



INVESTIGAYTORS WINNIPEG

"KEEP IT SPICY!"

EXPERIENCING RESEARCH THROUGH CREATIVE EXPRESSION

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The Investigators program represents a transformative and participatory approach to community-based research, aimed at empowering individuals within the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities who possess a keen interest in health and community research. Notably, the Investigaytors Winnipeg initiative is a joint effort between the Village Lab at the University of Manitoba (<https://www.villagelab.ca/>) and the Community-Based Research Centre (www.cbrc.net). This collaborative effort seeks to create an inclusive and empowering space for individuals to develop their capacity and actively engage in research that positively impacts their communities.





The dynamic support team behind Investigaytors Winnipeg is led by individuals who bring a wealth of lived experience to the program:

- The Program Coordinator, Noé Prefontaine (BSW, MSW) is a member of the Village Lab at the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. noeprefontaine@gmail.com.
- The Investigaytors program is guided by a dedicated Community Advisory Committee (CAC), whose invaluable insights and perspectives ensure that Investigaytors Winnipeg is culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the diverse communities involved. The CAC plays a crucial role in program development, providing input on action plans and ensuring that the program aligns with community needs. Their unwavering commitment to community input and cultural relevance makes the Investigaytors program a truly inclusive and community-driven initiative.
- The Principal Applicant, Dr. Rusty Souleymanov, (MSW, PHD) is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba and serves as the Director of Village Lab. rusty.souleymanov@umanitoba.ca.



INVESTIGAYTORS WINNIPEG

2022 - 2023

The resumption of the Investigaytors Winnipeg program in December 2022 marked an exciting milestone as it was made accessible to all members of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities. Throughout the course of the program year, the Investigaytors were not only engaged in building meaningful relationships, but also honing valuable research skills and strengthening their ability to actively contribute to community-based research and interventions. Through multiple sessions, they delved into qualitative research, community-based research, and the critical concepts of decolonizing and Indigenizing research. Additionally, they engaged in brainstorming sessions to identify the pressing needs and promising opportunities for future 2SLGBTQQIA+ health research. Overall, this program provided a platform for participants to foster relationships, expand their research literacy, and enhance their capacity to positively impact their communities through research and interventions.

The development of relationships and self-care skills were essential components of capacity strengthening in our first year. Throughout the program we emphasized the importance of fostering meaningful relationships and practicing self-care. One of the key aspects of the program was the opportunity for our Investigaytors to build relationships within their communities. Through various sessions, they were encouraged to engage with each other, share their experiences, and develop connections based on mutual understanding and support. Building relationships among 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals is vital as it creates a sense of belonging, reduces isolation, and fosters social support networks that can provide a buffer against mental health challenges such as discrimination, stigma, and stress from structural oppressions.





In addition to relationship building, the program also emphasized the development of self-care skills. The program recognized that individuals in the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities often face unique mental health challenges and stressors, including discrimination, prejudice, and social exclusion. Therefore, self-care skills and coping strategies were integrated into the program to help our Investigaytors circle members build resilience and maintain their mental well-being. Self-care is crucial as it enables individuals to effectively manage their mental health, cope with challenges, and prevent burnout, ultimately improving their overall well-being.

Furthermore, the program focused on enhancing research literacy and capacity strengthening among our group members. Through sessions on qualitative research, community-based research, and concepts such as decolonizing and Indigenizing research, the Investigaytors were equipped with valuable research skills that could be applied in their second year when focusing on mental health research and interventions in the community.

The Investigaytors Winnipeg program exemplified the importance of fostering relationships, practicing self-care, and enhancing community-based research capacity in empowering participants to contribute positively to their communities. By incorporating these elements into capacity building programs, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals can develop the skills and knowledge necessary to address the unique mental health needs of their communities and promote overall well-being.



INVESTIGAYTORS WINNIPEG

2022 - 2023

As the snow fell and the prairie's winter freeze deepened, we met our Investigaytors for the first time. During this inaugural meeting, the group participated in a co-creative brainstorming process which uncovered which stories they wanted told when it came to the mental health of 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples and communities, as well as which research methods, tools, and approaches they wanted to learn in order to experience and express those stories. They quickly identified that qualitative approaches to research, especially those that emphasized community art and creative expression, resonated most with the group.

