Art Intervention for Reducing Risks for Street Youth

**Background**
The East-side Youth Drop-in Centre provides services to street-involved youth (13-17), a substantial minority of whom carry transmissible infections, work in the sex trade, use injection drugs, and share needles. Program data also suggest that many of these youth self-identify as being from diverse sexual orientations and ethnic backgrounds, including representation from a variety of Aboriginal groups. The proposed project will involve working with the youth already presenting at East-side, to implement an arts-based intervention with the aim of better understanding risk in their lives, and ways it might be reduced.

**Research Question**
Is arts-based intervention an effective strategy to help street-involved youth identify risks to themselves and develop coping skills to reduce these risks?

**Proposed Method**
The arts-based intervention will be structured around weekly 3-hour sessions (for eight weeks) with a maximum of 10 youth per session. Each session will begin with a brief presentation by the researcher, followed by time for participants to work on art. The researcher will explain to the group that the exercises are not about artistic skill, but rather about the fact that each participant is an expert on their own lives. The themes for the sessions are intended to be open-ended enough to avoid being overly constraining, but structured enough to provide a meaningful framework for art-making and constructive discussion. The sessions will be organized around the following very general themes: What do you do for money? What are some of the risks? Could it be safer? How? How do you spend your money and time? What are some of the risks? Could it be safer? How? At the end of each session, each participant will talk about their project in the context of a group discussion about art-making and constructive discussion. Visual arts materials on hand will include pastels, pencil crayons, paper, acrylic paints, and canvas boards. Food (e.g., pizza) and drinks (e.g., pop) will be available at each session. Participants will also be compensated $20 per session. A second phase of this project will involve working with the youth and East-side to mount a public exhibition of their work, as a vehicle for knowledge translation.

**Participants (Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria)**
The desired participant group is youth who frequent the East-side Youth Drop-in Centre. Participants must be known to the Centre and be willing to commit to attending at least four sessions.

**Risks**
There are no physical risks due to being involved in the sessions. Some participants may feel uncomfortable discussing the story behind their art.

**Potential Benefits**
Participants will have a safe place to engage in art-making that they would not otherwise have. They may also learn and adopt strategies that will help them deal with the risks of their current situation. They will also have access to food and drink that they might not normally have.

**Recruitment**
A poster will be placed in the drop-in centre. Staff will be asked to mention the program to any youth who meet the inclusion criteria.

**Consent Process**
Interested participants will be asked to add their names to a sign-up sheet kept at the front desk of the drop-in centre along with any contact information they can provide. The centre staff will give them a printed schedule of the sessions and ask that they make sure to come to the first one. At the first session, the researcher will explain the details of the study and pass around consent forms for them to sign.

**Data security**
Each participant’s name and contact information will be kept in secure files by the researcher.

**Dissemination**
Dissemination may include press releases and media coverage, including interviews and appearances by the youth themselves; it may also include traveling the exhibition to different public venues, possibly in different cities. Exhibitions will include a comment book to solicit feedback from the public.