

A New Twist: Yoga Within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved

by

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BRec., Dalhousie University, 1999

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Abstract

This research explored the impact of yoga on the lives of youth who were street-involved. The study is supported by recent qualitative research that focuses on the strengths and coping strategies of youth who are street-involved.

Nine youth who were street-involved and attending weekly yoga classes, at a local drop-in centre, were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Additionally, a yoga instructor and an outreach worker who work with the yoga programme were interviewed to provide historical and philosophical background.

The narrative methodology used allowed the stories of the youth to be brought to the forefront. The youth are introduced individually and themes common to more than one youth are discussed. Through their stories the youth explored the themes of change and calm related to their experiences with yoga. Finally, considerations for including yoga in a programme working with youth who are street-involved are addressed.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

A large body of literature has developed to explore and explain the segment of the adolescent population who experience greater struggles than the developmental task of identity seeking. The literature describes these youth as “at risk”, “deviant”, “marginalized” or “street-involved”. Research attempts to define the characteristics of these youth and identify reasons for the crimes they commit, the drugs they use, and the lifestyles they live. Although the majority of research conducted with these youth focuses on negative aspects of their lives, some research has begun to expand the canvas upon which these youth are painted. This new research is exploring the multiple identities and stories in which youth who are street-involved belong.

I wondered about how personal strength might develop through the experience of being a street kid. Maybe there is more to being a street kid than being a bum.

Can we allow ourselves to imagine that the pedagogy of the street may also be fertile, valuable, and full of possibility. (Mayers, 2001, p. 56)

This new research illuminates health seeking and coping strategies used by youth who are street-involved. Many of these new research projects are based in qualitative methodologies which allow the stories of youth to be brought to the fore-front.

### *Stories*

The phrase ‘street kids’ stirs images of pink matted hair, studded boots, unwashed clothes and groups of youth asking for spare change. This image has led to stories about these youth that label and blame them for the lives that they lead. Further, the youths’ stories that challenge these labels are often judged, disbelieved or punished. Some of

these youth are not heard, supported or encouraged. I was drawn to working with high risk youth by the story of one young boy. He taught me the value and importance of simply listening and honouring a story. He taught me that youth who are street-involved are more than the image we create from passing them on the street.

Joey was nine. He was all of four feet tall, with a mop of curls and a sparkle in his eyes. He was tough enough to try to play basketball with the older kids and gentle enough to cry when he was knocked down. He was old enough to smoke pot and young enough to want to play hide and seek. His story made me cry. His resilience gave me hope. I knew no one else heard his story because he was 'too young' and 'too bad'. I wanted to wrap up Joey and his story and take them home. I felt helpless because I could not. In the end I dried tears, I played hide and seek and I listened to the pain, the anger and the joy in the story of a nine year old boy.

For almost ten years I have been involved with the stories of youth who are at risk. My primary work has been as a recreation therapist. This has meant I have had opportunities to be with youth when they were playing and relaxed. It was in these moments when they shared their stories. I noticed that so many of their stories were filled with constant chaos and upheaval. Rarely did the youth describe calm situations in their lives. As a result of these stories I integrated opportunities for relaxation into the work I did with youth. I led relaxation groups and individual sessions. Some sessions used guided meditation or stories, whereas others used yoga. I have never lived on or near the streets and therefore I can never fully understand that life but I do understand the need to escape and the desire to have quiet in my mind. During the groups and individual sessions I watched as some youth initially resisted and then connected to the moments of

calm. Many of the youth I worked with began to integrate these relaxation practices into their own lives. I hoped that moments of quiet would give space to the youth to explore different aspects of themselves. Observing and talking to these youth about their ability to connect to calm encouraged my belief that youth who are street-involved could create stories that moved beyond the chaos they experienced and the boundaries of labels they are given.

### *My Own Yoga Story*

As I began my research I considered how yoga might fit into the story of youth who are street-involved and I reflected on my own beliefs about yoga. I pondered whether I believed yoga to be a tool for stress relief, fitness or altering states of consciousness or whether I viewed yoga as part of a spiritual journey or larger way of living. As I interviewed each youth I realized that yoga has the potential to be all of these things and that each person will construct their own experience and relationship with yoga.

I have been constructing my relationship with yoga for many years. This research process challenged me to re-examine my relationship with my practice. When I began I thought I understood my connection to yoga and the role yoga played in my life. I learned through this research process that my own yoga narrative continues to evolve.

Yoga is one of my tools for maintaining my connection to my body and my sense of calm, although I am still learning to use this tool after misplacing it many times. My first memory of yoga participation is of myself lying on the floor beside my mom at the local YMCA evening yoga class. I was wearing a brightly coloured t-shirt and black tights. Our legs stretched above us up a wall. I was about fifteen, still unsure of my body,

but more confident after a summer spent walking in England and losing about thirty pounds. My mother had suggested we try the class as a way to spend time together and participate in physical activity. I remember being the youngest person in the class with women of all sizes bending and twisting their bodies. I am sure there were men in the class but my memories of them have faded as my focus stayed on comparing my body to that of the other women.

My mom and I spent eight weeks twisting and moving our bodies into yoga poses and then for reasons of which are now uncertain we did not sign up for the next session. Maybe summer arrived, or soccer started, or I wanted to spend more time with friends, or my mother's work got too busy; whatever the reason we stopped.

I did not find my way back to yoga until my early twenties when my life was crumbling. At that time I sought yoga as self-care. My weekly yoga class became my time. During class I did not have to manage or cope with anything else or take care of anyone else. I also did not have to fight with my own body. The walls of the studio seemed protective and in that room I was able to shut out the world.

After a few months I decided I could no longer spare the time to participate in yoga classes. After stopping, my fight with my body grew as I ran and exercised frantically. I exercised to the point of damaging my body just to lose weight. I trained for a marathon and ate only bagels. For a short time I lived off carrots and apples. I counted daily calories and rationed myself to fewer than 1500 calories each day. Food and exercise monitoring tapes played constantly in my head. I became afraid of slowing down and gaining weight.

Recently, I picked up Elizabeth Kadetsky's book called *First There is a Mountain*. As I read I discovered that the main character shared my struggles with food and exercise and that these struggles became intertwined with her yoga practice. Her narrative resonated with my own story.

Around this time, I went to one of Manouso's yoga classes. Yoga was at two. I had run in the morning. After, I'd felt the endorphin buzz of the runner's high. I rode that high through the blood-sugar drop of a skipped lunch, so that when I got to class on the requisite empty stomach, I was famished. The hunger inside made me feel like a bird, soft and alive, so weightless it might fly. The hunger gave the world a different cast. I felt ethereal. Luminous shapes shimmered around edges of the purple gym mats that lined the floors. The universe had a sparkly, tingly effervescence. This was a numinous, radiant world, alluring and dangerous.

(Kadetsky, 2004, p. 52)

Like this woman, for me, being hungry was a high. I had a frantic and unending energy when I was hungry. Eating made me feel sluggish. Like this character, I skipped meals and over-exercised to maintain my high. The cycle fed itself.

I often considered taking another yoga class but always found an excuse to not start. Most often that excuse focused around yoga not being good enough exercise. I rationalized that I could not spare the time to do something that would not serve the purpose of maintaining weight. I did take the odd yoga fitness class at a local gym but these occurred in jam-packed rooms that still held the frenetic energy of the aerobics class that occurred in the previous hour.

Yoga came back into my life at another point of crisis about three years ago. I was living in the Cayman Islands and experiencing a period of significant personal and professional stress. During this time I attempted to cope with my stress by exercising at least two hours each day. My hip and knee began to hurt but I ignored these warning signals. Eventually, I injured myself to a point where every movement, including sneezing, was a painful experience. I was forced to stop moving. The first day on my back I remember lying alone in the dark, sobbing as voices ran over in my head reminding me that I was a fat, ugly and an awful person. In those moments of forced stillness my thoughts stabbed me and I cried. On the second day I remembered a meditation practice I had been taught years earlier. I focused on my breathing instead of my thoughts. As I focused on my breath, the thoughts began to play slower and softer. Over the next few days as I continued to focus on my breath, my body began to heal.

As my body recovered I recognized, once again, my need to incorporate moments of presence and reflection in my life. I realized that time for self-care was essential and not just a luxury. This is when I returned to yoga. The classes were small and intimate. The walls once again became my barrier from the outside world. In the classes there were moments when I disengaged from the tapes playing in my head and I was present in the room.

For the next couple of years I tried to maintain yoga as an integral part of my life. Some weeks I only made one class but everyday a piece of yoga practice filtered into my life whether it was taking a moment to breathe or to stretch into a posture. That regular practice slipped away from me again recently when work and school took on a frantic pace. Although my own practice faded, the constancy with which I have considered the

participant's experiences with yoga has meant my own experience of yoga is never far from my mind.

I recognize that my experience of yoga is contextualized and located within my relationship with my body. In my life yoga has created opportunities for me to slow down and re-story my relationship with my body. Similarly, I believe yoga is embedded in a larger story for youth who are street-involved. In this research I sought to explore the stories of yoga within the lives of youth who are street-involved. Interviews with nine youth provide a window into how yoga may fit with the drama of street life that includes violence and drug use. Their stories, like my own, illuminate the possibility that yoga can be involved in the process of change.

The literature review that follows will highlight some of the characteristics of youth who are street-involved and the ways qualitative research is expanding understanding of their complex lives. Literature related to programmes and services for youth who are street-involved is also addressed. Additionally, an exploration of both the processes of change and the philosophy of yoga are undertaken. Finally, the small body of literature on yoga with marginalized populations highlights the need for this current research.

The literature review is followed by an explanation of the research methodology in Chapter 3. Both the literature review and methodology provide a framework for the documentation and discussion of the yoga and life stories of nine youth. These stories are presented in two ways. First, in Chapter 4, a narrative introducing each youth is offered. These individual narratives are followed, in Chapters 5 and 6, by a discussion of the themes that run among the youths' stories. Considerations for incorporating yoga into

existing programs with youth who are street-involved are addressed in Chapter 7. Finally, in Chapter 8, I return to my own yoga story and reflect on the intermingling of my story with the stories told by the youth.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The literature for this thesis is multidisciplinary. The project is informed by the disciplines of child and youth care, and social work, along with eastern and western psychology. This literature review addresses characteristics of youth who are street-involved, approaches used to work with these youth, processes of change, yoga philosophy and other eastern approaches to working with high-risk youth. The literature submitted provides rationale and support for the research question: How does yoga fit with/in the stories of youth who are street-involved?

#### *Characteristics of Youth who are Street-Involved*

An established and unilateral definition for youth who are street-involved does not exist. In general, youth who are homeless or street-involved are defined by their lack of stable housing and significant involvement with street culture (Baer, Peterson & Wells, 2004); however, the variety of circumstances through which youth arrive on the street and the situations they encounter while living on or near the street make generalizations and definitions difficult. One of the ways youth who are street-involved are classified is by the way that they arrive on the street.

Homeless youth include young people who have left home at their own volition and have a home to return to ('runaways'), youth who have been encouraged to leave and do not have a place to return to ('throwaways' and 'pushouts'), and youth who have been placed outside of their parents' home, typically to foster or institutional care, before becoming homeless ('system'). (Robertson, 1992, MacLean et al., 1999, Ginzler & Cauce, 2000, as cited in Baer et al., 2004, p. 318)

A possible link between all of these categories is the experience of alienation youth encounter as they are pushed or thrown from family, community, school and social systems. "Many youth perceive they have no other alternative to leaving home...They become alienated from these systems that normally keep youth anchored in mainstream society" (Higgitt, Wingert, Ristock, Brown, Ballantyne, Caett, Coy, & Quoquat, 2003, p. 5).

The housing situation youth find themselves in once they are street-involved is another factor that illustrates diversity within the youth street-culture. Homelessness is a continuum ranging from the traditional image of people sleeping in doorways and on benches to people couch surfing, staying in single room occupancy hotels, cars, abandoned building or shifting among all of these options. "People who experience relative homelessness have shelter, but it is poor quality, inadequate or unstable. Absolute homelessness refers to the complete lack of long-term shelter" (Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 14). Youth who are street-involved may find themselves at various points along the homelessness continuum for differing lengths of time.

Ziefert and Brown (1991) as cited in Bronstein (1996) discuss a continuum of homelessness ranging from situationally homeless to marginally homeless to chronically or habitually homeless. Youth who are situationally homeless are often on the streets for the first time "due to loss of job, loss of welfare benefits or an interpersonal conflict" (Bronstein, 1996, p. 129). Marginally homeless youth are those youth who move on and off the street and who may have issues with mental health or substance abuse. "When the marginally homeless do not receive help, they move to the last segment on the

continuum...Here individuals have developed a routine for living on the street” (Bronstein, 1996, p. 129).

The individual baggage youth bring to the street, including their personal characteristics, cultural background and family of origin issues, add to the complexity of defining and categorizing this population. Many of these youth cope with histories of family violence and substance abuse, sexual and emotional abuse, and/or abandonment (Baron, 1999; Kidd, 2003). Concurrently, some youth experience mental health problems. “Depression appears most frequently (Ayerst, 1999; Kurtz, Kurtz & Jarvis, 1991; MacLean et al., 1999; Rotheram-Borus, 1993; Whitbeck, Hoyt & Yoder, 1999), followed by conduct disorder, (Buckner & Bassuk, 1997; Fietal et al., 1992), trauma and post traumatic stress disorder (Fietal et al., 1992), and psychotic symptoms (Mundy, Robertson, Robertson & Greenblatt, 1990)” (Kidd, 2003, p. 237). Bronstein (1996) suggests that the one unifying characteristic of youth who are street-involved may be that they are at higher risk for “encountering every social, emotional and physical problem affecting their age group” (p. 129). Further, research suggests that the identity and therefore the needs of individuals who are street-involved are becoming more complex. “Whereas the homeless population from prior decades consisted primarily of Older, White men, the current homeless are much more heterogeneous. They are younger, better educated, and more likely to use drugs, and they exhibit more symptoms of mental illness” (McCarty, Argeriou, Huebner & Lubran, 1991, p. 1139).

Once youth are street-involved they choose many ways to survive and to cope with their histories of pain, trauma, mental health issues, alienation and abuse. For some youth this means becoming involved in the sex trade, criminal activity or drug dealing.

Substance abuse is one of the many methods youth who are street-involved utilize to forget about their daily pain and stress (Higgitt et al., 2003; Kidd, 2003). Youth who are street-involved are often identified as one of the highest risk populations for harmful involvement with drugs and or alcohol. "Homeless street youths are a widely perceived 'problem population' at risk for drug and alcohol use" (Smart & Adlaf, 1991; Unger et al., 1998, as cited in Baron, 1999, p. 3). Baron (1999) identifies that risk factors for substance use arise from both the background of the youth and their current life situation on the street.

