

Required Elements for Success and Benefits of Participation in Camps of an On-The-Land Program in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region

Éléments nécessaires à la réussite et bienfaits de la participation au programme de guérison sur les terres ancestrales dans la région occupée par les Inuvialuit

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article rend compte d'un partenariat entre la Société régionale inuvialuit et l'Université d'Ottawa déterminant si et comment le programme de guérison sur les terres ancestrales offre une expérience culturellement adéquate pour assurer les besoins identifiés par les résidents de la région des Inuvialuit. L'étude se base sur l'expérience des participants du programme de guérison sur les terres ancestrales *Jewel* développé par la Société régionale inuvialuit. Nous avons utilisé la théorie postcoloniale soutenue par des études critiques inuit et un cadre conceptuel de décolonisation pour orienter notre méthodologie de recherche communautaire. Le comité consultatif communautaire et l'équipe consultative de recherche ont co-déterminé comme méthode de travail pour ce projet des entretiens semi-dirigés, des cercles de partage et un *photovox*. Les résultats indiquent que les programmes de guérison sur les terres ancestrales ont considérablement renforcé l'identité culturelle et les liens significatifs avec le soutien social et le patrimoine inuvialuit dans un environnement « sur le terrain ». Les programmes sur les terres ancestrales peuvent donc offrir une possibilité de guérison alternative et efficace aux participants qui ne se sentent pas à l'aise ou qui ne sont pas adéquatement servis par les programmes de traitement communautaires ou résidentiels conventionnels.

Required Elements for Success and Benefits of Participation in Camps of an On-The-Land Program in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region

Mary Ollierⁱ, Audrey R. Gilesⁱⁱ, Meghan Etterⁱⁱⁱ, Jimmy Ruttan^{iv}, Nellie Elanik^v, Ruth Goose^{vi}, and Esther Ipana^{vii}

ABSTRACT

We report on a partnership between the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC) and the University of Ottawa to determine whether/how on-the-land programming offered culturally safe experiences to meet the self-identified needs of the residents of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. This study draws upon the experiences of participants in the IRC's land-based healing program, Project Jewel. We used postcolonial theory supported by a decolonization framework and critical Inuit studies to direct this community-based research methodology. The community advisory committee and the research advisory team co-determined semi-structured interviews, sharing circles, and photovoice as the chosen research methods for this project. Results indicate that land-based healing programs considerably enhanced cultural identity and meaningful connections to social support and Inuvialuit heritage in an "on-the-land" environment. Land-based programs may thus offer an alternative and effective healing opportunity for participants who feel uncomfortable or are not being adequately served by conventional community-based or residential treatment programs.

KEYWORDS

Inuvialuit, on-the-land, land-based, healing, Northwest Territories, community-based research

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RÉSUMÉ

Éléments nécessaires à la réussite et bienfaits de la participation au programme de guérison sur les terres ancestrales dans la région occupée par les Inuvialuit

Cet article rend compte d'un partenariat entre la Société régionale inuvialuit et l'Université d'Ottawa déterminant si et comment le programme de guérison sur les terres ancestrales offre une expérience culturellement adéquate pour assurer les besoins identifiés par les résidents de la région des Inuvialuit. L'étude se base sur l'expérience des participants du programme de guérison sur les terres ancestrales *Jewel* développé par la Société régionale inuvialuit. Nous avons utilisé la théorie postcoloniale soutenue par des études critiques inuit et un cadre conceptuel de décolonisation pour orienter notre méthodologie de recherche communautaire. Le comité consultatif communautaire et l'équipe consultative de recherche ont co-déterminé comme méthode de travail pour ce projet des entretiens semi-dirigés, des cercles de partage et un *photovox*. Les résultats indiquent que les programmes de guérison sur les terres ancestrales ont considérablement renforcé l'identité culturelle et les liens significatifs avec le soutien social et le patrimoine inuvialuit dans un environnement « sur le terrain ». Les programmes sur les terres ancestrales peuvent donc offrir une possibilité de guérison alternative et efficace aux participants qui ne se sentent pas à l'aise ou qui ne sont pas adéquatement servis par les programmes de traitement communautaires ou résidentiels conventionnels.

MOTS-CLÉS

Inuvialuit, terres ancestrales, territoire, guérison, Territoires du Nord-Ouest, recherche communautaire

The land is the heart of Inuvialuit culture, identity, and heritage (Alunik 2003). The Inuvialuit, Inuit of the Western Arctic in Canada, have been disconnected from the land because of colonization and residential schools (Alunik 2003); consequently, like other Indigenous populations, they are heavily burdened with trauma and health disparities (Richmond 2009). “Land-based” or “on-the-land” programs refer to programs that provide services outside of existing community structures. Recently, the Government of the Northwest Territories’ Department of Health and Social Services Research Agenda (2016-17, 2) identified “research that provides evidence about the effectiveness of land-based healing approaches” as a research priority.

Project Jewel is an on-the-land program led by the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC). The project offers land-based wellness camps to residents of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) approximately six times a year. Run by three full-time employees and supported by Elders, each camp focuses on residents of the ISR who struggle with a particular issue (e.g., addiction, trauma). While operated by the IRC, Project Jewel offers its services to all residents of the ISR, regardless of cultural background. After completing a

Project Jewel camp, each participant is eligible for aftercare; when possible, follow-up with staff takes place either over the phone, in person, and/or on social media to maintain support, and participants are invited to a follow-up camp(s). Project Jewel aims to provide participants with culturally safe tools, such as opportunities to engage in cultural activities on the land and welcome Elder support, which they can use to address and overcome trauma and individual struggles, change behaviours/patterns, and build resilience.

