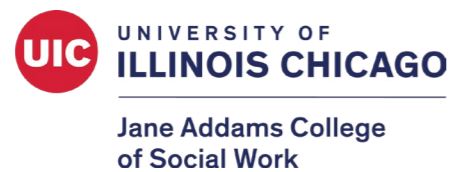


# Support Group for People Who Use Drugs: A Low-Barrier, Harm Reduction Approach

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*Funders:*



# Background

***Abstinence-based support groups for people who use drugs (PWUD) often require sobriety.***

- Limits access for people using substances
- Can undermine key elements of support: *belonging, safety, and voice*



# Saskatchewan Context

**Substance-related harms are shaped by settler colonialism and dislocation, disproportionately impacting Indigenous communities.**

- These barriers are especially significant in Saskatchewan

# The Current Study: *Overview*

## The current study...

- 1 Examines a community-led, low-barrier support group for PWUD in Regina
- 2 Guided by liberatory harm reduction and dislocation theory

# The Current Study: *Methods*



- **The group was led by AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan (APSS) and the Eaton Lab.**



- Sessions co-facilitated by APSS First Nations Staff and a social work practicum student
  - Structured group report notes captured activities, discussion, forms of engagement, and group dynamics
- **Two, six-week phases:**
    - June 12 – July 17, 2024
    - August 7 – September 11, 2024

# The Current Study: *Results*

- Groups ranged from 2 to 11 participants per session
- All participants were Indigenous, and no additional demographic or attendance data were collected
- Three themes emerged

# **THEME 1:** *Storytelling as a Site of Healing and Resistance*

## **Sub-Theme 1.1:**



### **Voicing Lived Experience**

- Space for participants to speak candidly; to share stories, speak to their goals and their dreams, and discuss amongst one another their lived experiences

## **Sub-Theme 1.1:**



### **Bearing Witness**

- “You guys actually listen”
- Group dynamics were collectively navigated to “cultivate a space for collective sharing, deep listening, and mutual respect during story-sharing moments”

## THEME 2: Peer-Led Learning

Sub-Theme 2.1: 

### Collective Knowledge Sharing

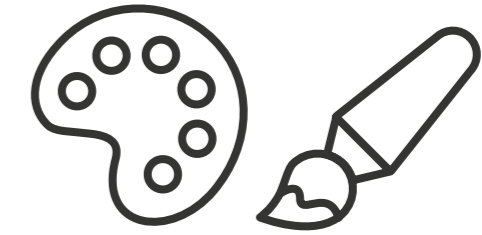
- Group sessions loosely structured around topics related to substance use
  - *Teaching and learning emerged collaboratively, through open discussions amongst facilitators and group members*

Sub-Theme 2.2: 

### Consciousness-Raising Process

- Discussions created opportunities for group members and facilitators to share personal struggles within broader structural contexts
- Lived experience and professional knowledge were brought together to fuel a consciousness-raising process tied to the collective

# THEME 3: Environmental and Bodily Safety



## Sub-Theme 3.1:

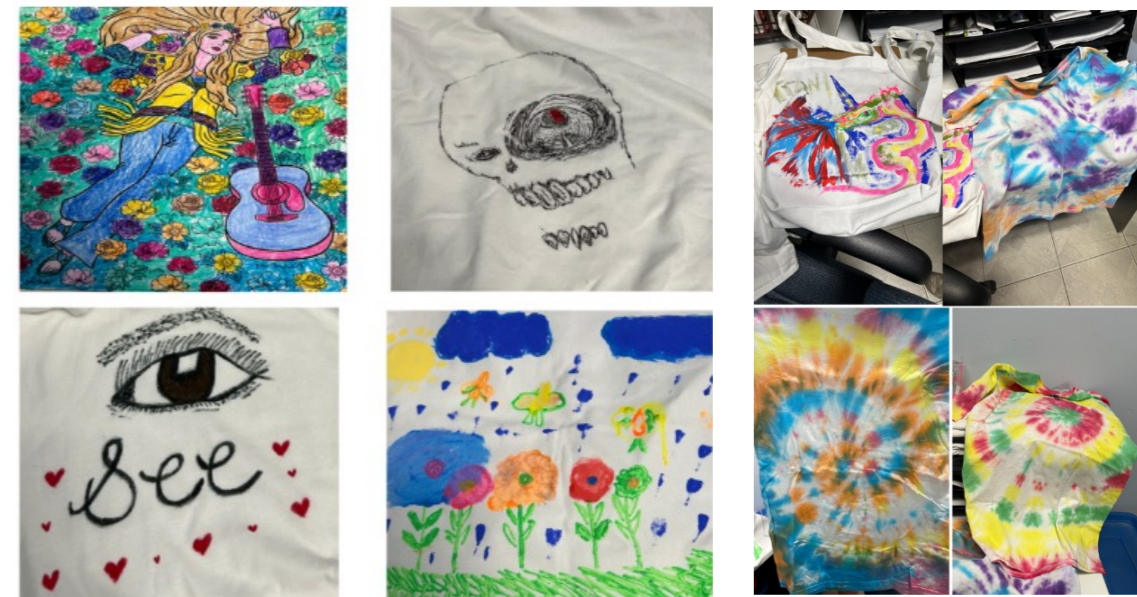
### Flexible Engagement

- Facilitators and group members worked together to establish group parameters that worked for all
  - *Individuals could participate on their own terms; free to come and go as they pleased; no pressure to stay for full duration or attend consistently*
  - *No expectation of sobriety to participate*
  - *Facilitators and group members worked together to establish group parameters that worked for all*

## Sub-Theme 3.2:

### Art as a Tool for Grounding

- Art-making fostered a sense of relational connection
- Art-making centered a “make your own” project approach





# Conclusion

- The group created a space where people could show up as they were, without the requirement of sobriety
- Revealed how storytelling, peer-led learning, and safety fostered a support group model grounded in connection and re-connection



Read the publication here!



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