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Strengthening Voice: A Photovoice Project with Youth on Mental Health and Wellbeing

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Background and Purpose

- As part of a three-year community-based children and youth mental health (CYMH) project to engage youth, ages 12 – 17, parents, and community partners in the development of user focused initiatives for the promotion and early intervention of mental health in Canada and China.
- The aim of this study was to elucidate youth insights, allowing voice via ***photo stories (n=23)***, identifying strengths, and highlighting and engendering resilience for participating youth, their families, and communities.
- Six photovoice groups with youth ($n=44$) were conducted in a western Canadian province to gain an understanding of their perspectives on mental health and wellbeing. Each group had 6 to 7 sessions and each session lasted for 1.5 hours.

Qualitative Research Methodology

- ***Participatory Action Approach (PAR)***. PAR is perceived to be not only an approach (but a methodology that enables the co-creation of knowledge to promote social change (Lenette, 2022; Oosterbroek et al., 2021).
- ***Photovoice*** shares consistent assumptions on participation and effecting change as PAR. The purpose of taking the photos and to have the discussion is to act as a means to facilitate change and influence social change and action (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999).

Data Analysis

- **Photos were taken by the youth participants** via guided questions posed during photostory group sessions and served as the focus (content) of this data analysis process.
- Operationalizing a process of latent content analysis (Faucher & Garner, 2015; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), our coding frame involved abstracting and conceptualizing the meaning of each individual photo into codes and then categories (Schreier, 2019).
- The categories in the content analysis were developed inductively through an iterative process (Graneheim et al., 2017), where the coding frame was continuously revised as we examined new data (photos) for meaning.

Steps in Our Qualitative Content Analysis Process

- Photos submitted by our youth participants from a series of focus group sessions served as the units of analysis.
- The preliminary coding frame centred on the four guiding Photo Story group session questions Facilitators used with the children and youth during the sessions. According to Schreier (2019), the purpose of the coding frame is to “conceptualize and assess relevant meanings, with relevance depending on the research question—in our photo story analysis.
- The questions included, ***What does mental health and wellbeing mean to you? What are some of the challenges to mental health and wellbeing? What helps create positive mental health? and what supports positive mental wellbeing in our community?***
- The main coding phase involved two researchers engaging in an inductive and interpretive process of detailing the photos, operationalizing a process of data reduction to code each photo, and then grouping similar codes into categories.
- Categories were then merged to identify key themes, supported by participant photos and quotes. We share our findings via photos shared by our youth participants, supported by their quotes that share the narratives of their stories.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

- To support rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, we stayed as close as possible to the coding frame and descriptive details of each photo and narrative, to honour the vision and voices of the youth participants involved in this project.
- We aimed for what Graneheim et al. (2017) suggested as being important for credibility and authenticity of the findings—providing examples of our abstraction and interpretation processes through the use of representative photos, stories/narratives, and quotes from our young participants.



Findings

Five themes emerged including:

- *Relational Connectedness and Being in Community;*
- *Ways of Coping to Support Mental Health and Wellbeing;*
- *Growth in the Face of Challenges and Adversity;*
- *Spending Time in Nature Fosters Mental Health and Wellness, and*
- *Providing Safe Spaces and Programming*

Relational Connectedness and Being in Community



“Mental health and wellbeing means community working together.” (011)

Unknown. (2016). Hands and heart [Photo]. Pixabay. Retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/photos/hands-heart-red-paint-heart-shape-1846428/>



“Communication (through volunteering in the community) will more likely help with our mental health.” (0612)

“One of the most important strategies for staying happy and healthy is frequently going outside, enjoying nature and spending time under the sun. Isolating yourself, alone, at home, is detrimental to our mental states, and is a common pitfall many fall into.” (064)