Project Jewel staff members Meghan Etter (IRC Manager, Counselling Services) and Jimmy Ruttan (On-the-land Coordinator) approached Dr. Giles of the University of Ottawa to conduct this research. They applied for federal research funding, namely, a Catalyst grant from the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR). The research team was composed of a research advisory team (southern-based researchers, two Project Jewel staff members, an IRC director, and an Elder) and a community advisory team (two former Project Jewel participants and two Project Jewel staff members). The research presented herein is a component of this larger research effort. For this study, we used semi-structured interviews, sharing circles, and photovoice to address two research questions: (1) What do Project Jewel participants and stakeholders identify as necessary elements for the camps to be successful? and (2) What are the benefits for those who participate in Project Jewel camps?

Literature Review

We reviewed relevant literature on Inuvialuit identity and culture, the effects of colonization on these subjects, Inuit mental health, and on-the-land programming, and we drew upon general Inuit examples in the literature in the absence of Inuvialuit-specific examples. We then highlighted the existing literature concerning on-the-land programs in Inuit Nunangat. This section concludes with additional information on Project Jewel.

Inuvialuit Identity and Culture

Inuvialuit identity is defined by the land they inhabit, which is known today as the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Distinct local resources determine Inuvialuit identity to be “subject to multiple definitions and understandings”, depending on the specific region and land in which it is fostered (Lyons 2009: 63). Regional resources and affiliated groups gave rise to distinct families and ancestral heritages that play an important role in Inuvialuit identity (Alunik 2003) and associated cultural practices. Collectively, across Inuit cultures, the land is not meant for profit or farming (Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik 2017); indeed, Inuvialuit culture is rooted in traditional land-based activities that promote the respectful harvest and consumption of country foods (IRC 2017a). Seasonal whale camps, fish camps, and trap lines

for the hunting of resources such as “caribou, muskrat, seal, beluga and bowhead whale, fish, and berries” are central to Inuvialuit culture (IRC 2017a: par. 3). Going out on the land thus remains an essential practice in Inuvialuit culture, despite the challenges imposed by colonialism (IRC 2017b).

Effects of Colonialism

The first devastating effect of colonialism came to the Inuvialuit at the turn of the century in the form of disease. Whalers introduced European viruses that reduced the Inuvialuit population to an estimated 250 people, a mere ten percent of earlier generations (Morrison 2003). With the subsequent influx of missionaries, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and government officials, who had already developed immunity to these diseases, the Inuvialuit “lost sovereignty over their own lives” (Morrison 2003, 93). The arrival of thriving white settlers “ushered in a new lifestyle”, which forced the Inuvialuit to live away from the land in new communities that were more heavily influenced by the settlers’ Western wage economy than by the traditional Inuvialuit way of life (Aglukark 1999; Alunik 2003; Dowsley 2005).

Residential schools in the ISR

Residential schools in the ISR have a history that is “more recent than that of residential schooling in the rest of the country” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015: 3). When the federal government first opened the Sir Alexander Mackenzie School in 1959, Grollier Hall (Catholic) and Stringer Hall (Anglican), hostels for the Alexander Mackenzie day school, were also opened (Kolausok 2003). These hostels, which housed many students from remote communities, were overcrowded and had deteriorating conditions (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Stringer Hall closed in 1975 followed by Grollier Hall in 1997 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). In both the hostels and the schools, the staff forbade Inuvialuit languages and ways of living and prevented the children from receiving an education in their own culture (Kolausok 2003). Horrific acts of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse were committed by staff on children residing at Grollier Hall and Stringer Hall to attend school (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). As a result, the colonial legacy of residential schools and hostels as well as the concomitant social and demographic shifts that occurred in the region converged to threaten Inuvialuit identity and culture.

Effects on identity and culture

The effects of colonialism continue to negatively impact Inuvialuit identity and culture because they have dispossessed and disconnected the Inuvialuit from their lands (Alunik 2003; Kolausok 2003). Indeed, life in colonial society has precipitated economic stratification, which has prevented contemporary

Inuvialuit from accessing the land (Kolausok 2003). Furthermore, Western wage economy has created a reliance on currency for commodities, such as gas, permits, and vehicles, to access land-based activities (Dowsley 2015). These contemporary colonial practices have all impeded the Inuvialuit from living their traditional land-based lifestyle. As the legacy of residential schools continues to perniciously affect Inuit culture, many Inuvialuit today lack knowledge and teachings about the land, as this would have been transmitted by their family and would have enabled them to engage in the land-based lifestyle of their ancestors (Alunik 2003). Reconnecting with the land has been identified by Inuit Elders, scholars, and communities alike as a crucial step to addressing the trauma of colonization and residential schools and reconnecting and revitalizing identity and culture (Alunik 2003; Inuit Tapariit Kanatami 2016). Because the relationship between the land, identity, and culture, and colonization and residential schools hold significant implications for Inuvialuit health, it is imperative that discussions of Inuvialuit mental health be contextualized within these elements.