Homeless youth tend to come to the streets with backgrounds that promote drug and alcohol use. However, once on the street, their risk for drug and alcohol use is exacerbated by their street experiences, including cultural supports for substance use, drug-using peers, and involvement in a criminal lifestyle that finances heavy drug and alcohol use. Further, they are embedded in employment situations that can either leave them alienated from conventional society or frustrated with their failure, both of which serve to increase the risk of drug and alcohol use. (Baron, 1999, p. 19)

Recent studies show that use of all drugs and alcohol is significantly higher among youth who are street-involved than all other populations of youth. One specific study of homeless youth between 13-19 years of age, in Seattle, found that over the period of one year 95.4% of the youth who are street-involved surveyed had used marijuana. This same study provided a figure of 70.3% for speed, 49.2% for cocaine/crack and 35.5% for heroin (Baer et al., 2004). These numbers can be compared to national American high school figures, which show 37.0% of high school students had

used marijuana in the past year, 10.9% used speed, 4.8% crack/cocaine and 0.9% used heroin (Johnston et al., 2001, as cited in Baer et al., 2004).

Studies in Canada present similar numbers to the American research. The 1999 *Canadian Profile: Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug* found that between one quarter and one half of youth who are street-involved report engaging in heavy drinking, 66% to 88% report cannabis use and 18% to 64% state the use of crack/cocaine (Currie, 2001).

Further, "rates of lifetime injection drug use among street youth range from approximately 11% in a national sample to 48% of males and 32% of females among Vancouver street youth" (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 1999, as cited in Currie, 2001, p. 14). Finally, a study conducted by McCarthy and Hagan (1992) with homeless youth in Toronto indicated that many of them had been heavily involved with drugs. Specifically, the research revealed that 80% of the youth had used marijuana and 42.6% specified use of crack or cocaine.

The complex experiences of youth who are street-involved create difficulty not only in categorizing and defining but also in gathering demographic information.

"Moreover, we lack consensus on how to define and count them. Estimates vary according to definitions and measures and these reflect diverging philosophies, theories, and political agendas" (Peressini & McDonald as cited in Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 15).

Statistics reported that 53,434 Canadian youth under eighteen ran away from home situations in 2000 although this number does not reflect the additional youth who were thrown or pushed out (Higgitt et al., 2003). "It has been estimated that there may be 150,000 homeless youth in Canada" (Caputo et al., 1997, as cited in Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 16). The number of youth living on the margins of mainstream society is growing

daily. The current service delivery model does not meet the needs of youth who are street-involved and therefore they are left to survive on their own. To create changes in this service delivery system innovative programmes and qualitative researchers have begun to advocate on behalf of youth who are street-involved by encouraging mainstream society to meet the youth and learn about their stories, their needs and their coping strategies.

Qualitative researchers are illuminating the minds and the spirits of youth who are street-involved and highlighting the insightful nature of these youth that grasp the complexity of their life stories.

One view, momentarily uttered-with confidence and strength, pride and hope-is that street life is about respect and community, about freedom, fun and love. Yet almost in the same breath street life is conceived of as an endless series of painful experiences infused with fear and shame, insecurity and boredom, anger, hate, and regret. And still, there are incalculable spaces in between which make up the gamut of street life experiences. (Mayers, 2001, p. 60)

After conducting research with twelve street-involved individuals in Winnipeg in 2002 Higgitt et al. (2003) echoed Mayers conclusions that youth who are street-involved express multiple identities.

They actively fought for their independence and autonomy. They saw themselves as survivors and agents who were in control of their lives. For many, their travel experiences became integrated into their self-concept. They were people who had seen the world and lived life on their own terms...Beneath the hardened exteriors were hurt, scared kids who had been let down by everyone who was supposed to

look after them. They were keenly aware of the ways in which they were disadvantaged compared to their non-street-involved peers...They desperately wanted to have normal, adult lives, but were unsure how to achieve their goals.

(Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 44-45)

The ability for qualitative research to capture the complexity of voice, identity and life for youth who are street-involved youth is critical. Moving beyond labels and definitions allows research, programmes and policies to more accurately reflect the diversity of youth who are street-involved.

#### *Programmes and Services for Youth who are Street-Involved*

There are many barriers to accessing programs and services for youth who are street-involved. Two of these barriers will be addressed in this literature review. The first barrier is that many youth who are street-involved have long histories with social service systems. In numerous instances youth express that their voices and needs have not been heard and they have experienced abuse, isolation or power misuse (Kurtz, Lindsey, Jarvis, Williams & Nackerud, 2000; Morrissette, 1992). These experiences lead to a lack of trust and a higher degree of hostility towards traditional helping agencies and institutions (Currie, 2001; Kurtz et al., 2000). The experiences also become obstacles to youth accessing traditional health, treatment and social services. "While socially supported agencies are potential sources of assistance, they are often viewed negatively and perceived by street youth as sources of stress and danger" (Kidd, 2003, p.236).

Working with youth who are street-involved requires professionals to rebuild relationships and trust through person-centred approaches.

The second barrier is the type of service that is often offered to youth who are street-involved. Health and social services can be categorized by their programs entrance requirements and expectations. There are three general program categories: 1) high threshold, 2) medium threshold and 3) low threshold.

"Threshold" refers to the eligibility criteria for program entrance and the state of readiness to participate and meet program demands. For example, abstinence-based programs are high-threshold, standard methadone maintenance programs are considered medium-threshold, and needle-exchange and street-based outreach programs are low-threshold programs. (Kerr & Palepu, 2001, p. 436)

Traditional government social, health and treatment services are often high threshold. High threshold treatment programs have strict entrance and participation requirements, structured daily programs and external expectations for change. "For example, many did not have identification, such as a medical card, to access health services" (Higgitt et al., 2003, p.76). Due to the restrictions high threshold programs are often inaccessible or ineffective for youth who are street-involved.

The *Canadian 2001 Best Practices Treatment and Rehabilitation for Youth with Substance Use Problems* prepared by Janet Currie identifies restrictive treatment entry requirements as a barrier for youth who are street-involved or marginalized.

A traditional approach, that is highly structured and encourages adopting labels of 'addict' and resolutions to cease completely, which was developed for adults, may be inappropriate for youth and can heighten mistrust of the service system and increase resistance for change. (Baer et al., 2004, p. 320)

Due to these restrictions many youth who are street-involved do not access traditional substance treatment programmes even when they acknowledge that their substance use is creating harm in their lives. “Although the majority of homeless youth who use alcohol and drugs report problems due to their substance use, and nearly half have reported wanting to cut down or change their use, traditional treatment appears limited in availability and impact” (Baer et al., 2004, p. 319). High threshold service approaches have proven ineffective for youth who are street-involved because they do not take into consideration the lived experience of these youth.

Youth who are street-involved have lives that are “highly mobile” (Baer et al. 2004, p.320). The youth live day-to-day directed by their needs to acquire food and shelter to survive. To survive on the street youth develop support networks and coping strategies that are often not considered traditional. To access youth who are street-involved programme models need acknowledge both the unique and diverse characteristics of this population and the important coping strategies and strengths of the youth. Kurtz et al. (2000) indicate that “programmes designed for runaway and homeless youth need to be flexible and person-centered” (p. 400). Higgitt et al. (2003) support this program style stating: “The young people in our study liked services that were street-youth oriented and could be accessed on a ‘no questions asked’ basis” (p. 77). Kidd (2003) affirms that “core elements in any such work should include a recognition of the youth’s independence and incorporate a sense of control on their part” (p. 240). Low threshold approaches understand that youth who are street-involved are independent actors in their own lives. Baer (2004) states, “...low-threshold interventions may facilitate consideration of change and initial treatment involvement, and thus are

important for initial engagement of homeless youth” (p. 321). These types of programs create the flexibility necessary to meet youth where they are without imposed expectations for change.

A harm reduction philosophy is often intricately linked to low threshold programs for youth who are marginalized or street-involved. “Harm reduction is a term that defines policies, programmes, services and actions that work to reduce the health, social, and economic harms to: individuals, communities, and society that are associated with the use of drugs” (UKHRA, n.d.). Although most definitions of harm reduction refer to drug related harms, the philosophy and principles can be extended to all high-risk behaviours. The principles of harm reduction include, 1) acceptance of high-risk behaviours as a component of society, 2) inclusion of people involved in high risk behaviours in programme and policy development, 3) understanding of the multifaceted phenomenon of high risk behaviours, and 4) non-judgmental provision of services (Harm Reduction Coalition, n.d.). The principles of harm reduction fit with the needs of youth who are street-involved, and allow counsellors and programmes to be flexible in their approach to building helping relationships with youth. The philosophy is a client-centred approach that offers opportunity for youth to have voice in decisions that affect their lives. Harm reduction can also be considered a philosophy for change.

#### *The Process of Change*

The process of change has been a topic of analysis and study for centuries. The field of psychology has used everything from lobotomies to behaviour modification to hypnosis to encourage change in individuals. Science and spiritual practices have also added to the change discussion (Mahoney, 2003). Each new philosophy, procedure or

technique has heralded a promise of success in the field of change. Each new philosophy, procedure or technique has worked for some individuals and for others has been unsuccessful. The most salient conclusion rising from all of these trials is that the change process is unique and contextual to the personality, experience and environment of the individual. Michael Mahoney summarizes the history of the change discussion with three questions he describes as “fundamental to the profession of psychotherapy”

(p. 1).

Can humans change? Can people help one another change? Are some forms of helping better than others? The questions seem simple. Their answers are more complicated than one might expect, and good answers lead to further questions.

(Mahoney, 2003, p.1)

Beyond the complicated and individual nature of change there is the inherent challenge of change itself. Rarely do humans engage in activities that do not serve some purpose or benefit. Throwing homeostasis out of balance requires an individual to overcome the fear of change.

...We are wise to appreciate the self-protective conservatism of change processes.

We resist change even more passionately than we seek it. We are sometimes desperate in our quests for different ways of being, yet we gravitate toward old and familiar patterns. Change is a risky and sometimes lonely adventure.

(Mahoney, 2003, p.1)

Change is difficult and yet change does occur. A constructivist perspective on the process of change encourages change to be viewed as a lifelong process embedded in experience and relationship.

More effective forms of helping tend to be more sensitive to our personal needs, our developmental history, our styles of learning, our cycles of experiencing, the changing circumstances of our lives, and our relationships, communities, and cultures. Effective forms of helping are also more creative, more affirming, and more likely to respect our capabilities for development. (Mahoney, 2003, p. 2)

A constructivist perspective on change also identifies change as a nonlinear phenomenon filled with steps or leaps forward among returns to older established patterns (Mahoney, 2003). A constructivist framework dovetails with a harm reduction and a low threshold approach to working with youth who are street-involved. All acknowledge the individual and the context of street-life. All allow for flexible interventions as a helper in the change process. All allow youth the ownership of re-storying their lives.

Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross's (1992) transtheoretical stage of change model describes the process of change as cyclical rather than linear. Similar to constructivist theory, the trans-theoretical model acknowledges change as a dynamic and unique process. "The transtheoretical model postulates that both the cessation of high-risk behaviours and the acquisition of healthier alternatives involve progression through five stages of change" (Prochaska, 1994, p. 47). The five stages of change identified in this theory are:

- 1) Pre-contemplation: In the pre-contemplation stage a person is either unaware or under aware of the problems in his/her life. In this stage the person has no intention of changing.

2) Contemplation: In the second stage of contemplation a person becomes aware that there is a problem and considers making change. In contemplation the person does not make a commitment to change.

3) Preparation: During the preparation stage a person begins to combine change intention with behaviour. The person may begin to make small changes.

4) Action: The action stage occurs when the person modifies their behaviour or their environment towards overcoming their problems.

5) Maintenance: The final stage of maintenance involves consolidating, stabilizing and practicing the behavioural changes made during action phase.

(Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992)

Just as these stages are cyclical, people may also enter the cycle at different stages or even skip stages as they work through the change process. The work of Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross illustrates ways to identify which stage of change an individual may be in, as well as, the difference in techniques used to engage with individuals at each stage in the change process.

Some youth who are street-involved would be considered to be in the pre-contemplative or contemplative stages. Ultimately, Prochaska (1994) identified that “at any point in time, only a minority of populations at risk are prepared to take action on their problem behaviours. Typically, about 50% of populations at risk are in the pre-contemplation stage and do not intend to take action in the foreseeable future” (p. 47). The pre-contemplative or contemplative stage of change in which some marginalized youth are located is another reason that high threshold approaches are not suited for this population. In these first two stages of change relationship development is critical in

addition to a harm reduction philosophy. In these stages youth need low-threshold opportunities where they may be exposed to different ideas or activities without pressure to make changes. Prochaska (1994) identifies that “individual change processes like consciousness raising and self-reevaluation can be used to increase the perceived pros of healthy behaviour changes without altering the actual pros” (p. 50). Yoga could be one of these activities as long as it is embedded in a philosophy of non-judgement and youth choice.

Other youth who are street-involved may be in the preparation for action or action stages of change as they consider moving away from or off of the streets. The transition from contemplation into action may be a process and possibly even a cycle of leaving and returning before fully transitioning away from street life. “Among youth in this study, change was not a linear process, but one characterized by cycles of progress and regress” (Lindsey, Kurtz, Jarvis, Williams & Nackerud, 2000, p. 138). Yoga may also belong to the action stage of change as a part of the transitioning to a life away the streets.

Research with youth who are street-involved indicates that this process of change occurs at diverse rates for different individuals (Lindsey et al., 2000). For some youth change is a gradual process of reflecting on their experiences whereas for other youth change was brought about by a significant event in their lives.

For the majority of street youth in a study by Caputo et al. (1997), a critical life event, such as the death of a friend, an arrest, or being threatened by others, motivated them to seek help leaving the streets. Other motivators included disillusionment with street life, hitting rock bottom, fear and taking on responsibilities. (Caputo, 1997, as cited in, Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 79)

Research has shown that a combination of internal resilience and strength, coupled with external help and support are essential for youth in making the transition from the streets (Higgitt et al., 2003; Kurtz et al., 2000; Lindsey et al., 2000). Four categories of support have been identified by youth as helpful in their transition from the streets. These categories are: caring or compassion, setting boundaries, concrete assistance and professional intervention (Higgitt et al., 2003; Kurtz et al., 2000). The methods through which these categories are actualized can be varied. The salient thread throughout all of these forms of help is in understanding the youth and their process of change. "Although it is difficult to recognize when learning or other change is happening, it is important that social workers maintain a focus on the possibilities for learning in any situation" (Lindsey et al., 2003, p. 138). Supporting youth through their transition from the streets can be a long process that involves working with the youth on the street and beyond the street.

As counsellors and therapists have sought new ways to assist in the process of change, some have begun to explore Eastern practices such as mindfulness meditation and yoga. Initially, one would suspect that these practices focus the change process inward, but in actuality these practices encourage a cycle of change from inward to outward and back in again.

Exercises such as mirror time, centering, and meditation begin with self-focus, yet they often lead far beyond the self. Just as 'the way out' of a problematic pattern may be 'the way in' of self-relationship, so it is that the way in (towards self-understanding) often leads again toward an outward shift of interests. (Mahoney, 2003, p. 161)

*The History and Modern Context of Yoga*

Historically, in India, the physical practice of yoga was inextricably interwoven with a spiritual path and a way of living.

