

Art from the Heart – Traveling Art Exhibit

Alan Syliboy, Mi'kmaw artist, shared time with youth in First Nations in order to explore how they would express pain and hurt through art. Since Aboriginal children have higher incidents of pain than non-Aboriginals, ACHH's research aims to understand how Aboriginal children and youth experience pain, perceive it and communicate it to others. This would enhance clinicians understanding about Aboriginal health, especially in pain diagnosis and pain management.

Two-Eyed Seeing, integration of Indigenous and western knowledge, is a culturally appropriate methodology for the art component of the study because it allows children to narrate their stories as well as use art to share their understanding and perception of pain and hurt. The process takes many hours of preparation and community engagement, in order for the youth to feel safe.

Alan was perfect in enticing the youth by helping them to connect their powerful narratives about their physical pain experiences into expressions of art. It was almost magical to witness the process by which youth, if provided the right tools, time and safe space, express what is pain and hurt, even though the word may not exist in their Mi'kmaw language.

Coincidentally, 100% of the 40 children from the four communities all expressed physical pain in their narratives, but greater than 70% included emotional expression of pain in their art. These preliminary findings literally paint a clear picture that emotional pain is also an important reality that Aboriginal children face when they feel physical pain. ACHH is developing a pain app which will help with the communication process to enhance diagnosis of pain for Aboriginal kids in health centres. This app will incorporate the importance of diagnosing pain more holistically and culturally, thanks to the evidence from the study's art component.

The community and hospital exhibits are part of knowledge translation to share Aboriginal youth's art expression about pain and hurt. It is part of the process to return their knowledge back to the community. Even more important is to share this knowledge with health care providers who attend to Mi'kmaw and Maliseet kids and youth for pain treatment.

John R. Syliboy
Aboriginal Research Engagement Coordinator