Inuit Mental Health

Due to a lack of data, specifically on Inuvialuit mental health, we drew upon broader information gathered from Inuit populations across Inuit Nunangat. Mental health is a major area of concern, as the Inuit experience tremendous health disparities in comparison to non-Aboriginal Canadians (Richmond 2009). Post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and major depression are the leading mental health issues affecting the Inuit and are unfortunately associated with high rates of morbidity (Inuit Tapariit Kanatami 2016). Furthermore, epidemiological data indicate that suicide rates in Inuit communities are eleven times higher than the Canadian average (Inuit Tapariit Kanatami 2016). Although this disparity is a complex issue, it is linked to a decline in social support (Richmond 2009). In addition to their assault on Inuit identity and culture, colonialism and residential schools also continue to weaken Inuit structures of social support, resulting in poorer mental health outcomes (Richmond 2009). In this regard, the IRC has recently used land-based programming as a strategy to improve participants' mental health by emphasizing connections to Inuvialuit land and culture.

On-the-Land Programs

With the paucity of literature regarding land-based programs for the Inuvialuit, on-the-land or land-based programs have been developed and practiced by Indigenous scholars and communities as a way to reclaim identity and culture and heal from colonialism-related traumas (Kwanlin Dün First Nation 2014; Radu, House, and Pashagumskum 2014; Redvers 2016). The following sections feature research pertaining to on-the-land programs from a variety of Indigenous groups.

Decolonization

On-the-land programs for/by Indigenous peoples are more than simply programs in the bush; fundamentally, they decolonize (Redvers 2016). Simpson (2014) explained that the practice of physically going out onto the land was crucial to Indigenous healing and reconciliation: land-based programs address the dispossession from the land that Indigenous people throughout Canada have experienced and continue to experience through acts of neocolonial violence. While treaties and land claim agreement negotiations continue between Indigenous communities and the Canadian government, disconnection from the land persists in contemporary colonial society (Redvers 2016). In this perspective, land-based programs not only represent an effective approach to healing the ongoing traumas caused by colonization and residential schools, but can also promote and support well-being and decolonization among Indigenous individuals and communities.

Healing

From an Indigenous worldview, the land is at the core of the concept of healing itself as well as the process of healing *from* colonization and residential schools (Redvers 2016). For Indigenous peoples, the land is a place of healing; a place where one can renew and strengthen one's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness. These are the elements of a healthy individual and healthy communities (Redvers 2016; Wohlberg and Scott 2018). The disconnection from the land caused by colonization and residential schools has "led to breakdowns in connection to language, culture, and identity" (Wohlberg and Scott 2018: para. 2). Culturally relevant Indigenous land-based activities and programs have been shown to enhance individual and community resilience, cultural identity, and social support (Radu et al. 2014), which demonstrates their potential relevance to enhancing well-being.

Existing on-the-land programs

A variety of Indigenous-led land-based programs are currently ongoing in several communities across Canada. For example, the Chisasibi land-based healing program in Eeyou Istchee, which began in 2012, promotes personal, familial, and community wellness from a perspective rooted in the Cree way of life (Radu et al. 2014). In the Yukon, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation established a permanent land-based healing camp at Jackson Lake, 25 km outside of Whitehorse on Kwanlin Dün traditional territory land, where it offers one or two land-based programs annually (Kwanlin Dün First Nation 2019). These programs use a land-based healing approach to bridge culture with clinical therapy during a four-week camp, followed by aftercare. Evaluations of these programs have indicated high retention rates and satisfaction among participants, as well as overall measured improvements

in general well-being, personal balance, social relationships, mental health, cultural knowledge, life skills, and resilient behaviours (Kwanlin Dün First Nation 2014; Radu et al. 2014).

Staff members at the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation created Project Jewel to meet Inuvialuit demand for a local, land-based health program. The pilot program, addressing the theme of addiction, began in 2015 and was called Project J W L; however, IRC staff members encountered difficulties recruiting and retaining participants under the label of an addiction-focused program. During this time, funding for the closest formal addiction treatment centre in Hay River, NWT ceased and was instead channeled into supporting on-the-land programs throughout the territory. Project J W L thus evolved into Project Jewel, a land-based wellness program devoted to providing experiences on the land (during “camps”) and connect individuals with service providers.

Despite the existence of numerous land-based health and wellness programs in the North, the field of land-based healing in Inuit communities continues to be poorly defined and understood in the literature (Redvers 2016). There is a lack of literature exploring on-the-land programs for Inuvialuit well-being (Redvers 2016); indeed, there are currently no peer-reviewed publications describing the elements of successful land-based programs or the benefits of such programming for the Inuvialuit. The research presented in the following section addresses this gap in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, the research advisory committee determined that a postcolonial lens informed by a decolonization framework and critical Inuit studies would constitute the most suitable theoretical framework. This approach provides a strong theoretical foundation to better understand the legacies of imperialism and colonialism. It was thus deemed appropriate for this research because the Inuvialuit, like other Indigenous peoples in Canada, have been—and continue to be—subjected to horrific colonial efforts and assimilation techniques. Consequently, the Inuvialuit have experienced radical shifts in their culture and traditions and remain greatly affected by colonialism (Lyons 2009). However, we determined that our use of postcolonial theory had to be supported by a decolonization framework because, from an Indigenous perspective, Western research, “white research,” or “academic research” is a site of profound colonial influence that reinforces the colonial domination of Indigenous peoples (Smith 1999).

A decolonization framework is conceptualized and situated within the decolonization politics of Indigenous movements to better understand the pervasive effects of colonialism from an Indigenous perspective and how to shape a better postcolonial future for Indigenous peoples (Smith 1999). As

stated by Smith (1999: 143), a decolonization framework is also used to center “broader politics and strategic goals of indigenous research” in the methodologies which the researcher subsequently employs. We thus used a decolonization framework to structure the research in the context of Inuvialuit values, tools, knowledge, and social agenda. By supporting the use of postcolonial theory with a decolonization framework, this research can further our understanding of how colonialism has shaped and continues to shape Inuvialuit health and well-being from a perspective that is guided and fueled by Inuvialuit values and social justice goals.