To the Hindu, enlightenment is union with the absolute. The popular term that describes this experience, yoga, is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, meaning union. Yoga also means the way or vehicle to achieve this union. (Mathew, 2001, p.9)

Highlighting this integration of physical yoga practice and spiritual life is the yoga *sutra*.

The text was written by Patanjali between the first and fourth centuries and describes yoga as a way of being and a way of knowing (Sprinkling, 1986, p. 5). Specifically, Patanjali describes eight limbs of yoga in his yoga *sutra*:

1) yama, abstentions or restraints – from harming others, from falsehood, from stealing, from indulgence, and from greed; 2) niyama, observances – purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-study and devotion to God; 3) asana, physical postures; 4) pranayama, breath control; 5) pratyahara, withdrawal of the mind from sense objects; 6) dharana, concentration; 7) dhyana, meditation and 8) samadi, union or a state of superconsciousness (Sprinkling, 1986, p. 6).

B.K.S. Iyengar (1976) explains that the first three limbs of yoga are outward quests.

“Yama and Niyama control the yogi’s passions and emotions and keep him in harmony with his fellow man. Asanas keep the body healthy and strong and in harmony with nature. Finally, the yogi becomes free of body consciousness”(Iyengar, 1976, p. 3).

Traditionally, the physical asana practice was combined with a lifestyle that included rising early in the morning, reading spiritual literature, maintaining a vegetarian diet and

abstaining from alcohol. "Use of alcohol and tobacco, as well as other destructive habits, are seen as obstacles, whereas fasting, repeating prayers and mantras and spending some time in silence advance the yogic way of life" (Holthaus, 2004, p. 12). Regulation of breathing and withdrawal of the senses, the fourth and fifth limbs, are described as the "inner quests" (Iyengar, 1976, p. 3). Purity of the lifestyle, a healthy body and an inward focus on the mind were seen as preparation for achieving higher levels of consciousness. The final three limbs Iyengar (1976) identifies as "the quest for the soul" (p. 3). The spiritual aspect of yoga encourages individuals to look inward to find their connection to a greater being.

By profound meditation, the knower, the knowledge and the known become one. The seer, the sight and the seen have no separate existence from each other. It is like a great musician becoming one with his instrument and the music that comes from it. Then, the yogi stands in his own nature and realises his self (Atman), the part of the Supreme Soul within himself. (Iyengar, 1976, p. 3)

As yoga journeyed to the West, the view and the practice of yoga changed.

Elizabeth De Michelis (2004) describes Western styles of yoga as Modern Yoga.

The expression 'Modern Yoga' is used as a technical term to refer to certain types of yoga that evolved mainly through interaction of Western individuals interested in Indian religions and a number of more or less Westernized Indians over the last 150 years. (De Michelis, 2004, p. 2)

One of the most significant changes that occurred, as yoga traveled from East to West, was the separation of physical practice or asanas from the mental, spiritual and lifestyle aspects of yoga. "Though Hatha yoga is popular in both India and the United States, there

are some basic lifestyle and cultural differences between the Western practitioners of yoga and the yogis of India” (Holthaus, 2004, p. 12). For most people in North America, yoga has become a secular entity, and asanas can be practiced without accompanying a lifestyle of abstentions or connection to samadi.

The shift in definition and philosophy of yoga practice as it moved from East to West and from a historical context to a modern world, opened yoga to a greater percentage of the population. In Western society each person involved in yoga has freedom to connect with the practice and the philosophy in their own way. For some, yoga is strictly a fitness tool, whereas for others yoga is a vehicle leading to relaxation and stress relief. “Modern conditions of urban living are notoriously frustrating, and this type of lifestyle is also highly conducive to sedentariness. Hence the need for fitness and de-stressing, both of which can be supplied by MPY [Modern Postural Yoga]” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 250). Although many people use yoga as a tool there are others for whom yoga is a spiritual experience and a place to heal. “Thus the MPY session becomes a ritual which affords various levels of access to the sacred, starting from the ‘safe’, mundane, tangible foundation of a body-based practice” (De Michelis, 2004, p. 251).

The majority of Western yoga classes, whether they are referred to as Hatha or Iyengar or Astanga, incorporate asana practice with breathing (pranayama). Many classes also involve a separate time for some form of seated meditation. De Michelis (2004) explains the structure of most modern yoga classes.

The one to one-and-a half hours of the standard MPY session is usually divided into three parts: (i) introductory quietening time: arrival and settling in (about ten minutes); (ii) MPY practice proper: instruction in postural and breathing practice

given by the instructor through example, correction and explanation; (iii) final relaxation: pupils lie down for *savasana* ('corpse pose') for guided relaxation, possibly with elements of visualization or meditation (ten to twenty minutes). This period includes a short 'coming back' time at the end of the relaxation session. (De Michelis, 2004, p. 251)

Although the practice of yoga in North America is significantly more secular than its India counterpart, yoga is still believed, by many teachers and practitioners, to provide benefits for the body, mind and spirit. Specifically, B.K.S. Iyengar (2001) discusses the holistic effects of yoga practice:

The primary aim of yoga is to restore the mind to simplicity and peace, and free it from confusion and distress. This sense of calm comes from the practice of yogic asanas and pranayama. Unlike other forms of exercise which strain muscles and bones, yoga gently rejuvenates the body. By restoring the body, yoga frees the mind from the negative feelings caused by the fast pace of modern life. The practice of yoga fills up the reservoirs of hope and optimism within you. (p. 9)

Research into the use of yoga and the potential benefits of the practice for a variety of populations is limited. Certain studies identify the physical and physiological benefits of yoga. "Regular practice of asanas and pranayama can help such diverse ailments as arthritis, arteriosclerosis, chronic fatigue, asthma, varicose veins and heart conditions" (Lindell, 1983, as cited in, Holthaus, 2004, p. 15).

Yoga research echoes results of studies on mindfulness meditation. Reported physiological changes, as cited by Perez-De-Albeniz and Holmes (2000), include decreased heart rate, muscle relaxation, decreased respiratory frequency, increased

cerebral flow, changes in metabolic function and a shift in hemisphere dominance towards increased right brain activity.

In summary, it seems that meditation has a bimodal biological impact along time. Initially there is a physiological relaxation response in the short term...More enduring hormonal and metabolic changes can be later detected in experienced meditations, some 12 to 18 months after starting meditation practice. (Perez-De-Albeniz & Holmes, 2000, p. 51)

These physiological benefits have prompted some doctors to recommend meditation to patients, with a variety of conditions, as an adjunctive to other forms of treatment.

Increasingly both yoga and mindfulness meditation are being used in Western therapeutic settings to achieve a variety of therapeutic goals. These therapeutic benefits have been the focus of some research studies. Specifically, one study indicated that yoga may help to decrease drug cravings. "Stukin (2002) notes that there is some evidence that suggests that, 'yoga and meditation may actually dampen dopamine activity in the basal ganglia' (p.111) and that 'by inhibiting that dopamine impulse, yoga helps inhibit cravings and negative emotional states that trigger drug use' (p.111)" (Holthaus, 2004, p. 15). Another study indicated that yoga may be helpful in relieving symptoms associated with depression and anxiety. "Nespor (2000) found that 'yoga can supplement various psychotherapies through its somatopsychic approach. For example, depression or anxiety may be relieved by sufficient intensive physical activity that occurs' (p. 25) during yoga" (Holthaus, 2004, p. 32).

Two recent meta-analyses of mindfulness inquiry have examined the reported psychological benefits. Baer (2003) outlined past research studies which suggested that

the practice of mindfulness may lead to changes in cognitive patterns including: 1) helping patients with depression interfere with escalation of negative thoughts, 2) assisting people with borderline personality to tolerate negative emotional states, 3) encouraging people with addiction to cope with cravings and 4) promoting people with binge eating behaviours to accept aversive conditions that they may be avoiding. Overall, these studies demonstrate the possibility that mindfulness practice can assist clients with mental health issues to manage their thoughts from a more positive perspective. Bishop (2002) notes there have been a variety of both controlled and uncontrolled studies on mindfulness. He reports that one controlled study showed “65% and 35% reductions in total mood disturbance and stress symptoms, respectively” (p.72). Uncontrolled studies discussed by Bishop cite significant decreases in severity of symptoms related to generalized anxiety and panic disorder and reductions on self-reported measures of emotional stress for people with chronic pain.

Although few studies have focused on aspects of yoga and meditation limitations in this scientific research have been identified. Both Baer (2003) and Bishop (2002) discuss the methodological problems related to mindfulness research. Baer indicates a need for randomized clinical trials, and Bishop argues that a requirement exists to formulate defining criteria for mindfulness. Similarly, Mathew (2001) indicates that one problem with research on Western practices of yoga is the variety of purposes for which yoga is used. Finally, Holthaus (2004) states:

Another problem is that many of the studies that have been done were conducted on people who used yoga with, or without, instituting other adjunct changes in

lifestyle and worldview. This makes it difficult to control variables associated with the outcomes of practicing yoga. (p. 15)

### *The Use of Yoga with Marginalized Youth*

There has been some research into the use of yoga with children and youth. “Overall, the benefits from yoga that were discovered in these studies fall into three general categories: reduced stress and anxiety, increased body satisfaction and fitness, and increased mental capacity” (Holthaus, 2004, p. 16). More specifically, an extensive literature review did not uncover any research related to yoga and street-involved youth. Further only one study was found that examined the use of yoga with any high risk adolescent population. This study examined the impact of yoga on adolescent sex offenders in a residential treatment programme. In this study the classes in the programme combined meditation with yoga practice. The youth interviewed for this study identified benefits of participation that included 1) increased self-awareness and ability to relax 2) reduced anxiety and 3) a sense of spiritual development (Dezerotes, 1999). “All but one of the boys felt that the training had assisted them in their own spiritual development. For example, one boy said, ‘I get in touch more with my soul inside. It feels like I am light as a feather’” (Dezerotes, 1999, p. 106).

Although research specifically focused on yoga with high risk youth is scant, associated research shows that meditation can play a role in helping at-risk youth make changes in their lives. For example, James Garbarino (1999) uses mindfulness meditation practice in his work with adolescent male prisoners as he strives to understand the resiliency of the young men. “Resiliency is more than outside success, more than graduating from high school, staying out of jail, holding a job. It also means developing a

positive sense of self, a capacity for intimacy, and a feeling that life is meaningful” (p. 163). Garbarino uses meditation with youth prisoners to provide opportunities to develop a sense of meaning, connection and mindful presence. “Meditation is one of the few strategies for converting the danger of enforced solitude and immobilization into an opportunity for personal growth and development” (p. 221). Garbarino teaches youth Vipassana meditation. This meditation approach invites participants to become present and focused on the moment. Garbarino (1999) documented the experiences of these youth. One of the youth involved in meditation practice stated:

Now that I have been doing it for four months, I don't feel right if for some reason I miss my morning and evening meditation time. It's like I am hungry for it if I miss it, so I try not to miss it. In my meditation I am learning about peace for the first time in my life. I feel different in myself and with the other residents. I'm calmer and when things get tense on my unit, I try to project my own inner peace all around me. (Garbarino, 1999, p. 223)

David Forbes (2004) also used meditation with young males. In his research Forbes worked with inner city male football players from diverse cultural backgrounds. He used meditation to assist these young men to find the ‘zone’ in both football and in their lives.

They were motivated to practice meditation as a way to increase chances of playing football in the zone. They knew that the zone is a higher state of consciousness in which the athlete is so attuned to the moment there is no thought, no effort, no self-consciousness; the mind is at one with the body and moves toward a higher goal. More so, some also wanted to play life in the *zone*.

They learned to be mindful of thoughts and feelings and experience higher states of awareness during ordinary activities. (Forbes, 2004, p. 1-2)

In his research Forbes worked with the young football team for over a year. He collected both quantitative and qualitative data and reported a number of benefits of using meditation with this population of youth. Beyond increased performance on the football field, benefits included decreased stress and reactivity in social relationships as well as increased concentration (Forbes, 2004).

Dezerotes (1999), Garbarino (1999) and Forbes (2004), through their research and work with different youth populations, have shown that mindful practices such as meditation and yoga can be beneficial for marginalized youth in leading to internal changes in thoughts and feelings which in turn lead to external changes in attitudes and behaviours.

Even with the limited number of studies related to the use of yoga with high-risk youth many programmes working with these youth are incorporating yoga. In these programmes the yoga classes are designed to expose youth to new coping or harm reducing tools. The classes are often adjusted to meet specific youth needs. Programmes are usually attached to an outreach or drop-in centre. The yoga programme researched in this thesis is a programme in a large American city, specifically designed for youth who are street-involved between the ages of eleven and twenty. The classes are held at a local resource centre for youth. The goal of every class is to:

...meet the youth where they live, close to the streets, in near constant survival mode, of the mind that yoga is a luxury. We emphasize the aspects of yoga that can build immunity, cleanse toxins from the system, help ease depression and

anxiety, increase mental and physical flexibility, all without compromising the strategies they have adopted to survive life on the streets. (Streetyoga, n.d.)

The yoga programme offers drop-in classes with no requirements for ongoing attendance or provision of equipment. The yoga programme is an example of a low threshold programme that accepts the youth and their realities.

Research shows that yoga and meditation can be tools for some youth to cope with anxiety and to develop conflict resolution skills. Additionally, studies demonstrate that some youth find a connection to spirituality through these practices. Ultimately, each study illustrates that for some youth, yoga can be a vehicle for a shift or a change in their life story. Yoga programmes for youth who are street-involved are operating in cities such as Vancouver, New York and Seattle. Additionally, programmes such as Yoga for Youth and Yoga Horizons offer yoga classes to youth in prison settings in the United States. The development of these programmes provides evidence that many helping professionals share hunches about yoga and meditation's ability to impact the lives of some youth who are street-involved. Currently the research to support these professional hunches is limited and a need exists to bring these hunches together through a research process. This research project aims to begin filling this research gap through asking youth who are street-involved to discuss the role yoga plays in their lives.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### *Post-modern and Constructivist Epistemology*

The necessity of knitting a fit among epistemology, methodology and approach to qualitative research are tantamount to the validity and reliability of the research. “First the aim of methodological coherence is to ensure congruence between the research question and the components of the method” (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olsen & Spiers, 2002, p. 12). This project is founded in post-modern and constructivist epistemologies and will use a narrative approach to the research. In the following section the epistemology and methodology will be explained in addition to how each fit with the research topic.

A post-modern approach to research focuses on multiple truths and multiple realities both within a single life and among the larger society. “Schneider (1998) defines post-modernism as the ‘breakdown of our pre-modern (e.g. religious) and modern (e.g. scientific) institutions, our relinquishment of absolute truths, and our recognition of socially constructed realities’” (D’Andrea, 2000, p. 2). I believe that understanding multiple perspectives is critical for research with youth who are street-involved. The reality and the truths spoken in the voices of these youth may be significantly different from the reality and truths of the dominant, hegemonic society. Michael Unger (2002) argues that youth who are marginalized actually undertake and participate in health seeking behaviours, although the practices look extremely different from traditional approaches to health. Unger further states that health, itself, is a social construct; a truth created by the dominant society that does not include alternative realities.