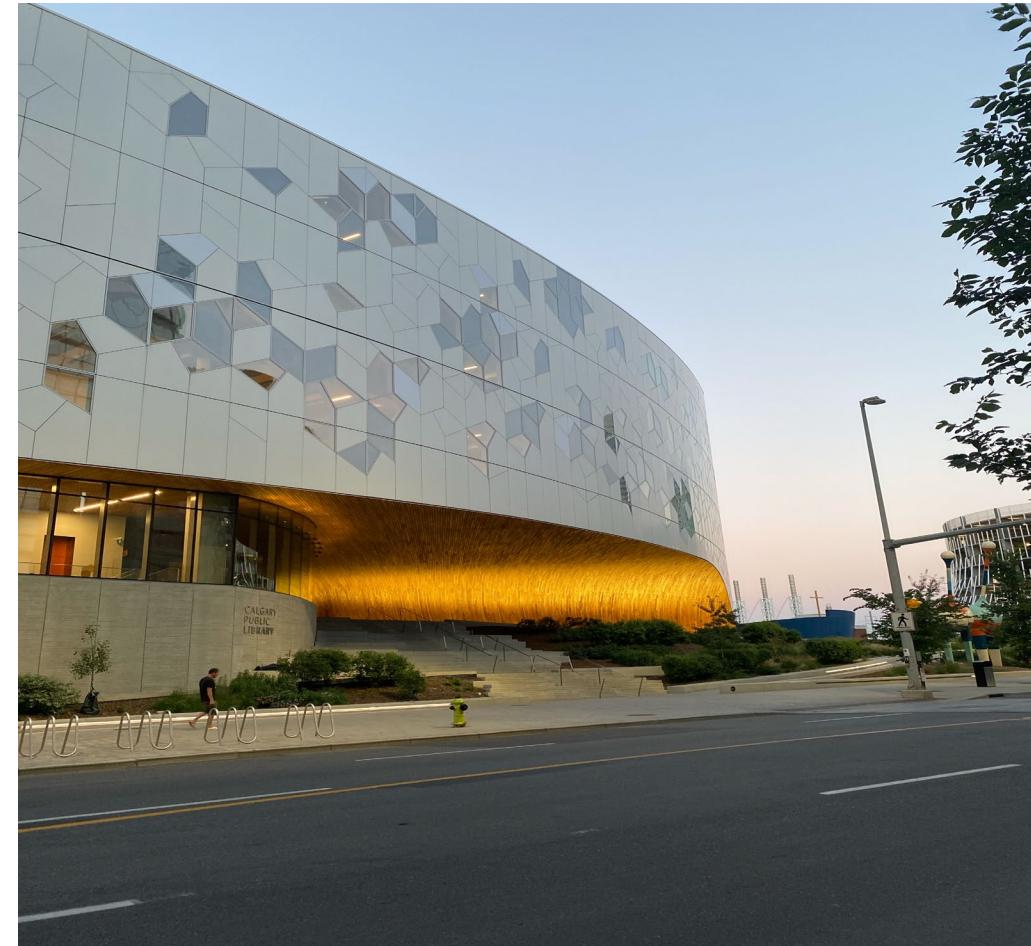
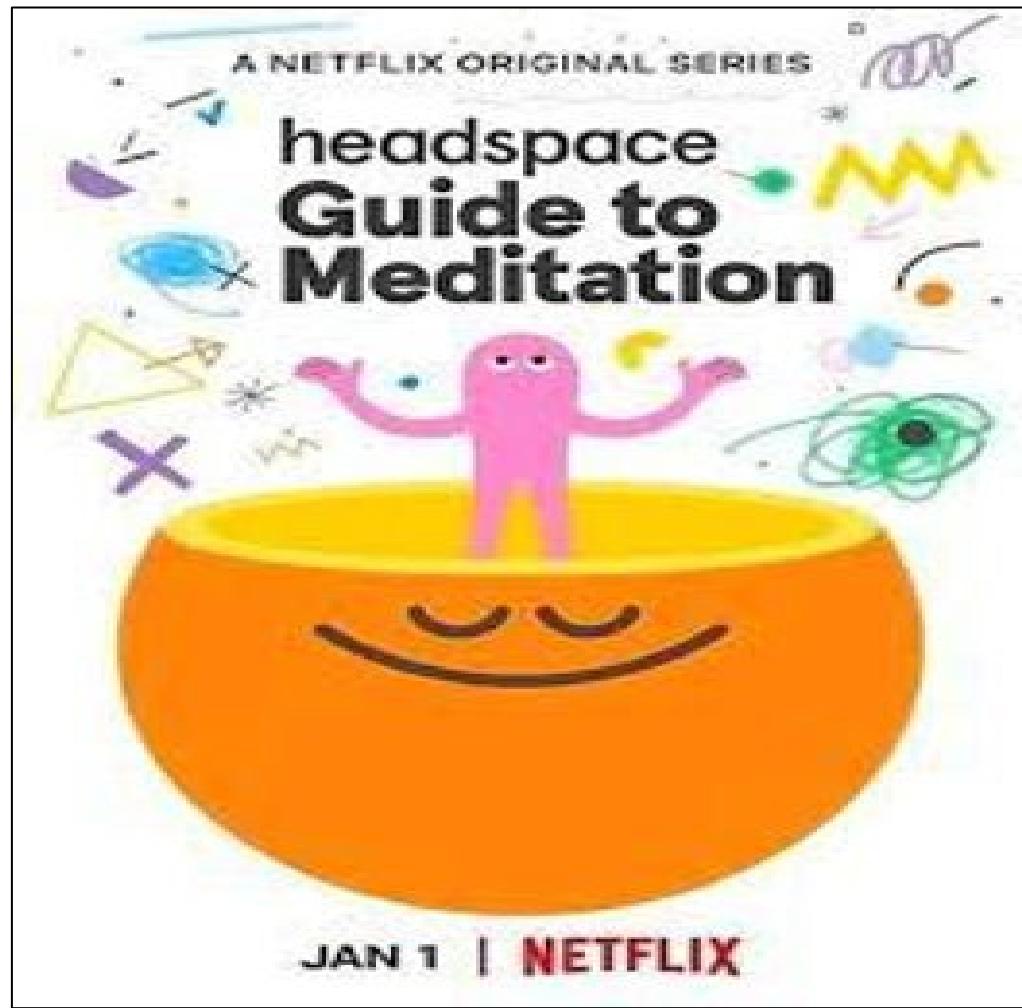