For this research, we also used critical Inuit studies to support our use of postcolonial theory and a decolonization framework. Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) refers to “a set of values and practices, the relevance and importance of these, and the ways of being and looking at things that are timeless” (Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik 2017, 1) and thus represents an intellectual tradition that is essential to engaging with critical Inuit studies. Inuit culture is an oral culture (Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik 2017); therefore, critical Inuit studies place oral histories and traditions at the forefront of knowledge acquisition to convey Inuit ideology (Martin 2009). One key aspect of critical Inuit studies is the use of rich oral traditions to emphasize the importance of social and historical contexts during the research process (Martin 2009). The contributions of the Inuvialuit members of the research advisory team and the community advisory board were invaluable in grounding this research in IQ.

Methodology

We used a community-based research (CBR) approach for this project. In CBR, reciprocal partnerships are formed between academics and community members to focus efforts on open discussions regarding power and privilege, the identification of common goals, the co-creation of knowledge, and the implementation of community improvement (Israel et al. 1998). The key principles of CBR are to facilitate collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research; integrate knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners; promote a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities; address health from a positive and ecological perspective; and disseminate findings and knowledge gained equally to all partners (Israel et al. 1998). Elder Sarah Rogers (also a member of the research advisory team), Peggy Day (IRC counsellor with Project Jewel), Ruth Goose (IRC cultural support worker), Nellie Elanik (Project Jewel participant), and Esther Ipana (Project Jewel participant) formed the community advisory board. Each decision and process was determined by the entire community advisory board in collaboration with the research advisory team. CBR was used to enable power sharing throughout the

research process, a practice emphasized by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national representational organization for Inuit in Canada, in their published *National Inuit Strategy on Research (NISR)* report (ITK 2018). Of interest is that CBR best practices are rooted in the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession™ (OCAP) for data management that align with *NISR* (First Nations Information Governance Centre 2014; ITK 2018).

Approval for this project was granted by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa and the Aurora Research Institute, which is responsible for issuing research licences for the NWT on behalf of the Government of the NWT.

Methods

To collect data from participants, the first author attended five on-the-land camps with Project Jewel. The first two took place in 2017: a five-day fish camp outside of Paulatuk (August 2017), which was attended by the second author and three other members of the community advisory board, and a two-and-a-half-day camp at a historical cultural site outside of Inuvik, Reindeer Station (September 2017), which was attended by the second author and five members of the research advisory committee. The first author then lived in Inuvik from July to September 2018 and was able to attend three day camps, each with two other community advisory board members: one fishing camp on the Mackenzie River Delta (July 2018) and two berry-picking day camps on Inuvialuit land north of Inuvik (August 2018). In addition to gathering data at these camps, the first author also conducted interviews and collected data from Project Jewel stakeholders and former program participants in Project Jewel. The community advisory board determined the use of three research methods to address our research questions: sharing circles, semi-structured interviews, and photovoice activities.

Sharing Circles

Sharing circles are used to gain insight into people's experiences (Lavallée 2009) and are considered to be an appropriate method of data collection because they not only have been shown to generate a wealth of information but are deeply rooted in Indigenous culture (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005; Lavallée 2009). With the help and guidance of an Elder, the first author co-facilitated two sharing circles. The first sharing circle involved three Project Jewel participants during a fish camp in Paulatuk, while the second sharing circle welcomed nine participants and one cultural support worker at the Reindeer Station weekend camp. The sharing circles were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Semi-Structured Interviews

We used semi-structured interviews with pre-structured questions to maintain the research focus while providing a safe space for organic conversation and open dialogue to take place (Spencer et al. 2003). Semi-structured interviews were deemed an appropriate data collection method because the flexibility of open dialogue enables the researcher to respect the knowledge and expertise which the interviewees feel are important to share (Spencer et al. 2003). Sample questions included: Do you think the land plays a role in the healing process for people? How would this program be different if it were offered in a community centre or other location (not out on the land)? Is it important to re-connect with the land to learn about your culture? Does being on the land connect you to your culture? What is the importance of the connection to the land?

The first author, with the occasional help of the second author, conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 Project Jewel stakeholders (10 women, four men), 13 Project Jewel participants (10 women, three men), and three former Project Jewel participants (three women). Stakeholders included five Project Jewel and IRC staff members, three Inuvialuit Elders, and three professionals who resided in Inuvik (one dietician, one community health worker, one educational counsellor), and two professionals (forgiveness experts) who had previously collaborated with Project Jewel. The first author audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim. Each participant received copies of their transcripts and were invited to make clarifications and edits as they deemed necessary before their data were included in the analysis; only one participant made changes to their transcript.

Photovoice

Photovoice is an innovative data gathering technique that blends both images and words to enable marginalized populations to be empowered to share their knowledge and implement change (Palibroda et al. 2009). Those who employ photovoice seek to achieve three main goals: enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns; promote critical dialogue and knowledge on important issues through large and small group discussions; and reach an audience of policy makers (Wang and Burris 1997). We deemed photovoice to be an appropriate method, as it can enable Indigenous people to direct the research agenda in a culturally appropriate way (Maclean and Cullen 2009). We conducted photovoice activities with 13 Project Jewel participants, one cultural support worker, and one Elder, all of whom had access to a digital camera throughout their participation in a Project Jewel camp. At the end of each camp, the first author—occasionally assisted by the second author—interviewed the participants regarding their photographs. We audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim. As with the semi-structured interview data, each photovoice participant received copies of their transcripts and was invited to make clarifications

and edits they felt were necessary before their data were included in the analysis; no participants made edits to their transcripts. The participants' photos and associated quotes were then compiled into photobooks. The draft photobooks were sent to each participant, who was invited to make edits as they deemed necessary. No edits were proposed by the participants. Each participant subsequently received copies of the photobooks to keep.