The distinction, then, between healthy functioning and unhealthy functioning does not depend on how one behaves. It depends far more on the power brokers in society at a particular point in time who try to secure their position by convincing others that how they see the world is the right way. (Unger, 2002, p. 60)

Using a post-modern lens, in research with youth who are street-involved, creates the opportunity to hear and represent the truths of these youth without amalgamating their reality into an absolute societal reality. The story of the youth will become part of the text of this research. Their truths about their experiences of yoga, within the story of their lives, will be heard as one of the multiple realities present in our post-modern society.

This research is also conducted using a constructivist lens. Construct, the root word of constructivist, is defined as: “to make or form by combining or arranging parts or elements” (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2003, p. 268). Individuals can form stories of their lives through combining and arranging experiences and relationships. Mahoney (2003) describes constructivism as “a positive and promising way of conceptualizing human experience as a complex and lifelong experiment” (p. 3). Constructivism, conceptualized in this fashion, conjures images of constructing and reconstructing stories, identities and relationships through interactions with self, others, community and the environment. “It is an approach that bridges and balances many calcified contrasts, particularly between mind and body, head and heart, self and society, and science and spirituality” (Mahoney, 2003, p. 3).

A constructivist lens dovetails with research on yoga because many Eastern philosophies are located in constructivism.

The Tao (literally, the 'path' or 'way') outlines an ancient wisdom tradition that recognizes the fluidity of life and its essential embrace of seemingly opposite elements (the 'yin' and 'yang'). Buddhism also acknowledges the changing (impermanent) nature of our lives; particularly our inner lives. (Mahoney, 2003, p. 3)

Yoga and meditation honour the fluidity of thoughts and thought patterns. During practice, thoughts are encouraged to flow through the mind and body, detached from ownership. Practitioners are invited to let thoughts be impermanent and begin to see the changing nature of both thoughts and self. "One begins to become less attached to the thoughts and no longer identify with them; to realize that thoughts about self are not really one's self, and that even the self is not a permanent entity but is itself a concept that keeps changing" (Forbes, 2004, p. 87).

Youth who are street-involved are often defined by their risk factors, their behaviours patterns and recently, their resiliency factors. These youth are categorized, blamed and labelled, quantified and described. "Nevertheless, the literature on street kids has defined, delineated and dissected the various aspects of becoming a street kid" (Mayers, 21, p. 13). Using post-modern and constructivist lenses impels the researcher to break down the walls of rigid categories, allowing for youth to be more than one identity and for those identities to be re-constructed through time and experience. These lenses allow room for research that is open to the storying and re-storying of individual lives including those of the participants, researchers and audience. Finally, these lenses allow a qualitative narrative methodology to be used in research with youth who are street-involved.

### *Narrative Inquiry*

This research uses qualitative methodology. I chose qualitative methodology because I sought to understand the experience of yoga as it is embedded in the stories of youth who are street-involved. Qualitative approaches, by nature, allow for individual experiences and meanings to be discovered and explored.

Qualitative methodologies are the most appropriate approach for studying perceptions, subjective experiences, and the meaning of those experiences (Gilgun, 1992) as they allow researchers to capture a richness and depth of information that is lacking in quantitative approaches. (Kurtz et al., 2000, p. 384)

Specifically this research utilizes narrative inquiry, one form of qualitative methodologies. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (p. 20). I chose narrative inquiry because the methodology encourages the experiences of the participants to be moved into the forefront while also acknowledging the changing and interpretative nature of their stories. “As inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.20). Narrative inquiry acknowledges that stories told in research are part of a greater story occurring before and after the research. In this research the experience with yoga has entered the lives of the youth participants in the midst of their experiences living on the street. The interviews I conducted with youth provide a snapshot story of their experience with both yoga and street-life. As participants left the interviews their stories continued and the

meaning of yoga within their lives may have changed. In narrative inquiry it is the process of research, only, that is finite within a context of place and time.

Narrative inquiry provides permission for individuals, including research participants, to be multi-layered.

We need not to see our participants as univocal, not tied to one theoretical structure or mode of behaviour that would leave them with the appearance of being uni-dimensional. We, and our participants, live and tell many stories. We are all characters with multiple plotlines. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147)

This style of inquiry is particularly important for capturing the complex lives of youth who are street-involved. As I identified in the literature review youth living street-involved are often categorized and labelled for the purposes of program structures, financial support and research. Labelling these youth decreases the understanding of their complex lives. Using narrative inquiry the individual story is moved to the forefront. By moving the individual story into the light, strengths and coping strategies can be acknowledged in the same story as the struggles and challenges. The narrative process also acknowledges that stories and the meaning within stories is an evolving construction. “An analysis of narratives cannot reveal what someone ‘really’ thinks or feels because any truth is simply a construction, and narratives are skillfully woven to bring into being versions of the self that serve specific purposes” (Redwood, 1999, p. 674). Youth in this research explored different aspects of themselves and different identities that they live through their experiences on the street and in the yoga studio.

I also chose narrative inquiry for this research because it acknowledged the story of the researcher and the impact of the researcher's story on both the research and the participants. The methodology recognized the intermingling and effect of the participant's story on the researcher. "It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). I acknowledge that the story of this research is multi-layered and constructed by interactions between myself and participants. Each of these interactions had impact on the individual stories as well as the collective story of the experience of yoga in the lives of youth who are street-involved. I knew that my own story of yoga would be impacted by the research process. To monitor this impact I kept a field journal that included my experiences of yoga before this research project began, in addition to my experiences with yoga throughout the research.

Using a narrative approach in this research I seek to understand how the experience of yoga has fit into each youth's story line including their cultural and social context. Additionally, I explore how each participant may re-story aspects of his/her social or personal self after the experience of yoga. The stories told in this text are not permanent. The stories have already changed in my retelling of them through the analysis process. I have drawn meaning from the stories of the youth. This meaning may continue to change as these stories are read.

Meaning is ambiguous because it arises out of a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst, and reader...Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and text that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly. (Riessman, 2002, p. 228)

The stories and the meaning drawn from the narratives may shift through time beyond the research and therefore the representation is impermanent.

### *Validity*

Validity in qualitative research, and specifically in narrative inquiry, requires its own approach because data in narrative inquiry is understood to be shifting across context and time.

In a word, traditional notions of reliability simply do not apply to narrative studies, and validity must be radically reconceptualized (see Mishler, 1990).

Validation, the process through which we make claims for the trustworthiness of our interpretations, is the critical issue. ‘Trustworthiness’ not ‘truth’ is a key semantic difference. The latter assumes an objective reality, whereas the former moves the process into the social world. (Reissman, 2002, p. 228)

Validity, therefore, must be re-conceptualized and narrative researchers must try to avoid the articulation of the absolute. “As inquirers, we tend to define our phenomenon as if life stood still and did not get in our way” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 125). Morse et al. (2002) state that although validity must be considered differently in qualitative research it remains critical to address the concept. “Without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility” (p. 2). Morse et al. (2002) further identify the need to consider validity throughout the research process instead of reflecting on validity after the research is complete. They consider constructive rather than evaluative procedures for ensuring validity in qualitative research. “These strategies, when used appropriately, force the researcher to correct both the direction of the analysis and the development of

the study as necessary, thus ensuring reliability and validity of the completed project” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 9). Morse et al. (2002) discuss a variety of strategies to think about in constructing validity throughout the research process. Two of these strategies, discussed below, will be utilized in this research project.

Morse et al. (2002) indicate that due to the non-linear nature of qualitative research, the researcher is impelled to move back and forth between epistemology, methodology, method, implementation and analysis to ensure congruence throughout the research process. The need to weave a thread among all of these aspects is important in ensuring validity in research. In this current research process I was cognizant that the constructive epistemology and narrative methodology was woven through the research design, interview question, data analysis and final written text. During this research process I documented all of my decisions regarding changes in research direction, design and analysis. In this way methodological coherence was maintained (Morse et al., 2002, p. 12).

Morse et al. (2002) also state that appropriate sampling is necessary for increasing validity. An appropriate sample is defined as “consisting of participants who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 12). In this research, participants were recruited from an outreach centre for youth who are street-involved where yoga classes occurred. To engage in this study participants were required to have completed at least three yoga classes in the last year and to be living on or near the streets. These youth, therefore, had both experience and stories of living on the street and participating in yoga. Participants found out about the research from outreach workers at the centre and word of mouth from other youth. The nine youth who

participated in the interview represented a diverse sample. There were two women and seven men involved in the interviews. Two of the participants self-identified as homosexual. Eight of the participants were Caucasian and one was African American. All of the participants had current or recent street-involvement. The length of time youth had been street-involved was not a criteria for involvement in this research.

### *Research Method*

This study involved single interviews with nine youth who were street-involved and participating in yoga. Additionally, a yoga instructor and an outreach worker were interviewed to provide information on the background and philosophy of the programmes with which the youth were involved. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the question: How does yoga fit within the stories of youth who are street-involved? The objectives for the research were as follows:

1. To document the yoga stories of some youth who are street-involved.
2. To explore impact and connections between yoga and social, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health.
3. To explore the connection between yoga participation and identity in the stories of some youth who are street-involved.

### *Participant Recruitment*

Permission from the youth centre and yoga programme was required for this research. A letter seeking this permission is included in Appendix D. The youth were informed about the research by a designated outreach worker. This worker signed a recruiter confidentiality waiver (see Appendix C). The relationship between the

designated worker and potential youth participants was important in the research process. The distant location of the research and the specific youth population involved in the research necessitated a conduit person to assist in gaining access to this population. "In working with street-involved individuals, development of relationship is foundational to breaking down barriers" (Kelly, 2004, p. 37). Youth who are street-involved can be wary of trusting new people entering their lives, therefore the established relationship with the designated worker assisted in the recruitment process.

To assure that the relationship between the designated worker and the participants did not unduly influence the youth's decision to participate in the research the participants were informed by both the designated worker and myself that their participation was voluntary. Further, this voluntary participation was outlined in the participant consent letter that was explained and signed at the beginning of each interview. Finally, the participants were made aware that the designated worker would not have any access to the data collected during the research process.

### *Informed Consent*

Informed consent forms were signed by each participant (Appendix B). Kvale (1996) discusses the importance of informed consent during the interview process. "Through briefing and debriefing, the subjects should be informed about the purpose and procedure of the interview. When it comes to later use of the interview it may be preferable to have a written agreement" (Kvale, 1996, p. 153). During both a briefing and a debriefing, participants were informed about the structure of the interview and the research process. Prior to the interview I reviewed the consent form with the participant after he/she had an opportunity to read the document. Further, each participant was given

permission during the consent process to withdraw their consent to participate at any point during or after the interview. During the debriefing, the steps that would be taken after the interview, including the transcription and publication processes, were discussed with the participants.

### *Confidentiality*

While the utmost care was taken during the research process to maintain the confidentiality of the participants some risk remains that people close to the participants may be able to recognize their identity. The risks and limits of confidentiality fall under two categories: 1) limits due to context and 2) limits due to selection. Participants were informed of these risks and the following procedures were put in place to maintain their confidentiality.

#### *Limits Due to Context.*

The small number of youth participating in yoga classes at the youth centre limited the ability to maintain the confidentiality of youth who chose to participate in the interviews. Many of the youth agreed to be interviewed while they were surrounded by other youth. To assist in maintaining the confidentiality of the specific stories told during the interviews the names of the participants were changed during the data transcription and identifying information, including locations and names, were changed in the text. Additionally, the city and site of the yoga program are not specifically identified in the text.

### *Limits Due to Selection.*

The outreach worker at the youth centre, assisting with the recruitment process, knew which youth were participating in the research project. Additionally, he had some knowledge of the lives of these youth. This knowledge places a limit on the confidentiality of the participants. This limit was explained to the participants prior to their interviews and on the confidentiality form they signed. During that same meeting participants were informed about ways that confidentiality was to be preserved including: 1) requiring the worker involved with recruiting to sign a confidentiality form, 2) changing the names of the participants during data transcription and 3) taking care not to provide revealing personal information in the final transcript.

The transcripts and recordings of each interview will be secured in a locked environment for seven years. Each participant involved in the research will receive a copy of their own transcript and the final thesis document.

### *Compensation for Participation*

Youth participants received compensation for their time and their stories from both myself and the yoga programme. I provided the participants with a gift of food from Northern Canada to share my culture and to thank them for the gift of their story. This food gift would have been given to each youth even if he/she had withdrawn from the research. The yoga programme provided the youth with a five dollar gift card for their participation in the interviews. This is a policy of the organization to provide youth with payment for their time and involvement in any projects. The money was provided to each participant after his/her interview.

### *Data Collection*

The data for this research was gathered through semi-structured interviews with nine youth, a yoga instructor and an outreach worker. The interviews occurred over the course of three days. Sessions ranged from thirty minutes to ninety minutes. The interviews were taped using a digital recorder.

Using a semi-structured interview format allowed both the researcher and the participant to have a conversation that explored the unique aspects of each yoga experience in addition to the themes that linked the experiences. Kvale (1996) outlines the boundaries of the semi-structured interview.

The research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest. It is a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through dialogue. The interaction is neither as anonymous or neutral as when a subject responds to a survey questionnaire, nor as personal and emotional as a therapeutic interview. (Kvale, 1996, p. 125)

Although I developed an initial interview guide with questions and themes, throughout each interview and over the course of the nine youth interviews, as themes emerged I asked different questions to allow each youth to express his/her experiences with yoga. Kvale (1996) notes that opening questions “may ask about a concrete situation” and “the different dimensions introduced in the answer can then be pursued” (p.132). Further, Kvale calls this style of interview an open interview, “where specific themes are in focus but without a predetermined sequence and formulation of questions” (p. 127).

#### *Interviews with Outreach Worker and Yoga Instructor.*

In the initial research proposal I anticipated having conversations with the yoga instructor and an outreach worker prior to meeting with the youth. In conducting the research the order of the interviews switched. I had the opportunity to interview all of the youth first and then followed up with the yoga instructor and the outreach worker. This change in interview order was due to logistics and availability of the youth. Although the order of the interviews switched, the focus of the conversations did not vary from the original proposal. These discussions provided context to the classes and the centre in which the participants' yoga stories occurred. These discussions did not focus on the specific youth involved in the research. The conversation with the yoga instructor articulated the styles of yoga used and explored unique adaptations of using yoga with this population of youth. The interview with the outreach worker focused on the services provided by the centre for youth who are street-involved and a broad picture of the general environment for street-involved youth in the city where the research was located.

#### *Youth Interviews.*

The research proposal indicated that two or three semi-structured interviews would be conducted with between five and ten youth participants. Each interview was intended to be approximately one hour in duration. The purpose of the first interview was to gather each participant's story of his/her experience with yoga. The second interview was meant to continue the conversation about the participant's experience of yoga focusing on areas he/she identified in the first interview. There was to be approximately one week between the first and second interviews. During that week the first interviews would be transcribed and mind maps developed. These mind maps would be taken to the second interview and would form the basis of the questions for that interview. A third

interview would have been scheduled if any further clarification was needed from participants after transcription of the second interview.