Ways of Coping to Support Mental Health and Wellbeing



“How you feel every day and how it affects your daily life [is what mental health means to me].” (013)

“I like to watch documentaries to remind myself I am not alone.” (021)



“It's the Calgary Public Library in the picture. Its design is so amazing that it allows people to read peacefully. Children and youths can just go to the library and grab a book, then all the anxiety will disappear.” (066)

Growth in the Face of Challenges and Adversity



“To me mental health means being happy and when I’m at the climbing gym I feel very relaxed at home.” (068)



“A challenge to my mental health would be my dirt bike being crashed. When something you love is ruined, it can cause a lot of stress and overwhelming feelings that aren't positive towards mental health.” (041)

[Challenges to mental wellbeing means that we have to] “face our fears.” (011)



Rodrigues, I. (2017). Challenging experience [Photo]. Unsplash. Retrieved from <https://unsplash.com/photos/6n4cDxbelNs>

Spending Time in Nature Fosters Mental Health and Wellness



“Being positive can help your community! It can put you in a better mindset to solve problems and you will have a clearer mind. You will make people around you positive as well.” (013)



“Hiking is a symbol of mental health for me because it can be a challenge at times. I enjoy hiking as a way to decompress.” (042)

“I love gymnastics, it is a fun way to express my feelings.” (021)



Lang, K. (2016). Balancing on beam [Photo]. Retrieved from <https://unsplash.com/s/photos/gymnastics-beam>

Providing Safe Spaces and Programming



Box and building say “Diversecities,” this is the name of a non-profit organization

“Over the summer, I’ve found Diversecities has been an excellent tool for free education surrounding mental health. What’s more, this photovoice project has been an especially cathartic outlet for reflecting on my own mental health, and the resources I have to care for it.” (065)



“Places which create a sense community support child and youth mental wellness. Public spaces like this library can gather youth together which makes those struggling with mental health issues feel less isolated and alone. A sense of belonging can significantly promote positive mental health since you get the feeling that you are not going through your issues by yourself.” (0611)

“Schools are one of the most important areas to youth and children, somewhere they will spend most of their childhood at. Thankfully, schools also offer mental health support and is somewhere children with mental issues can reach out and look for help at.” (064)





Youth Voices Shaped our
Photo Story Findings

Conclusions and Implications

- The results of this study provide valuable insights into some of the perspectives youth have regarding mental health and wellbeing, specifically related to what mental health and wellbeing means, illuminating some of the challenges to mental health and wellbeing for young people, ideas grounded in ways to help create positive mental health, and insights about what might help support positive, inclusive mental wellbeing in our communities.
- These insights and perspectives can aid in grounding strategies, policies, and approaches to supporting our youth, their families, and communities more broadly in addressing issues of mental health and wellbeing moving forward.

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