Analysis

Following CBR best practices, three members of the community advisory board, one cultural support worker, two former Project Jewel participants, and the first author co-analyzed the data. We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. Thematic analysis offers a robust, reflective, systematic, and flexible approach to analyzing applied research data and was therefore well suited to this research project (Braun and Clarke 2006). It is also an effective way to organize data in rich detail to identify patterns of meaning which are rigorously coded and reported as themes (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Together, we read through each transcript to familiarize ourselves with the data. We then discussed the data to generate initial codes. During our discussions, we used NVivo11 software to document and organize the created codes. Some examples of codes identified during this stage were "effects of Project Jewel," "program structure," "privacy," and "values in the bush." We then organized our codes to generate initial themes and identified sub-themes that met our research objectives, which resulted in forming two key themes: the elements required for a successful Project Jewel camp and the benefits experienced by the program participants as a result of their participation in Project Jewel. These results were then approved and further refined by the community advisory board and the research advisory team in a day-long, in-person meeting.

Results

Theme 1: Required Elements for a Successful Project Jewel Camp

Based on the results, we identified the following indicators of success of a Project Jewel camp on the land: Inuvialuit cultural practices; local programming; distraction and judgement-free environment; confidentiality; and comfort and support.

Inuvialuit cultural practices

Participants indicated that it was important that Project Jewel enable them to engage in Inuvialuit cultural practices. Having opportunities to participate in land-based cultural activities, such as hunting caribou, fishing, preparing dry meat, or picking berries, were highly valued, particularly among participants who did not have the financial means or equipment to do these activities on their own. Project Jewel stakeholders in fact reported that participants were motivated to attend Project Jewel camps primarily because they could be immersed in such enriching cultural activities. Several participants expressed that Project Jewel camps connected them to the traditional way of life of their elders and ancestors. One Project Jewel participant (Jane¹) explained her connection to Inuvialuit cultural practices during a Project Jewel camp: “You have so much freedom, [you] live healthy, sleep good, help and share, and talk just like long ago, how the Elders and Inuvialuit and Gwich’in used to get together, talk, share, help each other, do everything”.

Similarly, Dawn, a locally hired research assistant for Project Jewel, used photovoice to describe her connection to her culture and the land while attending a Project Jewel camp (Fig.1).



Figure 1. “I just think that [this photo] shows a connection, but it also speaks to survival, because it’s also the food that sustains you when you’re hunting, but it’s connected to the land, so this whole cycle: Everything is interconnected, and this kind of (...) maintains those connections, on different levels”.

1. Jane is a pseudonym. Some participants wanted their real names to be used. To respect their expert contributions to this research, we have used their names.

Shirley, an Inuvialuit Elder and Project Jewel participant, expressed that it was important to her that Project Jewel camps help her learn more about her own culture and share this culture with other participants: “I think having this workshop really helps me in identifying [my culture], well, it is important, you know it, and it does have an effect. In one sense, you’re learning, in another sense, you’re sharing culture”.

Local programming

Using photovoice, Dorothy, another Project Jewel participant, stated that it was important to her that she receive programming in the Mackenzie Delta region because it made her feel more comfortable, as the land on the Delta is where Dorothy grew up (Fig. 2).



Figure 2 “This one [photo] is important, because when I was growing up, I was in the bush with my parents. It’s important to me because it’s where we came from, on the land, and where we spent time on the land, and with my partner, now, we go out hunting and we go out fishing, and we go out camping, and it’s important to me because we still go out on the land”.

All of the Project Jewel participants and stakeholders agreed that in addition to feeling more comfortable in their traditional territory, local programming was important because locally, there were currently no formal addiction or mental health treatment centres available. When residents of the ISR require these services, located thousands of kilometres away in the South, in an unfamiliar culture and environment, experiencing feelings of fear and discomfort is not only normal but justified.

Distraction and judgement-free environment

The participants declared that being out on the land with Project Jewel helped them avoid alcohol, drug use, technology (i.e., cell phones and internet use), and scheduled responsibilities in town (e.g., appointments, work, child care) that would otherwise distract them from focusing on their own health and healing. Agnes, a Project Jewel participant, described how she preferred a land-based environment over in-town programs because it was removed from the adverse influences of alcohol, trauma, and stress: “It’s so much better out there. You don’t have the kids coming in with alcohol. If there are other things that are bothering you in town, you have a chance to forget them for a few days out on the land”.

Without these afore-mentioned distractions, the participants felt that they were able to relax and find the freedom to focus on themselves.

The participants in our study also emphasized that being on the land during Project Jewel camps fostered a judgement-free environment. Sarah, an Inuvialuit Elder and cultural support worker for Project Jewel, used photovoice to describe how she was able to freely communicate her thoughts and feelings on the land (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. “If we have issues that bother us, that are not healthy, sometimes I would go to someplace to de-stress, whether it be with other families to just not talk about my issues, or else I would stay alone in my room to not be a bother to anybody-. But out here, I’m on the land: It feels like I am free! I am free to talk how I want to talk and say what I want to say”.