In the actual data collection only one semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the nine youth. The interviews explored the ways through which each youth became involved in yoga and their experiences with yoga. The interviews also exposed some of the reasons youth participated in yoga and how yoga fit into the broader context of their lives. Time constraints, site location and the vast amount of data collected during the first interviews were the reasons that subsequent interviews were not conducted.

(Interview questions for each interview are located in Appendix A)

### *Data Analysis*

All of the interviews were digitally tape recorded. After all of the interviews were conducted the data was transcribed. Kvale (1996) indicates transcription is an interpretive process. "Transcripts are not copies or representations of some original reality, they are interpretive constructions that are useful tools for given purposes" (p. 165). The interpretive nature of transcription means that the researcher can choose the purpose and ways in which to transcribe the data. In this research my purpose was to transcribe the tapes verbatim. Maclean , Meyer, & Estable (2004) indicates that there are many choices a researcher makes during translation which impact the reliability of the text: "How the content is both heard and perceived by the transcriptionist and the form and accuracy of its transcription play a key role in determining what data are analysed and with what degree of dependability" (p. 113). Although I recognize that my transcription is an interpretation of the interviews I attempted to increase the reliability of the text by putting the following measures in place: 1)Where there were passages that I could not decipher

due to tone and speech speed I left a question mark, 2) over time I returned to the tapes to re-listen to these unknown passages, 3) those passages that I could not decipher have been left as question marks in the transcribed texts, and 4) to denote pauses in speech I inserted ellipsis.

As I transcribed the interviews I struggled. I think that I lost a dimension of each youth. For many of the youth the way that they spoke was as powerful as the words that they shared. Kvale (1996) notes that although tape recordings capture the tone and words of the interview the medium does not allow visual aspects of the interview including body posture or non-verbal expressions to be captured. For those participant's whose body language and gestures were significant I made notations of these in my field journal after the interview. In introducing each participant in the research text I include my interpretations of their gestures and body language, in addition to the words that they used to describe their experiences. I have tried to insert words to describe their tone of voice or descriptions of their gestures. MacLean et al. (2002) indicate that "verbatim transcription, augmented by the researcher's notation of nonverbal behaviour, has been cited as critical to the reliability and to the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research" (p. 114). Even with the inclusion of non-verbal interpretations ultimately the text feels decontextualized and somewhat dry compared to the real young people who shared their stories.

The analysis process for the transcribed data occurred in phases. The goal of this analysis was to synthesize the vast amount of raw data without losing the voices of the youth. Through transcription I had become intimately acquainted with the words and the voices of the participants. To shift into the analysis process I read each interview text

individually a number of times using my research question as a lens. As I read each text I highlighted and made notes where words, thoughts or themes related to the research question and objectives emerged. After all of the texts had been read I used recipe cards to categorize the information. Kvale (1996) states that meaning categorization can assist in structuring and reducing a large text. Further he states: "The categories can be developed in advance or they can arise ad hoc during the analysis; they can be taken from theory or the vernacular, as well as from the interviewees' own idioms" (p.192).

Each recipe card was given a theme title. These titles included physical, social, change, and calm. These themes emerged from words used and stories told by the participants related to the research question. Under each theme heading I listed all of the places each participant made reference to this theme. Once these cards had been compiled I searched for places where themes overlapped or where two themes could be compressed under a larger title. For example, programme considerations became an umbrella theme that arose from smaller themes related to time, space and incentives. The umbrella themes of Change, Calm and Programme Considerations became chapter titles. Within each of these chapters sub-themes are addressed that bring together the words of the youth, my interpretations and connections to other literature.

During the process of analysis and meaning categorization I recognized that the individual voices and stories were being lost in the synthesis. I wanted to honour each of the youth and their individual story. As such I chose to share a short personal narrative about each youth. These personal narratives attempt to use each participant's own words to describe their experiences. These narratives form Chapter Four: Youth Stories.

### *Ethics*

Embarking on a research project with youth who are street-involved presented a variety of ethical issues that needed to be considered and addressed. These issues included representation of voice, participant safety and age of consent.

I believe that awareness of the issues surrounding representation is critical to conducting ethical research with youth who are street-involved. Traditionally research with this population served to perpetuate misrepresentation and oppression. "Poor adults and children have been codified as Others, as the broader culture is being prepared for a permanent caste of children and adults beyond redemption" (Fine, 1994, p.75). Prior research illustrated the problems and highlighted the barriers for youth who are street-involved. This research took a step towards changing the representation of youth who are street-involved by inquiring about their strengths and positive coping strategies. Additionally, this research attempted to ensure that the youth voices were represented throughout the research process.

The voices and the stories of youth who are street-involved are central. The interviews with each youth were semi-structured to encourage each unique voice and story to be expressed. In the research text the youth stories are fore-fronted through including their own words and descriptions of their experiences.

A second ethical consideration for this research was the physical and emotional safety of the youth participants. Yoga actively engages both mind and body in ways to which many people are unaccustomed. I was aware that participating in yoga could have required some youth who were street-involved to be present with the physical pain of substance withdrawal, or the emotional pain of abuse. In this research the participants

were involved in an existing yoga programme connected to a youth drop-in programme. These programmes were responsible for the safety of the participants during the yoga classes. Throughout my interview process I was aware that revisiting feeling and memories about yoga classes could have provoked some emotional reactions to the questions. To protect the emotional safety of participants involved in the study the participants were informed that they were in control of the interview and could choose not to answer certain questions or end the interview at any time. If a situation occurred where the participant needed to end the interview I would have encouraged the participant to connect with their outreach worker or counsellor. This situation did not arise during any of the interviews.

The final ethical consideration surrounded age of consent for study participation. Youth under the age of consent could participate in this research without the permission of a legal guardian. Such a situation had been addressed in previous research with similar populations in which the parents are unavailable and the minors are to a large extent on their own. For example, Majorie Mayers (2001) in her research with youth who are street-involved argues for their ability to make decisions about consent.

Oh yes, I know, it's about protecting youth from abuses. Yes. That is certainly important and something that university and judicial institutions need to be concerned with. But we are talking about street kids here – kids who sleep outside and fend for themselves. Surely we think that they can decide whether or not they want to talk for themselves. (Mayers, 2001, p. 24)

Previous research identifies that in such circumstances, provided the research is ethical and could not be conducted otherwise, the research is justified in waiving parental

permission (Grisso, 1992, as cited in, Kidd, 2003, p. 242). Youth who identify themselves as street-involved additionally regard themselves as self-reliant. They often make their own life decisions without the input or consent of a legal guardian; therefore, they were able to make an informed choice to participate in this research study. This research attempted to balance protection of the youth through safeguards such as confidentiality and available counsellors with the understanding that youth living street-involved have the ability to make choices about their involvement with their research project.

## Chapter 4

### Youth Stories

I arrived in the city at about one o'clock on a Sunday afternoon uncertain of whether I would find any youth willing to discuss their experiences of street-involvement and yoga with someone new to their lives. By three that same afternoon I was sitting on a yoga matt surrounded by seven other yogis who had arrived off the streets for their Sunday yoga class. By nine that night I was walking back to my hotel with the voices of six youth echoing in my mind. Then next day three more youth sought me out to share their yoga stories. As I drove away from the city, two days after arriving, I felt honoured by these youth who had chosen to discuss their experiences with yoga and to explore where the practice fit within their lives.

I am still uncertain as to the reasons that so many youth easily told me their stories when developing trust can be difficult for youth who are street-involved. I have considered that my participation in the yoga class may have broken down initial trust barriers. I chose to participate in the yoga class because I believe through shared experiences trusting relationships can be built. "Sometimes an adult who is actively involved in the life experiences of a youth can engage in a more genuine and helpful communications than can a therapist tethered to an office desk" (Bendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1992, p.82). My experience as a recreation therapist has demonstrated that, during or after participating in recreation experiences with youth, they are more likely to share their stories with me. I think that shared experience allows youth to see me as human and more than a professional. In this research the shared experience of yoga may have encouraged youth to tell their stories to me. Creating an opportunity for youth to

have their stories heard without judgement may have been another reason that they easily approached the interviews. Finally, the money they received for participation may also have motivated their engagement in the interview process.

The stories these nine youth brought to the yoga programme were complex. In the interviews they provided me with a small snapshot of their lives, in addition to their beliefs about and experiences with yoga. They shared pieces of their history and provided some insight into their current situation on the streets. Some of the youth chose to share more of their lives beyond yoga whereas others focused on the impact of yoga. The nature of the questions and the structure of the interviews created this diversity. The stories that are shared here were told to me in one interview. This was one moment in an ever changing story for these youth.

Throughout the nine interviews a variety of themes were woven but within each individual interview were specific stories that seemed salient to each youth. The differences in stories are understood within a post-modern context that acknowledges the multiple truths and realities within an individual and a group. I believe the stories told by these youths were their truths in those moments. I also believe that the stories they chose to share were influenced by my presence and the role I played in their lives. To simply share the themes without introducing each youth would leave a hole in the exploration of this topic. As such I have chosen to provide both, beginning with the individuals. The names of the participants were changed by the researcher to maintain their confidentiality.

*John*

John entered the interview room with a fudgesicle dripping in his hand and his blond hair sneaking out from under a blue ball cap. He shared larger than life adventure stories from his youth and provided some explanation regarding his connection to the streets.

John began his life in the Southern States but moved around the country with his father's military career. He spoke little about his younger years except to say that "*my childhood was fucked up*". John made a connection between his current street identity and a childhood filled with constant moving.

*...like every six months at a time and so I really was unable to establish a basis anywhere. But, through time I've learned to just always move. I've always learned to just move from place to place. Where my Dad is now stationary so I always can go now place to place to place to place. I can always go back to him and go hey "what's up" and go back and do my thing. 'Cause it's, it's now in me that I want to move every six months somewhere else.*

John came to the city approximately one year before our conversation to "*escape*". At the time of the interview he was living in one of the city's youth shelters, which he acknowledged seemed to perpetuate his experience of constant motion. "*Because right now my living situation I really can't be relaxful...I have to always be moving in one way or another.*" In addition to his identity being intertwined with motion, he spoke with excitement about taking risks throughout his life. He told stories of driving fast cars, sneaking onto military airplanes and having bulls for pets.

*... well it wasn't really so much rodeo it was just basically messing around with bigger things that I know can kill me. And then I went through my ah crazy driving phase. And this is fifteen, sixteen area and I'd still do it if I was able to...can't do it cause no one owns property that would be willing to have a teen, a nineteen year old crazy driver dude chasing an old jeep.*

John identified himself as a person with high energy. “... *I've always had a lot of energy. I've never really outgrown the lot of energy thing.*” This quality seemed to tie together his needs for motion and excitement.

At the time of the interview John had been involved in the yoga programme for about eight months and yet yoga somehow did not fit John's risk taking, high energy and constantly moving lifestyle. Throughout his interview John expressed uncertainty about his relationship to and comfort with yoga. “*Well as you can tell it's out of my loop.*” He stated twice that his rational for attending yoga was for the five dollar incentive given by the youth centre for taking at least two classes a month. “... *I mainly do it because I want the cigarette money.*” As the interview continued and John explored more of his story he began to gain a possible new awareness about the impact of yoga in his current life. Upon reflecting on his high energy he thought maybe that yoga “*takes care of the little bit of excess energy.*”

John used the rich metaphor of a carpet to describe his relationship to yoga and to his greater life journey.

*...I say instead of a big piece of yarn it's a like little thread...But that, yah I'm actually using that as a good analogy. Because everybody is a piece of carpet. Well analogy everybody is a piece of carpet. And they're all weaving their ah*

*carpet, like they're doing their artwork...And once it's through they're dead. And then at the end you get to see everything.*

John, like his relationship to yoga, was in a period of change and growth. He was searching for work, hoping to finish his GED and find an apartment. How yoga currently fit or may fit in the future was something John could not be certain about but it was playing a role.

*Well I don't honestly. I don't see yoga as a big thing...But... it's probably carving it's way in multiple different areas...But I don't do it on a regular basis. I mean I could see if I was to do yoga on, say on a week, a monthly basis, ah seven times a week or ten times a month or something like that...I do mine twice a month...And that little bit, if it's carving that little bit and it's already showing me ok well this is how much I can flex.*

John walked away from the interview still uncertain of his relationship to yoga, although he had moved from believing his yoga participation was externally motivated to considering that there may be a shared internal and external motivation. The possibility had occurred to him throughout the interview that yoga may fill more than his need for cigarettes and may provide balance for his lifestyle of energy and movement, “*Probably does, somewhere down the line but I really don't know.*”

#### *Iris*

Iris was a proud new mom who spent much of the interview caring for her young daughter's well-being. Iris seemed to radiate the light and laughter that can sometimes surround new moms. As she spoke the wisdom she expressed was broken up by her perpetual use of the word ‘*like*’. The word filled the spaces where other people may pause

to collect their thoughts. I chose to replace many of the 'likes' in her text with ellipses to increase the readability of her words.

The conversation with Iris wove between her experiences with yoga and stories about her daughter and motherhood. Sometimes these two tales intersected. At the time of the interview Iris was focused on the present and her future with her daughter. She identified her daughter as only one of the many changes that had occurred in her life over the past few years. She was living in a transitional housing apartment and had plans to attend college in the fall. She spoke only briefly about her past and always in relationship to her yoga practice. She compared her prior experiences with yoga when she was "scattered" or possibly "stoned" to her current practice where she felt greater focus. Her daughter, she identified, provided much of that focus.

*I focusing on her, and... sometimes I'd have...really good yoga where I'd just... totally focus on her and...visualize... bright lights and you know just...kinda... space out into Hopeland.*

When Iris agreed to do the interview she had been connected to the yoga programme for ten months and knew that her own changes had created a space in her life for yoga.

*But then I started doing yoga here in September, I think, a little bit and I just... something about it was just... different. It was...way better... it was so calming, ... focused after everything's... crazy everywhere else...I don't know I think I was more ready for... to... do something more like calming. I was... more focused on doing something different, I don't know...I was more scattered then and a lot of the time between then and September. I was... in a good spot to do yoga.*

Throughout the interview as Iris breast fed and cuddled her daughter Hope; she talked about her transition into motherhood.

*The first week was, I think... just hormones are crazy and I was... just a little... I thought I had... depression or something. I was crying a lot and like breakdown but now I'm...not so bad. It's pretty fun.*

Iris seemed supported in her transition by other mothers in her mom and baby yoga class, her teen parent group and the teen parent programme. Each time Hope made sounds Iris was present to ensure her daughter's needs were met. As she breast fed, she discussed feeding schedules and other body functions. Iris shared her internal debate about pacifiers, a discussion which seemed to illuminate some of her own self-concept.

