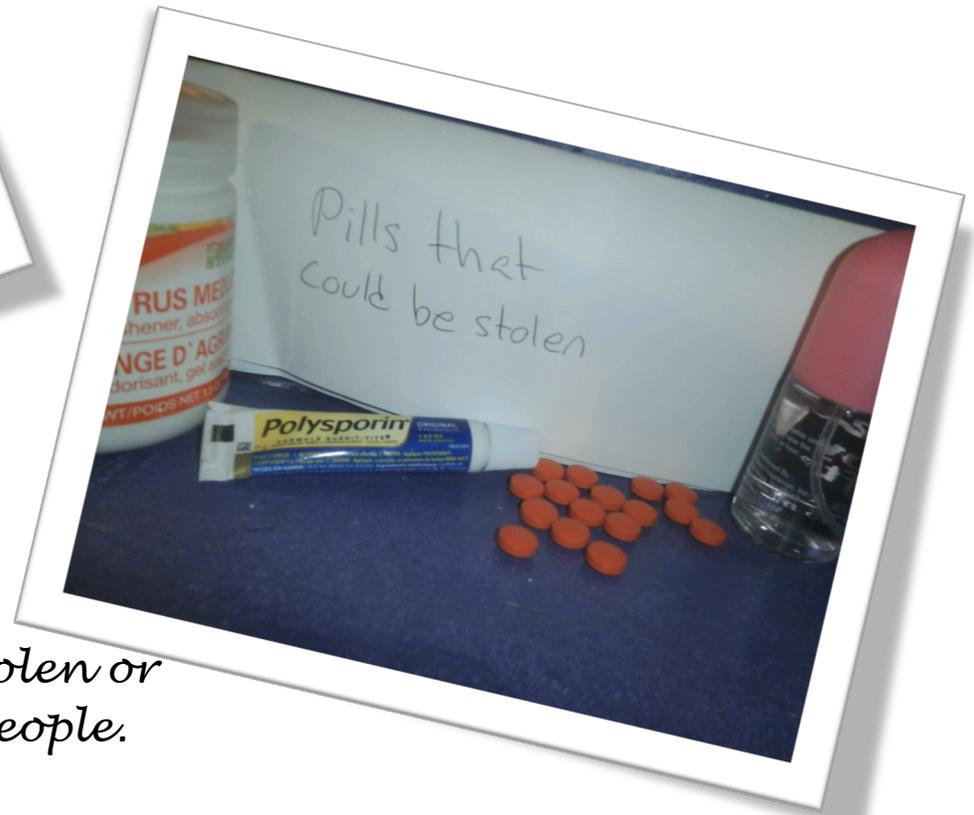


This picture shows someone working out rather than abusing prescription pain medication.

Destiny...



Pills that have the name ripped off.



Pills that are stolen or sold to other people.

Kelly...

Why do this! When you can do so much more.



You can be the better person and remember your Cultural Teachings.



Nickolas...

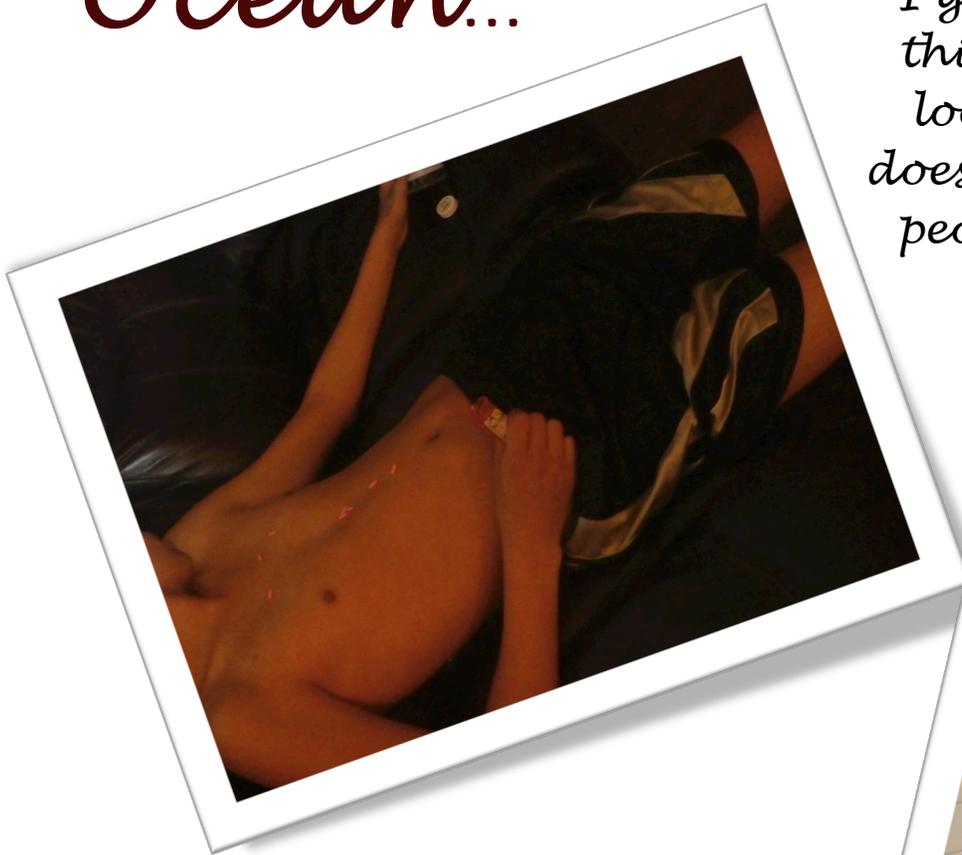


They're so easy to get, and it don't matter how high you put them or how hard you hide them. They're always easy to find anyways.

They're young but destined for great things! Hopefully their 'addiction' for success never changes.



Ocean...



I got someone to pretend how I think prescription drug misuse looks like. This is how it really does look or even sometimes when people who abused prescription medicine.



How I see healing in the community is coming together, praying, also being together to help one another.

Robbie...



This abandoned building I took a picture of stands for prescription drug abuse and of people that always hang around there.



This photo that I took a picture of stands for how people who don't abuse prescription and live a clean and healthy life.