The participants were unanimous in stating that being on the land made them feel more comfortable because they were less judgmental of others and perceived others to be less judgmental of them. Keith, another program participant, spoke to this:

I find that out on the land is ten times, a hundred times better than being in town doing it. If you're talking to someone, you don't have to worry about who's listening behind that door on the outside, or who is going to go gossip about you and make you look bad because you're trying to help yourself, because you're trying to accept that yes, I have demons that I am going to have to work on.

Confidentiality

Both the participants and the stakeholders stated that respecting the privacy and confidentiality of people who participated in Project Jewel was a key element of a successful camp. Jo-Ellen, a counsellor for Project Jewel, described how the Project Jewel staff and the participants maintained confidentiality upon their return to town after completing a camp: "I've never heard anybody ever come back and say, 'I shared that and now it's all over the community'. You know, it's beautiful how people really respect each other".

Comfort and support

Project Jewel participants identified that another key element to a successful on-the-land camp was creating a comfortable and supportive environment by providing food, transportation, accommodation, and the appropriate equipment. The camp further helped the participants to feel supported by providing a caring team of Elders, cultural support workers, and social workers. Jimmy, the program's on-the-land coordinator, elaborated on Project Jewel's services:

Project Jewel provides all facets of comfort and care... The only thing they have to focus on is themselves. We take all of the guesswork out of the day to day... But we just create this environment that is just so nurturing, and in addition to being in a culturally relevant setting, it's just a great recipe for success, for rest, for relaxation, to provide an opportunity to revisit trauma but also celebrate successes.

Dorothy, who participated in the Reindeer Station camp, highlighted that receiving one-on-one support from the Project Jewel staff and cultural support workers was important to her: "I took Ruthie [cultural support worker] and Jimmy [on-the-land coordinator] aside... I just said I needed somewhere to cry... So we went to Jimmy's cabin. [It's nice] to work one-on-one with Ruthie or Jimmy, you know, just one-on-one to see how you're feeling from when you first started and right to the end [of camp]".

Theme 2: Benefits of a Project Jewel Camp

The benefits of participating in a Project Jewel camp were identified as follows: (re)connection to the land; culture, heritage, and identity; strengthened social support systems; and enhanced land-based skills and self-esteem.

(Re)connection to the land, culture, heritage, and identity

Through effective on-the-land camps, Project Jewel made it possible for participants to feel (re)connected to their land, which fostered a (re)connection to Inuvialuit culture, heritage, and identity. Denise, a Project Jewel participant, used a photo to show that reconnecting to the land during a camp made her feel more connected to her culture and heritage, which enabled her to feel not only hopeful but also supported by fellow community members (Fig. 4).

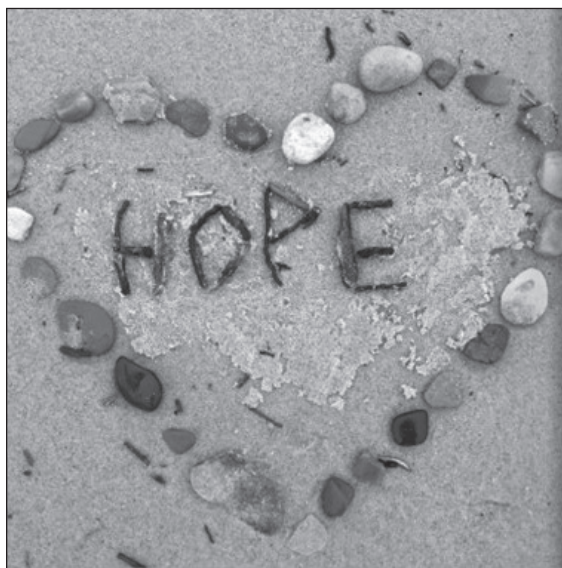


Figure 4. When you're out on the land, it does bring people together. We may not talk at home in our community, we may not mingle. We could say hi. But when you're out on the land, it's a totally different story: Everyone comes together. It's that warm, humble feeling everyone has when you're out. This is our background. This is where we grew up.

By participating in a camp at a culturally significant site or at a traditional Inuvialuit bush camp, the participants expressed feeling connected to their Elders, their ancestors, and their cultural traditions. Zenephia, another camp participant, described how being at Reindeer Station, a historical site where Inuvialuit reindeer herders once lived, enabled her to feel connected to her grandfather (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. “I know my grandpa was here one time, he was one of the reindeer herders...and I could just picture myself seeing my grandpa here...it makes me think about a connection to someone that was here before me, years before me, before I was even born...I feel connected here”.

Dawn used photovoice to describe how participating in traditional sewing activities at a camp made her feel (re)connected to her cultural heritage (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. “When you do the sewing projects, they are your connection to a past, but they are a connection to a future. It is a way of ensuring that what your ancestors did, that you carry it forward. It also allows for those times for sharing and telling stories... It’s that time when you sit there and you can just tell stories while you’re all sitting down together telling stories and sharing information and building those relationships, that trust”.

The participants expressed that going out on the land and participating in cultural practices strengthened their identity, as Inuvialuit. Elder Shirley described how learning to make dry meat during a Project Jewel camp reconnected her to her cultural identity and family:

Dry meat is a traditional meat from our animals. When we hunt our animals, we try to use every piece of it. [The meat] comes from the hind quarter of the reindeer, so whatever meat was left on it we made dry meat with it, and there's a special way of cutting dry meat and a special way of drying it. [It is the] first time I've tried cutting up dry meat and I feel really proud.