*She didn't want it. I just thought I would see what it was like. I figured if I used it one time she wouldn't be addicted to it. But we're not pacifier girls. But I can see how it would be useful. But if she wasn't born with it...I don't know I feel like I might be one of those people who uses it too much. I tend to have an addictive personality.*

Iris alluded to stress she experienced throughout her pregnancy and ongoing stress in her life. She was currently using positive coping strategies such as acupuncture and yoga to deal with the stress. Her most specific example of using positive coping strategies related to Hope's father. Iris indicated some frustration and distain for his choices and way of being but used the word Namaste to reconcile her feelings towards him. Namaste is the word uttered at the end of each yoga class. The spirit of the word is the same among different people although the exact meaning often changes in translation. Some state the word gives the message "the light in me acknowledges the light in you." Others

share that the phrase means, “the spirit in me meets the spirit in you.” The meaning behind the phrase is the acknowledgement of equality among all (Retrieved from <http://www.exoticindiaart.com/article/namaste>). Iris described her meaning as “*I honour this and you honour this in me.*” This phrase helped Iris to rectify her struggle with Hope’s father. The phrase allowed her to accept their different choices in paths and work through her anger towards him.

*Like he’s all, wears sandals and walks around Los Angeles and... is kind of a nut but it’s kind of...I feel like I have a different kind of understanding with him now...But...I can respect... his choice of his path and he respects my path and I maybe am really mad at him a little bit but...I can tell him I’m really mad at him.*

As Iris looked towards her future she wondered about school for Hope and a quiet place for yoga.

#### *Nick*

Nick was a young gay male living on the streets of the city. He loved playing the piano, singing and drama. They, along with yoga, were his escapes from street life. For Nick, life seemed to thread through many of the themes that personify street-involved youth. He had experienced abuse, foster care, addiction and the youth justice system. As one of the few participants that had actually grown up in the city he shared snapshots of his life experience which led to his current situation where he struggled with the effects of methamphetamine use and street life in the city.

*And like I’ve been to so many umm foster homes. I’ve been umm counselling for being raped and molested and stuff like that and thinking all these things that are totally wrong. And then what else? Mmm, I went, I was on probation and went to*

*like umm all those like little camps and detention centres and community service and all those were just like fun and games until I really got on the streets and noticed how bad, how bad this drug game is. How bad the people are and how bad myself is...I never realized, I never taken care about, I never cared about myself as much as I do now because before I had a place to go. I had a place to live. I didn't need, you know I can't hide out here. You can't.*

Nick had been involved in different programmes designed to help youth but had been kicked out of many of them including a boot camp or military rehabilitation programme. At the time of the interview Nick had been living on the streets and in one of the local shelters for about three months.

Nick grew up with a mom who struggled with a drug addiction to heroin. Many times throughout our conversation his voice trailed off into a whisper as he discussed the impact of his own drug use on his life, his mind and his body. He identified that one of the primary reasons for his street-involvement was due to drugs. *"I'm on the streets because I was being just a really bad person because of what the drugs were doing to me."*

Nick was trying to make changes. He wanted a future beyond drugs. His desire for a different future and the struggle to change were both palpable. What also resonated in his words were his hopes for other youth, particularly his friends, living street-involved. He discussed ways that he believed yoga was helping youth living street-involved and how happy this made him feel. *"A lot of people up here are depressed from drugs and want to get in touch with themselves. And that's what yoga's doing."*

When Nick left the small interview room the connections he made between drugs and yoga continued to echo. His thoughts about yoga being a peaceful place, an oasis from the streets, the people and the drugs resonated.

*Paige*

Paige was a twenty year old lesbian woman living on the streets and in the youth shelters of the city. She had been in the city for about a year at the time of the interview. The conversation with Paige focused on her present life experience which moved between the calm of the yoga studio on Sunday afternoon and the chaos of street drama the rest of the week.

At the time of the interview she had attended yoga for three months. She returned each week because yoga provided a way to balance the tension and stress during the times between the classes. Paige did not discuss her past or her path to street life but she clearly articulated her current awareness of the street. Paige talked about the drama that she witnessed and experienced in her life on the streets.

*Oh my gosh, there's people. Down here it's crazy it's like a survival one survival thing and I dunno. You have to take of yourself and if you don't know what you're doing down here you can get hurt. Brought into drama...ummm, people getting beat up. You always basically always watching your back. It's crazy down here.*

The juxtaposition between the street and the yoga studio Paige presented was profound. The comparisons strung the interview together. What was most poignant was her youthful excitement which was heard through changes in her voice as she discussed her pride and new self-awareness with her accomplishments in yoga.

*Bryan*

Bryan had grown up in a cop's home and attended military school as a teen. He described his current situation of living in a shelter and near the streets of the city as both a new and stressful experience. *"You know I grew up in a cop's home. You know we always had money. I always had a place to stay so...It's a lot different from here."* One significant difference he cited was in his experience of relationships growing up and those on the street.

*Where I came from there was like, you did your own stuff you know you weren't... I mean you had friends and stuff and you, I hung out with my friends like every freakin' day but you know we didn't bring up each other's problems in front of everyone you know I mean we helped 'em with it you know but it wasn't like oh this blah did e blah this and you know.*

Bryan had been living in the shelter for about two and a half months at the time of the interview. He was trying to stay off the streets, to get a job and find an apartment. He was attempting to remove himself from the stress and the drama that he described as being all around him on the streets.

*Ah just the stupid drama that goes on and...the stupid people mostly... Umm people are just on you constantly and you just feel a need to you know strangle them or whatever so kinda gets in the way so...*

Military school was actually the first place that Bryan was exposed to yoga. His background and training in discipline systems became most obvious when he spoke about attitude or discipline related to yoga.

*If you're doing it right then you're going to get a lot more out of it then if you're just doing the exercising just as sloppy as possible you know. You're not going to get as much out of it. Maybe you're not really trying.*

While he was living in the shelter the yoga classes were helping to provide a sense of productivity and an oasis from the drama. Although Bryan did not discuss the path that led him to live in the shelter, it was apparent throughout the conversation that starting a path away from the streets was his priority.

### *Reagan*

Reagan sat quietly in his chair throughout the interview, his voice sometimes decreasing to a whisper. The burdens he carried weighed heavy on his body and his mind. His emotional pain felt palpable. I had a hard time remaining in my role as interviewer as my instinct drew me to process and counselling.

Reagan had a family in New Mexico he could not get back to and a fiancé he had left six months previous to sort out his life.

*Actually I umm I moved back to Reno cause I grew up there when I turned nineteen. I met a girl we were going to get married and we came down here cause her uncle and family lives down here ... and I ended up telling her I need to go get my life in order before we do anything so I came to [the city] and then I'm not doing what I'm supposed to and so I'm just stuck here now. It's been like six months since I've seen her.*

Reagan had a variety of barriers holding him back from getting his life in order. He had no money and no ID, an experience of limbo which many youth who street-involved share. As he sat in the interview room his most immediate burden was a decision about

whether to turn himself into the police or run. He did not share his crime only that he may have a long time to spend in jail. *“But I know it’s going to be a long time and I don’t know if I want to do it but I gonna have to eventually if I wanna stay alive and keep a job you know.”* I do not know the decision Reagan made after the interview but there are many days when I wonder if either decision brought him some peace.

The conversation with Reagan focused on his experience of yoga as a support through his journey on the street. He identified an instant connection to yoga. The three classes he had attended leading up to the interview had provided a variety of benefits.

*At first I wasn’t going to go and then he told me you should check it out and so I hesitated but for the first then when I went the first time after I was done my whole body just ended up being really relaxed and you know I was really tension free and really was like, oh man, you know, I wasn’t really worried about anything. And I just... After that kept going and I got hooked on it ‘cause you know I mean just, I don’t know for me it is like a release to the week of all my stress and like good it feels like just you know I’m stress free after that.*

Jack

*My shit is wild so I know if I put my shit in a book it would just bug cats out. Even if it didn’t sell I wouldn’t care, the cats who read it would be like whoa...you know...*

The thoughts and experiences that Jack shared may have filled a book although he acknowledged that *“I’d still be writing it.”* Jack’s words were full of opinions on diverse topics as he spoke about meaningful quotes from books he had read, his thoughts on the street, and encounters with his mentor. He spoke with passion. As he spoke he

emphasized his words with strong hand and arm movements. The way he spoke was as much a part of his persona as the words themselves. As I translate Jack into text I fear that much of his character is lost in translation. I have tried to insert some of his non-verbal cues into the text where, in my interpretation, they were used to emphasize his words.

Jack had a unique way of weaving unusual quotes into motivational thoughts. *Like...Ghangus Khan right?...Had nothing to do with Art of Zen but he had this one quote that said "I leave no eye to weep for the dead". And what that meant is that he went into villages and he like raped, killed, like, like, like slaughtered everybody. Including the women, men, little babies. Like, like dogs. He killed every mother fuckin' thing that was in that town and therefore when he, when he slit that baby's throat, he didn't want that baby to get older and come and take him out. Now what I did is I read this quote and then what I did is I applied it to my life...Basically what he was doing, like metaphorically, he is, he's, he's, he's like destroying his obstacles, his future problems before they occur. Now a way you could apply that to your life is ah, ah, ah...like, like complete your obstacles as soon as possible...When a problem comes around. (hits palm in hand) Get it done. Now don't wait 'til next week. Don't wait 'til tomorrow. Don't wait, no, just get it done. Just get it done. Ain't got shit to do...You're sittin' here talking so go get it done. You know what I mean.*

I was not sure I knew what he meant but there were many moments throughout our conversation that I needed to pause, to consider and to integrate the thoughts Jack

expressed. His view on his life and street life were intriguing. I wondered how Jack's stories and his character had grown into their present forms.

Jack spoke excitedly about his own personal enlightenment. He told his story of enlightenment gained through meeting a mentor at the age of fifteen.

*So my mentor taught me about that shit. My mentor taught me about, like different types of religions and different types of ways of thinking. And just it progressed me as an individual, as an intellectual, you know.*

Jack met his mentor, "like full- blooded Native American so he grew up in a cave 'til he was six", at a copy shop when Jack was attempting to steal equipment and his future mentor began a conversation. Jack recalled meeting his mentor at a critical moment in his life.

*Like 15. And ah...no it's 2002. I was like, I was like 15 right. And ah I was trying to run away...Like I was, I was like a, a kid that was about to become like a full fledged criminal...I was right there you know what I mean. And ah I was staying with some deadbeat ass parents that weren't even my real parents yadda, yadda, yadda.*

Jack spoke about a variety of lessons that he had learned from his mentor. He talked about gaining knowledge, particularly knowledge of self. He shared one of the lessons which could be identified as a lesson on mindfulness tied to a motivational message.

*He taught me in whatever you do, you do it to the fullest you know what I mean? Whether you're ah eating a sandwich. You eat that sandwich good. You know what I mean? Whether you're ah...walking down the street you make sure you're walking down that street and you know what you are doing. Don't ever have any*

*moment in life where you're walking down and you're just like...you know you're just...flyin by.*

Jack, at the time of the interview, was living on the streets in the city trying to make changes in his life and rise above the 'bullshit'. He saw himself as different from any of the other youth living on the streets. He recognized the changes he had already made but shared the challenges of maintaining that change.

Jack's connection to yoga was through his practice of body scans. He had no name for the sensations he described but excitedly explained his procedure and experience.

*What I would do is, I lie down in bed and I would like, I would focus on certain parts of my body...Like my lower half. My upper half. Yudda Yudda Yudda. And I could feel like, like the thing, you know the shit inside my...Like the energy stuff.*

As Jack considered the future and the lessons he had gained from his mentor his final thoughts were of striving for presence and enjoyment of the moments in life.

*There's a, it was like, there was like one whole, it was like... "The only Zen at the top of a mountain is the Zen that you bring up there with you". And that was OJ Simpson that said that. That means, that also can be used for anything. You know what I mean? The only um, the only heaven. The only ah, aha, ah peace. The only ah, ah tranquility that you're going to find up there out in the mountains near a little like rainfall is the shit that you bring up there with you...It's all obtained by self (said with emphasis).*

*Malcolm*

Malcolm was a twenty year old male who had grown up in the city. He had been raised in the downtown neighbourhood. During the interview he discussed his community's experience of displacement to the outer edges of the city with the gentrification of the downtown core.

*They trying to make a better [city] but they actually kickin' all the poor people so far out. Give em one, one supermarket where they can get clothes and food at. One gas station you know. One movie block. And then you know and it take an hour and a half just to get back down town or to get back into the city that you go and then you know you spend all this money on the bus.*

His words were wise and his thoughts broad in scope. Intertwined with his ideas about yoga were beliefs about the impact of television on intelligence and the maturity of American youth compared with other countries. I found the tangents we took throughout this interview fascinating. Malcolm was in a process of learning who he was and discovering what he wanted to do with his life. Throughout the interview he moved through multiple identities.

*That's a hard part of life finding who you are. That's why you try to be this and you try to be that and your hair was this colour you know or you used to wear you clothes like this you know.*

At the time of the interview he was living on the streets surviving in a nocturnal life that included drinking and smoking. "I live in the streets and I'm in the streets and I'd a been hustling. I'd a been you know. I'd a been through this." Within his street life Malcolm also maintained an identity as a healthy individual. He shared passions for reading

autobiographies of influential individuals, for listening to and writing music, and for exercise or sports. It was among these latter identities that yoga seemed to fit.

*Well with my smoking, my drinking. You know. And then the little workout I do. Yoga is like yah. I love my body you know. I gotta keep it healthy. Yoga is healthy. It feels healthy. Just like I eat right. Like I don't eat junk food. Like in the morning I like to have an apple, or a plum, a peach and some yogurt.*

Malcolm identified that the shifting between his identities was part of the change process. He knew he was growing and changing.

*You know being from a little kid I'm just growing up. You grow up you start finding more ways to better yourself. And that's what I'm trying to do too. Better myself and get out of the position that I'm in. And so all of that plays a role in the yoga you know. Keeps me stretched out, feeling good you know.*

Malcolm was aware of changes he wanted to make in his life and was working towards those changes. His indicated that his awareness had arisen on his nineteenth birthday and had prompted him to, among other things, sign up for the navy.

*You know I've been trying to better my life since nineteen. Since my birthday when I was nineteen you know...I had to do something. Probably for the fact that then I didn't think that I would be...alive when I was eighteen you know. And I really did think that for the longest. It brought, it brought tears to my old mom's eyes when I told her. And you know I did and so I think, you know what I'm saying, I bullshitted for five years from fifteen ah...or you know four years. So I might as well try to do something now.*

Malcolm talked excitedly about traveling with the military and shared his experiences of travel during his high school days. He wanted to try new things. He wanted to explore and learn about other cultures.

Yoga seemed to fit Malcolm's shift from youth to adult life. He chose to attend yoga classes at a community studio so that he could progress with his practice because the classes at the yoga programme were always beginner practices. He appreciated the quiet of community classes where he could find his own flow rhythm. Even at the yoga programme Malcolm shared that he tried to keep his eyes closed and his focus internal.

Malcolm recognized that times for peace and calm were rare in his own life and in the lives of those around him. He discussed his idea that each person should be encouraged to have fifteen minutes of time each day to rest and rejuvenate. He compared this fifteen minutes to the final resting pose in yoga.