Photovoice is a participatory and community-based research method which provides an empowering platform for research "participants" to have their stories told through their own lens, both literally and figuratively. As part of our work as Investigaytors, the group was gifted the camera equipment required to begin a practical, hands-on exploration of Photovoice. Meanwhile in the classroom, they discovered how this method can support our communities' members in having their voices and wisdoms heard in the production of knowledge surrounding our communities.

The Investigaytors were asked to use the cameras to capture their experiences of "self-care", thereby familiarizing themselves with the research method while also expressing some of the ways in which they promote positive mental health in their daily lives. Through their captures alongside numerous discussions within our circle, the Investigaytors shared many practices and strategies they employ to support their own mental health as well as the health of our communities. It soon became clear that for 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples, self-care is community care; Caring for ourselves is caring for our communities, and caring for our communities is caring for ourselves.





Our group also identified that, for us, self-care is not simply a candlelit bubble bath; We are regularly called to do the difficult “inner work” so that we might contribute to the healing of our communities. One Investigaytor shared that self-care means “Acknowledging all my emotions equally and knowing they are all needed for the human experience, and serve the purpose of well-being.”

The Investigaytors’ Photovoice captures and other offerings highlighted proactive strategies that they employ while engaging in self-care. They shared the following practices which support their health and wellbeing:

Experiencing nature

Moving the body

Quiet

Art

Creative expression and performance
(Drag, for example)

Medication

Animal friends

Meditation and mindfulness

Practicing emotional recognition

Time spent alone

Time spent with chosen family
and kin

Time spent with children / family

Plants and living green things

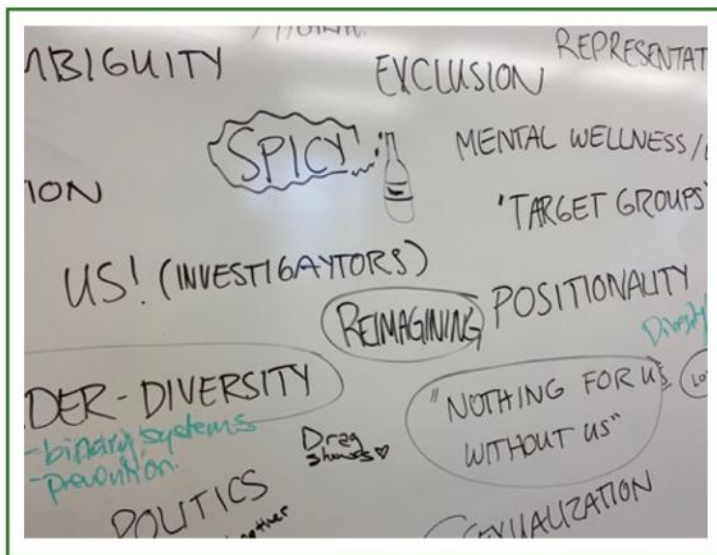
Comfortable and as-safe-as-possible
socializing

Journaling





During a debrief of the group's experiences with the participatory method, a few Investigaytors shared how the photo-taking process empowered them to engage in reflection surrounding their own mental health, the ways in which their wellbeing is impacted by their identities, and the practices and spaces they've developed to "do" self-care. This investigation of Photovoice marks but the beginning of our group's discovery of the usefulness of research in addressing 2SLGBTQQIA+ health inequities and knowledge gaps. The next chapter of Investigaytors in Winnipeg is sure to deepen these discoveries and further unearth the role that critically-conscious and community-based research can play in supporting the empowerment of sexual and gender diverse peoples and communities.





As the 2022 – 2023 chapter of Investigaytors Winnipeg began to draw to a close, one of our circle members created an artwork that represented the learning we had undertaken alongside each other. The artist gifted screen-prints of the art to everyone and also shared a digital version:

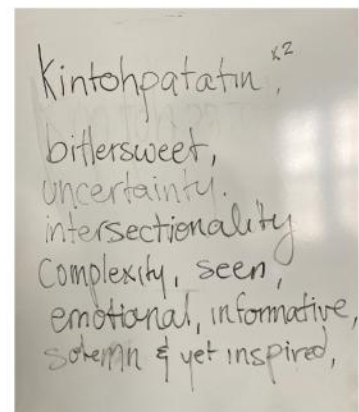
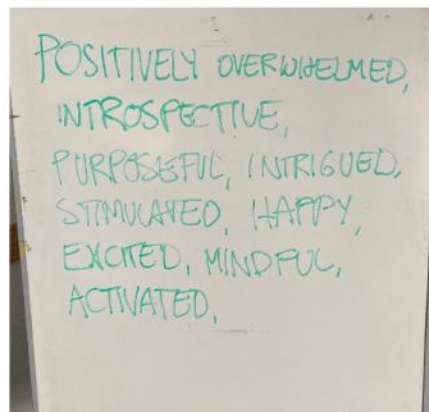
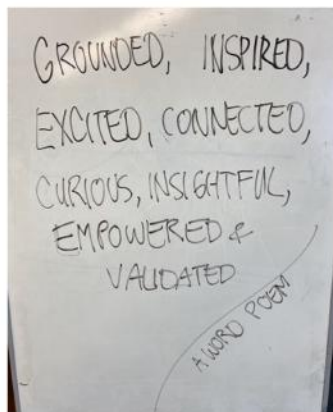