Strengthened social support systems

The participants described that participating in Project Jewel strengthened their social support networks. Being on the land with peers, staff, and support workers created an environment where the participants felt connected to each other. The participants also related how they felt better able to focus on their communication with family members and/or spouses. Denise from Tuktoyaktuk presented a photo she took during a photovoice activity and described how participating in Project Jewel not only had a positive impact on her communication skills but also improved her relationship with her husband (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. “We’re a lot closer... It [Project Jewel] brought my family, you know it got my family happy... We’re talking, you know, not so silent any more, that’s what I see. Now, we’re, you know, saying ‘goodnight’ or, you know, ‘I love you’”.

During sharing circles, the participants expressed that participating in Project Jewel camps provided them with the opportunity to develop their existing social relationships and forge new systems of support by building trust with other participants. As one sharing circle group participant noted, “We don’t need doctors and hospitals for the most part to heal our human condition. We need each other”.

Enhanced land-based skills and self-esteem

The participants agreed that participation in Project Jewel camps enhanced their land-based skills and self-esteem. Indeed, by engaging in cultural practices, they learned new skills and improved existing ones. Evelyn, Inuvialuit Elder and Director of Community Development at the IRC, described the skills and experiences participants gain during these camps:

I think it instills in them that pride, and some of them might have had that experience, say when they were younger with their families, but for whatever reason they haven’t been able to get back out there. And when you see these people working with food, or being involved with going out and setting snares, traps, fish nets, and you see how much pride they put into that. That speaks volumes.

Keith, a program participant, described the effects of learning how to hunt beluga whale with his two sons at a past whaling camp with Project Jewel:

I learned [how to hunt whale]. And [my sons] saw the whale, how to harvest the whale, so they’re learning about their tradition. I couldn’t offer that to them because I didn’t know it myself. If I don’t know it, how can I pass it down? So, with this whaling camp I did learn some stuff that I can pass down and they learned some stuff that they can help me with. It works both ways.

Discussion

Project Jewel addresses ongoing barriers to accessing the land, such as the lack of resources and knowledge, enables participants to remove themselves from colonial spaces in town, and acknowledges a colonial history of displacement by prioritizing local initiatives. By focusing on these elements, Project Jewel contributes to effective and sustainable processes of decolonization and healing in the ISR. We argue that the benefits of attending Project Jewel camps (as identified by the participants) hold significant potential for the improvement of mental health issues in the region.

Required Elements for Successful Project Jewel Camps

Our findings demonstrate that part of the success of the Project Jewel camps was that it directly addressed colonial legacies by providing ways to deal with barriers to accessing the land and engaging in Inuvialuit cultural practices. Many participants stated that Project Jewel made it possible for them to engage in such traditional practices as whaling, berry-picking, sewing, carving, and fishing; opportunities they had experienced difficulty accessing, or had never accessed before.

It is well documented that colonization and colonialism led to and continue to contribute to poverty and lifestyle shifts among the Inuvialuit (Dowsley 2015). Today, needing money to buy equipment and getting time off of work to access the land were viewed by the participants as being major barriers. Project Jewel challenges the impact of colonialism by directly addressing these barriers (albeit for a short period of time) by providing participants with the necessary vehicles, fuel, and food, as well as assistance to obtain time away from work.

Another barrier to participating in on-the-land activities that relates to colonialism was the participants' lack of knowledge about or comfort with Inuvialuit cultural activities. Staff at residential schools in the ISR often punished children who practiced their traditions in an attempt to assimilate them into Western culture, which created a legacy of shame associated with any engagement in Inuvialuit cultural practices (Kolausok 2003). These schools also removed Inuvialuit children from their families and Elders. Project Jewel's response to this legacy is targeted programming devoted to seasonal traditional activities on the land with cultural support from Elders, thus reintroducing some participants to aspects of their culture in a physically and emotionally nurturing way.

Another positive aspect identified by the participants regarding Project Jewel camps was that the program removed participants from their in-town environment, where wage economy and technology were omnipresent negative elements which many participants referred to as distractions. In town, wage economy emphasizes the Western, capitalistic value that time equates to money; as a result, daily life is structured by scheduled work hours to maximize profit. Opportunities to engage in Inuvialuit culture are thus limited by work hours, childcare, and technology. This value system and its associated practices go against Inuvialuit culture, where value lies in good weather and resources that make it possible to reap the benefits of the land and children accompany parents on the land (Aglukark 1999; Alunik 2003).

Finally, the participants identified the benefit of Project Jewel camps being offered in proximity to each ISR community. Again, this must be understood in relation to the colonial legacy of forced displacement so violently imposed upon the Inuvialuit. Beginning in the 1950s, the federal

government systematically forced Inuvialuit families to permanently move off the land and into community settlements (Alunik 2003; Kolausok 2003); with the collapse of the fur trade industry, families began to rely on welfare, government employment, and child tax allowances to survive, which were only available if they relocated to town (Kolausok 2003). In today's context, health and wellness programs within the ISR must acknowledge this history of forced displacement between communities, along with the subsequent associations of discrimination and racism.

When Inuvik was established in 1958, the Inuvialuit widely viewed it as a town “built by and for Southerners” (Kolausok 2003, 174). While Inuvik remains the administrative hub of the ISR, those who operate health and wellness programs must recognize that forcing residents to travel from their home communities to participate in programs in Inuvik may not be emotionally safe nor viable for some participants. Project Jewel thus alleviates these challenges by offering both regional camps and visits to each community rather than only providing programming on the land surrounding Inuvik and requiring participants from smaller communities to leave their local lands to attend a camp.