*I think, I think it would probably make everyone feel better. So say the first, beginning of your day was stressful or you're just too busy. Frustrating. Or you just upset you know. Everybody had their nice little fifteen minutes of nice little dim light...Laying down just inner peace...Betcha the next day, half of your day would probably go better.*

As Malcolm walked away from the interview I was struck by the dynamic question of yoga prompting change or as a practice sought by those in the middle of change. Malcolm was shifting. Yoga had come into his life long after his burgeoning awareness on his nineteenth birthday. He had come to yoga four months previous for the five dollar incentive yet he had stayed. Even if yoga had not prompted his initial

awareness of growth, yoga was threading his conversation of change and evolving identities.

*Tom*

I have struggled to include Tom in this text. To me Tom is an enigma. I sat through much of our interview confused by his thought patterns. I felt my interview skills slip away as I floundered to probe or to summarize. There were moments when I felt both Tom and I had clarity. These moments were quickly erased when Tom's mind wandered to a place I found hard to follow. As Tom spoke I wondered how much his former drug use factored into what appeared to be disjointed trains of thought. The following example highlights Tom's thought patterns.

*yoga also like in the classroom or something or like with friends or with the family or like at a wedding or something like...I don't know just seeing everybody's energy's cause like...I can remember back in like high school and we'd have like one best friend or four best friends or something. And now that I'm out of high school it's more like...I don't have any best friends I just have a bunch of people that I know and they know and umm...It seems like our energy's like sometimes you wanna, I get sucked into like talking to one person more and sometimes I get sucked into talking to another person more and so it's like...balancing them both it's, it's, it's really cool. Umm like with rap and stuff I didn't understand it. I was into rock and roll and everything and like rap music makes more sense.*

Although I found it difficult to follow Tom and I wonder even now if I can represent him with any accuracy, I do believe his words are important to the overall view because he was living street-involved and attending yoga classes.

Tom was first introduced to yoga about two years prior to the interview as part of a holistic counselling experience.

*She did like energy work and stuff and work with Chakras and things. And we went, it's like weekend retreats and stuff and like she ah just had us do yoga out on the porch and like beaches and stuff. Um yah it was really fun and umm...it was like counselling and stuff. And she was like wow it seems like you have a lot of emotional release around like certain things.*

His first yoga experience was undertaken out of curiosity and lasted for five classes. As with much of the interview Tom wove a variety of stories into his first experience with yoga. The stories I found difficult to knit together. The counsellor he identified as a:

*“Christian yoga person but like she wasn't Christian and I was like not in the Christian faith. I was raised a Christian but I was against it and so like it changed a little bit and so yah and so I went to Liz. It was cause she had more of a Eastern philosophies about everything as well.”* Tom discussed a strong affiliation with Eastern practices including chakras and acupuncture. He also shared that he was encouraged to participate in these initial classes because of the connection the instructor made to his father.

*My dad Jake died when I was in the womb. And umm he named me Thomas. And then I, my Dad now, my umm step father adopted me when I was two years old. And his name was Tom so he just called me Tom too. And like I had mentioned something that I'd felt like Jake's spirit was still in me or something. Jake was the*

*name of my biological father. And this is kind of out of the blue like no where just a random story but like he was like supposedly like in me still. And I asked Liz and she was like "Yah I sense your father's in you" and stuff and all that.*

Tom's sense of connection to energetic and spiritual processes was a theme that was woven throughout his interview. In his stories about experiences with yoga and people living on the streets he discussed light and energy. Of his experience with change throughout a yoga class Tom stated:

*Everything's more fair. It's more light based. Like when I'm laying there on the floor like it seems like people's like energy's take shape around me and they like rise up toward the ceiling or something. And like it's really cool.*

Between his initial experience with yoga and Tom's current involvement at the yoga programme had been a couple of years of drugs and rehab. *"And heavy drugs and living on the street and losing my job and girlfriends and graduating high school and stuff."* He knew life on the streets and discussed the violence that occurred. *"Other things were going on and stuff like lots of weird shit happens on the street that's not so weird it just happens and then people tend to like have an, it's so unbelievable response but like it's believable and there's nothing uncommon about it."* His current attendance at the yoga programme was prompted by the five dollar incentive and the opportunity for relaxation.

At the time of the interview Tom was in the process of making changes in his life. He was living in transitional housing. *"I got a roof over my head and a great view of the city. And I save one third of my income I get to live up there. Sometimes I don't save like all of it but um (pause). Yah like there's people who come here [youth centre] who don't*

*have the roofs over their heads. And so it's like I have a roof over my head."* Tom had also begun his career path choosing to attend massage college. He chose this profession because he wanted to help people. He was drawn to the work because of "*the healing people with hands part.*"

Tom, throughout the interview, considered ways that yoga was woven among his life stories. He thought life was a meditation. He considered ways that light and energetic processes were woven into his experiences. As he left the interview I wondered if I sought the literal in his words but he spoke about the intangible or ephemeral in the experience.

*I work for a call centre and... being in that training environment was really, there was a lot of like yoga style type things but it was all in your voice and like not as much moving around and stuff. Like yoga like you had to like if you projected yourself in a certain way like it would create a certain effect in somebody else's mind and like you can see the reverberation of like their response and like go off of that.*

## Chapter 5

### Change

Introducing the participants individually allows each of them to be heard. Having included the multiplicity and changeability among stories I believe it is also important to acknowledge the themes or threads that weave among the nine stories. Although these themes may not be generalizable to the entire street-involved youth population, they have implications for future programme possibilities. The themes may provide a window into the ways in which some youth who are street-involved can be supported in creating or maintaining change in their lives. The themes that will be addressed in chapter five are:

- a. The process of change
- b. Substance use and yoga
- c. Yoga and change in social, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual life realms

In chapter six and seven two more themes will be addressed:

- a. The experience of calm
- b. Programme considerations

#### *The Process of Change*

Michael Mahoney (1991) argues that every individual is in a constant state of change in some form.

On several levels, of course, we are all seeking – and achieving – some form of change every moment of our lives. Whether it be the transition from inhalation to exhalation or from one thought to another, we are each in the dynamic movements of a life in process. (p. 5)

Although each individual is experiencing changes moment by moment, the process of change can be difficult. Homeostasis is a preferred state of being and stabilizing forces are often stronger than the impetus for change. Patterns of behaviour and thought, even those that are negative, are comfortable because they are known. Changing these patterns can propel an individual into the discomfort of the unknown. "Their familiarity adds an appealing quality. Even when consequences are predictably painful, old habits offer comfort. Repeatedly returning to old patterns is a frequent and frustrating reality for many people who are wanting to change" (Mahoney, 2003, p. 173). The process of change is cycling one way and the forces of stabilization are turning in the other direction. "The same person is both changing and remaining the same at different levels" (Mahoney, 2003, p. 173). Change, therefore, is a dynamic process.

Participants illustrated this dynamic process. They described both the impetus for change and the difficulty of moving beyond the streets. Although participants identified ways they were working towards a life beyond the street they also discussed the challenges in maintaining these changes.

All of the youth involved in interviews attended a youth drop-in centre. Attendance meant they were exposed to employment and education programmes in addition to housing opportunities. Many of the youth involved in the yoga programme were participating in these other services and they described their change processes related to these life areas. Some of the participants also discussed their dreams for the future beyond life on the street.

Tom had already begun massage college and was living in transitional housing at the youth centre. Iris was planning to attend college in the fall and was also living in

transitional housing. Malcolm had just signed himself up for the navy and looked forward to the adventures of travel. He also talked about his dream of becoming a motivational speaker.

*So that's why I'm trying to work my way to become a motivational speaker for everybody who does the things I do and been in what I been. You know so I can tell them don't even go there. Don't even try it you know.*

Nick had finished his GED through the education programme at the youth centre. At the time of the interview he was trying to get an internship in the retail field and into the housing programme at the centre. Nick wanted to move off the streets. He repeated throughout the interview: *"I want to change my life."* To encourage his process of change Nick had begun an outpatient drug treatment group. His dreams for the future included going to college, working in outreach and maybe even helping children overseas.

Similar to Nick, Bryan wanted off the streets. He wanted a job and the opportunity to move into the transitional apartments. He discussed his reasons for coming to the youth centre: *"I mean I'm here just cause I want to get off the streets. You know I want to get a job and stuff."* Jack talked about his dreams of a house and a family. John discussed his desire for a job and stable housing. He had moved to [the city] to finish his GED. He thought construction work would be a good fit for his high level of energy. Reagan also discussed his dreams of marriage and returning to his family. The desire for changes to life circumstances were spoken about by all but one of the participants. Each youth who talked about change envisioned their lives beyond the streets and the shelters. They discussed their futures with strength and conviction.

In as much as the youth talked about their futures beyond the streets they also provided descriptions of their current lives and identities. The participants discussed the stabilizing forces that pulled them back into old patterns. Moments of relaxation and calm fell away as the stress and tension of street life returned. "Change emerges from a shifting matrix of competing possibilities. Old, tenured patterns of activity compete with new and experimental possibilities" (Mahoney, 2003, p. 258). Iris was the only participant that did not speak directly about current experiences with street life.

Higgitt et al. (2003) discovered these multiple identities with street-involved youth in her research in Winnipeg. Of this multiplicity she stated: "They desperately wanted to have normal lives, but were unsure how to achieve their goals" (Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 45). In this current research some youth talked about the drug culture and others about the drama of street life. Many of the youth used the phrase 'street drama'. The street drama the youth discussed conjured the traditional images of life on the streets. Stories of abuse and violence, either witnessed or experienced, wove through many of the participants' interviews. The instability of street life was mentioned by a few of the participants. What became clear was that life on or near the streets was a different world than the vision youth had for their futures.

Paige talked about always watching her back and Malcolm about having to survive. Paige described vividly the challenge of trying to find a place to rest. After being asked whether it is difficult to fall asleep on the streets she answered:

*Yah because no one let's you sleep. Everybody's all over you and stuff. 'Wake up, wake up, wake up, waaaaaa'. You're like, oh god. Go hide in the doorway. Yah, it's impossible though.*

Nick depicted the streets as a place for drug drama.

*That is the drama. There's a lot of drama in the shelter too but that's different.*

*Umm, the drama out here is more of drug drama. Umm, 'You didn't pay me my five dollars and I'm going to cut your hair off'.*

The youth illustrated the pressures of seeking work or making changes, the challenge of coping with difficult family histories and of living with other youth on or near the streets. *"I don't know just people having to bring their problems in front of everyone and you know dragging everyone else down with them."* (Bryan). The lives of these youth seemed full of change and instability. Their days were spent surrounded by people on the street, in the shelters and in the youth centres. Quiet and calm seemed to be elusive both externally and internally.

Shifting among identities that spanned the street and the future was highlighted by some of the youth. For example, Malcolm saw himself as a writer but did not believe that street life gave him much time to write or to explore his writing identity. *"You know being always up and you know trying to survive at the same time you don't really have time."* Nick wanted off the streets and away from the drugs that made him feel so terrible about himself and his life. At the same time he talked about the freedom of the streets and the challenge of staying away from drugs when he was living on the streets.

*I really, I really don't but it's hard out here not to... And how I feel about being homeless. And umm the not having friends, best friends and not having family and just be like well there's nothing else to do.*

Jack passionately shared his motivational strategies for moving beyond the streets. He believed the path towards this change was created by effort and positive mental state.

*Because the mind records everything that happens you know what I mean. So if you can put your full 100 percent, 100 percent like effort into whatever you do your life is just going to elevate. It's just going to elevate. Because if you do everything good. If you do everything well. If you strive for perfection. You will rise above all this bullshit. So that's what I do here.*

He believed he had control over his mind and body. He thought he had the ability to impact situations and the environment around him but he also confessed that it was hard to think that way all of the time. He knew that he was changing and learning from past mistakes but he also remained close to old patterns.

*I used to do a lot of foul shit. But now I found out new ways to get money, to do shit you know what I mean? It hasn't like changed necessarily like entirely. Like I mean two, I'm still two steps away from selling drugs. Like if I ever get too depressed or too...but I recognize shit like that.*

Through their stories these youth echoed what Higgitt et al. (2003) discovered in her conversations with youth in Winnipeg. "Most of the youth we talked to wanted to return to mainstream society. They experienced trepidation at the prospect because they were not certain they could survive off the street. Furthermore, the freedom, money, and drugs were often difficult to leave behind" (p. 81). The dance between the street and beyond was palpable in the lives of some of the youth.

*The Role of Yoga in Change Processes*

Included in the youth's descriptions of shifting patterns were their experiences of change through yoga. The transformations were discussed with respect to their substance use in addition specific changes to their bodies, minds, relationships and spirits.

Some youth expressed that they were discovering new aspects of themselves or new coping strategies through their yoga participation. Although the connection between these change processes and yoga may not be linear, I became curious as to whether: 1) youth involved in a change process self-select yoga or 2) yoga participation prompts a change process? Ultimately these two possibilities may not have to be mutually exclusive.

*Substance Use and Yoga.*

The link between substance use and yoga may be important considering that research indicates substance use is highest among this population of youth. Connections were drawn between drugs and yoga by six of the participants. Paige did not specify her 'bad habit' although I assumed, from her words, that she was talking about some type of substance abuse problem. *"I have like a habit, a bad one kind of a little bit of a habit."* For Paige her 'habit' helped to relieve stress. In yoga, Paige was finding a new way to reduce her level of tension and to feel better about herself. *"It's teaching me a new way to not be able to that but do something else. Try a different way to stress, find stress reliever...And now I go there and I breathe and do all that. I feel better...And so...it's like I don't need to go do it."* For Paige yoga was creating an alternative way to deal with stress and decrease her need for drugs.

Similar to Paige, Nick spoke about the significant damage drugs had done in his life. Nick believed that the reason he was on the streets was due to the changes he experienced through using drugs.

*Like my friends just noticed that it was changing me I wasn't the same person anymore I wasn't taking any responsibility from like my actions and stuff, I wasn't caring about people.*

Nick described his methamphetamine (meth) high as being on top of the world but he acknowledged that this drug had changed his ability to concentrate, to hold a conversation, to stay still and to get good grades. *"I mean I smoked so much of it that I'm half way retarded probably by now."* He was sober for the interview, expressing desperately his desire to stay clean but he also acknowledged his craving to be high. *"You know I'm not going to say I don't do drugs but I do...I feel responsible enough to take accountability for that."*

In contrast to the 'going up' high created by meth, Nick described yoga as a coming down. For Nick yoga was an escape to the 'down drain' of meth. Although Nick could identify that yoga was not a quick fix or a simple alternative to his drug use he was able to integrate yoga into a broader goal towards change.

*Yoga won't get me off drugs...But yoga will and like emphasize me to umm I guess get in touch with myself more which is not doing drugs. Myself does not, I don't want to do drugs honestly.*

Yoga was a space where drugs and drug life disappeared.

*It's an hour and a half away from drugs. It's an half and a half away from people that just don't like you and wanna see trouble or just wanna to influence you on doing drugs.*

Yoga was also a place where he shore up his defences against the pull of the drugs.