In this digital work, you can see that the second “i” is represented by a teabag, reflecting the conversations in which we discussed the Indigenous-informed practice of “sharing tea”. We shared of how we can “share tea” with ideas –sitting quietly and allowing the reflexive thoughts to come to us, observing them with compassion and without judgment– and talked about how the very human, very community-oriented practice of “sharing tea” can help inform the ways in which we engage in research. The “y” in the artwork is represented by a multi-coloured hot pepper, once again referencing the Investigaytors’ emphasis on keeping our learning “spicy” and transformative. The “o” in the work is represented by an icon of the camera model gifted to the group as part of their exploration of the community-based participatory research method, Photovoice.



'A WORD POEM'

It was during one of our earliest Investigaytors sessions that the concept of 'A Word Poem' emerged; In essence, this concept involved gathering our "check-out" words in an effort to capture our feelings and thought-scapes in closing our circle for the day. One Investigaytor suggested that we title this check-out process 'A Word Poem', since the collection of words told its own organic story about our capacity-strengthening work.



Soon after the adoption of 'A Word Poem', another Investigaytor connected this check-out practice to the emerging field of A.I. (artificial intelligence) art as they began to explore the research potential which exists at the intersection of arts-based methods and auto-ethnographic approaches. The artworks created through this process brought our Investigaytors' poems to life, breathing colour, texture, and brilliance into the shared words.

CLOSING OUR CIRCLE

(FOR NOW)

As this year of Investigaytors came to a close, we gathered to reflect on what we discovered as a circle of 2SLGBTQIA+ learners. Our group's reflections expressed being inspired by the course content's emphasis on qualitative research methods given their interest in creative approaches, as well as a deep sense of gratitude for the teachings of Elder Albert McLeod whose guest lecture enriched their understanding of relationality and what it means to "do research" in a good way.


The most familiar refrain within the group's reflections was the feeling of being seen and empowered by our work as Investigaytors, many people noticing that the practice of community care that we'd identified as central to promoting the mental health of 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples, underlined their experiences within this capacity-strengthening program.

To be seen, to be listened to, to belong to others in kinship; These are among the greatest kindnesses and strengths shared between people. When consulted within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Cree author and knowledge keeper Edmund Metatawabin's shared of *kintohpatatin*, a Cree word that loosely translates to 'you've been listened to'. Edmund explained that,

*"There is no concept of justice in Cree culture. The nearest word is **kintohpatatin**, which loosely translates to you've been listened to. But **kintohpatatin** is richer than justice – really it means you have been listened to by someone compassionate and fair, and your needs will be taken seriously."*

(Metatawabin, 2014)

Metatawabin, E., & Shimo, A. (2014). *Up Ghost River: A chief's journey through the turbulent waters of Native history*. Vintage Canada.



As our Investigaytors identified throughout the course of this year's training sessions, to be seen and listened to are essential protective health factors for 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples, especially those who are multiply-targeted and whose identities are especially unseen and unheard. Looking to the future and the next year of the Investigaytors program, our circle will build on the community and kinship bonds forged throughout this past year and seek to listen to one another as we discover, with even greater curiosity, how research can support the health, liberation, and healing of our communities.

While the wisdoms, creative works, and learnings that originated within our circle are as inspiring as they are brilliant, the greatest gifts that emerged from this year likely were the kinship bonds created and the development of a community of 2SLGBTQIA+ learners seeking to reimagine research. Capacity-strengthening begins when those that came before open the door for those who are sure to follow; The doorway of Investigaytors is ready to embark on its next chapter of strengthening capacities, deepening understandings, and supporting the development of healthy futures in our communities.

“The work” has just begun!