Decolonization and Healing

Our results show that Project Jewel's programming not only plays a role in countering colonial legacies but can also significantly contribute to improving the mental health and well-being of ISR residents.

Decolonization through (re)connection to the land, culture, identity, heritage

On-the-land programs decolonize because they enable a (re)connection to the land, culture, identity, and heritage: all key benefits identified in this study. Although residential schools in the ISR are now closed, the repercussions of their legacy continue today (Alunik 2003). Indigenous scholars have drawn attention not only to the physical colonization of their lands at the hands of settlers, but also to the many colonization processes ingrained in their minds and spirits by residential schools, in addition to colonial acts of violence that have so devalued Indigenous cultures (Alunik 2003; Lyons 2009).

To successfully deal with this colonial burden, the tools of decolonization must come from the Inuvialuit. By providing ISR residents with the opportunity to (re)connect with their culture, identity, and heritage, Project Jewel camps can help restore the traditional knowledge and traditions that were devalued and lost because of residential schools and other colonial practices. Placing the land at the heart of effective and sustainable programming, with emphasis on (re)vitalizing Inuvialuit cultural practices, is what distinguishes Project Jewel from conventional mental health, wellness, and suicide prevention strategies.

Our findings support Redvers' (2016) assertion that revitalizing connection to the land, culture, and heritage significantly promotes well-being among on-the-land program participants. Healthcare policy makers, such as Indigenous governments, territorial and federal politicians, and practitioners and administrators such as community health representatives, healthcare managers, and physicians, must therefore advocate for the continuation of Project Jeweland other on-the-land programs—as vital and effective wellness strategies in the ISR, and likely in other communities.

Indeed, beyond the ISR, our research findings contribute to ITK's objective to prevent suicide and improve well-being among the Inuit. As stated in ITK's National Inuit Suicide Prevention Plan (2016), knowledge that supports culturally safe mental wellness programs *at the community level* is crucial in addressing suicide and mental health struggles among the Inuit. For this very purpose, Project Jewel not only contributes to decolonization but its land-based programs can successfully build a continuum of local and culturally safe mental wellness services. To effectively address mental health and suicide among the Inuit, and specifically among the Inuvialuit in the ISR, we must continue to emphasize the direct correlation between decolonization and healing; indeed, through supported decolonization efforts, on-the-land programs can promote healing.

Healing through social support systems, enhanced land-based skills, and self-esteem

By taking participants out on the land during a camp, Project Jewel creates a space for healing that is both physically and metaphorically removed from ongoing sites of colonization in town. On the land, participants are able to experience healing together as a group, which (re)builds crucial social support structures. The Elders teach that strong social relationships, which are necessary to survive on the land, are the foundation of Inuit life and thus cultivate and nurture healthy well-being (Alunik 2003; Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik 2017). In Project Jewel, healing is not only discussed among participants and counsellors on the land, but is actually practiced, even for a short time, when participants and staff work together to hunt, trap, fish, and cook traditional food during the camp's activities.

Beyond the benefits of social support that emerged from practicing traditional activities together, we found that (re)learning or enhancing land-based skills fostered greater and more positive self-esteem among the participants. In her research with Dechinta, a land-based university in Dene territory, Ballantyne (2014, 76) described how many Dene students experienced guilt for lacking knowledge pertaining to traditional skills: "It is the guilt of having been raised in small communities and not having the land-based skills by which so many thinkers ground Indigeneity and

Indigenous-ness. Some students have never actually lit a fire, let alone spent significant time in the bush”.

Although the Dene and Inuvialuit have distinct histories and experiences with colonization, the sentiments of these students resonate strongly with the results of this research in that guilt surrounding the loss of traditional knowledge is accompanied by anger towards the colonial powers responsible. These feelings can however be followed by feelings of validation and self-worth when these skills are re-learned (Ballantyne 2014). By promoting and supporting traditional skill building, Project Jewel enabled participants to (re)claim pride in their culture and identity, which contributed to a process of healing.

Conclusion

This research responded to a call from ITK (2018) and GNWT health policy makers (GNWT Social Services Research Agenda 2016-2017) for more information on the effectiveness of on-the-land programming. Using a CBR approach, we experienced bidirectional learning, as local people in the ISR were trained to conduct research that met academic standards (as in writing a manuscript), while southern researchers on the research team were trained to conduct research that met Inuvialuit standards. As a result, we were able to build local research capacity during this study, a key component of research with Inuit communities, as identified by the *NISR* (ITK 2018). In light of the lack of literature specific to the ISR, the results of this study provide new insight into what makes Project Jewel camps effective and beneficial from the perspective of the Inuvialuit.

Of importance is that these findings draw attention to how Inuvialuit relationships to the land continue to be vital for Inuvialuit well-being and mental health. Project Jewel is successful because it is embedded within the connections to the land and counters some of the ongoing negative effects of colonization. The benefits that the Inuvialuit experience through their participation in Project Jewel thus contribute to a larger process of decolonization and healing. Furthermore, our findings provide a direction for health policy makers in the IRC and may inform aspects of other land-based healing programs in Inuit Nunangat. Future studies should examine the potential benefits of on-the-land initiatives for specific sub-populations, such as families, children, and those who experience addiction. Hopefully, health officials and on-the-land program developers and facilitators will be able to use our findings to support further funding for the development and evaluation of land-based programs specific to their own regions and cultural practices.

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