*Just, it's just helping me with umm... my learning...my...my like strengths. You know because I used to have a lot of strengths now I have a lot of weaknesses you know. And I'm just trying to like build up my strengths so I can go to school...and get off drugs and I don't wanna be out here really.*

Malcolm saw both marijuana and yoga as integral parts of his life, although in his opinion, they were mutually exclusive. Malcolm believed marijuana was a part of his cultural heritage. Pot, he believed, was a drug that provided an opportunity to seek deeper meaning in events and literature. He discussed his experience of using marijuana and reading.

*See how when they describe the girl with the red dress and how tall she was and how her face was kind of like a pumpkin. And you really do see that visual in your head then yah I think you're actually doing something better you know.*

In contrast to those thoughts, Malcolm believed he needed to be sober to seek inner peace. He, therefore, did not attend yoga while he was high. He acknowledged that when he tried yoga after smoking marijuana his mind wandered and he did not find a place of inner calm or peace.

Iris echoed Malcolm's thoughts by comparing her yoga experiences as a youth to her current practice. As she reflected on her high school yoga experiences she identified her drug use and focus as two stumbling blocks to her genuine participation.

*But like having one thing to focus on is like a start...And I don't think I had anything I was like focusing on so I was probably like stoned or something when I was doing it.*

In contrast she acknowledged that during current yoga practice she was sober and more engaged.

John was a self-identified 'stoner'. He shared that pot helped him to slow down.  
*I'm in the stoner class. But that's mainly what drains most of my energy away during the week cause there's always an abundant amount of people saying "hey you wanna go get high?" or stoned cause you can't get high on pot.*

Pot decreased the speed at which his mind operated and lowered his excess energy. *"So it's like it's I mainly smoke pot just to slow me down for a bare minimal of like two hours."* Throughout the week John seemed to find enough pot and people with whom to smoke. Alternatively, on Sundays, he shared that there were fewer opportunities to get weed. On Sundays yoga became a replacement for weed. John identified that yoga helped to slow him down, similar to his experiences with pot.

Jack stated that he did not take drugs or drink alcohol. Instead his highs came from body scans and sunny days. Body scans were a practice he discovered at age seventeen.

*The fact that I have the ability to focus on certain parts of my body. Or just I could, I could like focus on feet and then run it all the way up and down my head and keep going back and forth and you can feel it going up and down your body that is bugged out! See I don't get high. I don't smoke weed. I don't get drunk. All I do is smoke cigarettes. So therefore I have no added substances that come to*

*my body and they like you know what I mean I'm not high off of shit. So like when I do shit like that...that's like my high. Or, or when It's sunny outside...that's my high. Stuff like that, that's my high. So, that's, I guess that's why I do it because it's like a...it's like a body high.*

Jack believed that there would be less need for drugs if people were not as lazy and sought positive highs through activity.

*But I create the body high. That's what I'm saying there's shit people can do with their bodies. Like you, if you could trigger those dopamines and all that shit in your brain people would not need to get high.*

The strongest connection Jack made to yoga classes was through linking the 'high' he created through body scans and the 'high' he experienced during savasana.

*But man the crazy thing about that yoga class is at the end. After you do the stretching you lay down. And they have like that dead man's pose or whatever the hell it is where you just lay down. Literally that puts motherfuckers in like a deep ass like...it just, it knocks motherfuckers out. It like, when I did it today, I did it for like, we didn't even do it very long today. When we did it, we were just like, I was just like whoa. It feels, there's something it does those stretches...That certain order of stretches, even though if you're not even doing them correctly. Those stretches trigger that shit in your body and then when you lay down just to relax you shit is just like, like whoa...that's a high right there. That is a high.*

Although each of the six youth described different connections between yoga and substance abuse each of them identified areas that could be explored through current or future research.

There may be many explanations for the connections between yoga and substance use for youth living street-involved. The first explanation uses the trans-theoretical model (TTM) of change. This model acknowledges change as a cyclic process with a variety of stages. Both Paige and Nick described their link between yoga and drugs as a process of changing patterns. The TTM identifies the second stage of the change process as the contemplation stage. The contemplation stage describes a situation where people are aware of a problem but uncertain of how or if they will make a change. This is often the stage where individuals weigh the pros and cons of change. From the relationship to drugs that Nick and Paige described I ascertained that they were in the contemplation stage of the change process. They both acknowledged the benefits of the drugs and the drawbacks to the use of the drugs. At this stage in the change process opportunities to explore change or alternatives to the current behaviour can be useful in tipping the balance towards change. For Paige and Nick yoga seemed to be a place to explore alternatives to their drug use which also provided helpful benefits to their lives. Yoga presented the possibility of prompting these two youth into the action phase of the change process. Indeed by Nick attending the interview sober and by Paige decreasing her drug use both had already made strides into action.

Another possible connection between experiences of yoga and substance use was made in research conducted by Wilson and Spencer (1990). During the second phase of their research that explored peak experiences they compared the most positive experiences of ashram residents to those of non-ashram residents most positive non-drug and drug experiences. What was discovered in this comparison was “that the majority of ashram respondents experienced a radical shift in consciousness of the type that most

people only experience when they are using psychoactive drugs” (Wilson & Spencer, 1990, p. 572). The differences in the positive experiences of ashram residents and drug using non-ashram residents were 1) the level of anxiety attached to the experiences and 2) the involvement of a mystical or religious interpretation. For ashram residents feelings of anxiety attached to positive experiences were much lower and the involvement of a mystical or religious dimension to the experience were much higher than for those non-ashram residents that described drug-using experiences. Mystical or religious interpretation included the experience of oneness and a sense of being in touch with the divine or the spiritual. Wilson and Spencer concluded that “in general, this shows that, phenomenologically, the positive experience for ashram residents more closely resembled the drug experiences of the non-residents” (p. 570). This research illuminates the possibility that for some youth who are street-involved and using substances yoga could provide a similar shift of consciousness without the negative attachments such as anxiety.

Malcolm acknowledged his alteration in consciousness through yoga. He believed that achieving inner peace through yoga participation meant that he needed to be sober. He highlighted that the difference between altering consciousness through drug use and through yoga. Marijuana promoted distractions whereas yoga created focus. This focus allowed Malcolm to experience that sense of oneness described in Wilson and Spencer’s study.

The final possible connection between yoga and drug use could be made using the harm reduction model. This model could be applied to John’s description of yoga and pot. Harm reduction seeks to minimize the harmful effects of substances through such processes as safer equipment and reducing use. On Sundays, John used yoga as a method

through which to slow his mind and body. On Sundays he was reducing his use of weed and therein minimizing the harm experienced on that day. Overall, each youth that described a connection between yoga and substance use illustrated a way that yoga was helping to reduce the harm experienced through that substance use either by creating a safe space, a different mind frame or an alternative to using.

Overall the connections drawn by youth in this research between yoga and substance use has interesting implications for practice. The possibility is presented, in the words of these youth, that yoga could be incorporated into programmes to help some youth struggling with substance use to make changes or reduce the harm experienced through substance use. There are of course considerations for this incorporation which will be taken up in Chapter Seven.

#### *Yoga & Change in Physical, Mental Emotional, Social and Spiritual Life Realms*

Throughout the interviews the youth discussed changes that occurred within their physical, mental, social and spiritual realms through yoga participation. Each of these realms and the illustrations of change processes will be described individually.

#### *Physical*

In Western yoga classes the physical asana practice is often the largest focus. The series of postures encourage individuals to move differently, to stretch and to release built up tension or energy from the body. There are a variety of physical benefits described for yoga practitioners.

The practice of asanas has a beneficial impact on the whole body. Asanas not only tone the muscles, tissues, ligaments, joints and nerves, but also maintain the smooth functioning and health of all the body systems...Asanas also boost

metabolism, lymphatic circulation, and hormonal secretions, and bring about a chemical balance in the body. (Iyengar, 2001, p. 17)

The physical aspect of yoga practice was acknowledged by all of the youth. Some of the youth used yoga as a synonym for stretching. Many of the youth spoke about the physical benefits of yoga practice. Paige shared, *"It gets you all stretched out and stuff."* Bryan noted, *"You know it was really good exercise, it stretches you out."* Reagan acknowledged, *"And I'm stretched out and I'm like you know feel like I'm new for the next week."* Malcolm stated, *"Cause I'm real tense. I'm real like stiff. Like a real robot movement and after I get done doing that I'm going to be more loosen up."* Iris identified yoga practice as beneficial to her body during pregnancy and chose to attend yoga as her only form of prenatal classes. *"The prenatal yoga was like, we did lots of...stretching and stuff that I think was helping me have a good labour and stuff."* The experiences of stretching associated with yoga practice seemed to be inherently beneficial for some of the youth.

Although some youth discussed the benefits of stretching others related the physical practice of yoga to more specific changes within their bodies. Increased flexibility and strength were two of these changes. Nick noted that he had become more flexible through his yoga participation. Malcolm also acknowledged his increased flexibility: *"And make it more flexible too. I never was able to get down and touch my toes."* Both Bryan and Paige noticed that practicing yoga had increased the strength in their legs. Additionally, Paige discovered that through yoga she had developed her ability to balance. *"I can stretch like better. I can have better balance."* Iris also spoke about the increases in strength that she experienced through her yoga practice.

*And sometimes...I feel so strong when I'm doing...the plank pose, I feel so strong... recently now that I'm not pregnant I can do those...sun salutes...and so...holding myself up I'm like wow I'm so strong.*

The changes in physical ability whether they were increased flexibility, balance or strength were discussed by some youth with surprise and pride. Bryan had not considered yoga as “real” exercise until he tried the practice in military school.

*Not at first I hated it ...Just cause I thought of yoga as meditating and like all this stuff that I don't really believe in. Ummm, but, after a while I just started liking it just the exercising part and stuff like that. You know it was really good exercise, it stretches you out.*

Paige was proud of the changes that had occurred in her physical body.

*The breathing and the stretching and just feeling better cause you know what your body can do, I dunno and uh you don't know that what things you can do and then you can do it and it's like wow cool.*

Iris also illustrated her pride stating:

*And it's not just yoga but...it's a good way of...test, seeing your strength cause I can't do pushups and I probably never will be able to...I'm not that's not something I aspire to be able to do but...to be able to hold myself up...that is...a cool feeling.*

As Iyengar (2001) described, yoga practice has the potential to impact multiple body systems. Most youth described changes to the muscle and tissue systems but two participants indicated different internal sensations. Both Nick and Tom described yoga as an opportunity to experience a connection to their body on multiple levels. Nick

described his experience in yoga as follows: “*cause I’m in perfect like movement with my body and the blood’s flowing well and things like that.*” Tom portrayed his practice as: “*it’s the whole body moving. It’s like all my fluids and stuff. And my legs move. Like my blood moves a lot more.*” Tom also described the internal sensations he experienced after a yoga practice.

*It just feels really good to have all my stuff compressed into my bones and it’s nice stretched out like my spine’s straight and my breath’s more like in me. It’s more cold in the lungs it feels like.*

These descriptions from Nick and Tom seem to indicate a heightened awareness of body sensations which may have some important repercussions for these youth in their change process.

For many youth who are street-involved experiences of abuse and long-term drug use can lead to coping strategies which numb body sensations. The practice of yoga may assist some youth in reconnecting to their bodies and possibly learning to value their bodies. “*Eventually it was like wow we’re all not like sitting or we’re all not just standing or like focus or like leaning to one side or something like we’re moving full range of motion outside of what we normally do.*” (Tom)

John was the only person that discussed any negative physical impact related to yoga practice. Although John shared that yoga was helping him to discover how far he could ‘flex’, he also discussed some physical pain created by the practice of yoga. “*Yah it’s fun. It’s actually pulls out the most...muscle, I’ve actually hurt myself the most in yoga though. Like today I pulled out a, my arm out of it’s socket.*” Although the pain he described sounded severe, his prior experiences with football may have been linked to a

predisposition to injury. John's nature was also to take risk and push limits. He carried this philosophy into yoga practice. Even in yoga he sought an edge. He found his edge in the balancing poses which he enjoyed for the opportunity to fall. *"The tree pose is kind of fun cause I always crash. It's just a new environment of crashing so I guess it's kinda cool. Gets the adrenaline running, it's kinda cool."*

### *Mental*

In addition to physical benefits many of the youth discussed the integration of mind and body during yoga practice. The incorporation of mind and body is identified, in many yoga texts, as a unique benefit of yoga practice. Although asanas are often considered simply physical stretches, yoga teachers affirm that the physical practice enhances mental clarity and relaxation. B.K.S. Iyengar (2001) states of asanas, "they relax the body and mind, allowing both to recover from fatigue or weakness and the stress of daily life" (p.17).

Some of the youth described their transition through a yoga class. These descriptions illustrated the integration between the mind and body. The youth described feeling tense, "hyped up" or tired prior to a yoga class but noticed that they left class feeling relaxed and motivated. Specifically, Iris portrayed her experience of transition during prenatal yoga.

*It just makes me feel...good afterwards and...even when I was taking prenatal yoga...I wouldn't want to go sometimes. I'd be...here and...lazy and huge and ...oh I don't want to go but then I'd always be like you know you feel so much better afterwards...go (Laughter) and I'd just...would go and then I'd always feel so much better afterwards. It was just amazing.*

Bryan discussed his shift from tension to relaxation throughout the yoga class. He identified a transition in both his mind and his body.

[Prior to yoga] *How do I feel? Tired maybe...Just not awake you know...Just really uptight* [After yoga] *Feel better you know. I just feel loose... You know I just feel laid back. That's a good word. What does laid back feel like, ah jeez...Laid back. Oh I dunno know I just...at home with yourself I guess...Just kinda comfortable with you know...just feeling good...You know your body's feeling good. You're all stretched out and stuff.*

The places the mind traveled as well as the ways thoughts flowed during yoga class were discussed by some of the participants. Iris, Reagan and Nick all had thoughts about family during yoga classes. For Iris her new daughter had brought focus to her life and more specifically her yoga practice. For Reagan the music played during savasana brought him back to his childhood. He would remember the music his parents played to help him sleep.

*Yah my parents used to give me it to go to sleep. So when I, like when I hear that it oh, like I remember the first time I did it I really tried to get into it and start tears coming to my eyes I was like just because you know it helps me remember my past.*

He also thought about trips he took with his family and good times spent with his girlfriend. Nick and his mother shared both the practice of yoga and the struggle with drug addiction. When thoughts entered his mind during yoga practice Nick reflected on his mother.

*Nothing. Oh my God I'm so like focused on just doing the positions right and just letting myself umm think about...I do think about my mom when I doing yoga.*

*Shutting off the Mind.*

Iyengar (2001) notes that the mind “though it has the capacity to perceive things within and without, its natural capacity is to be preoccupied with the outside world” (p. 26). He states that sometimes this preoccupation can lead to negative actions and behaviours but indicates that yoga provides the opportunity to shift the mind. “Yoga trains the mind and inculcates a sense of discrimination so that objects and events are seen for what they are and are not allowed to gain mastery over us” (Iyengar, 2001, p. 26).

By way of training the mind in yoga, practitioners are encouraged to be mindful. “Mindfulness has been broadly conceptualized as a state in which one is highly aware and focused on the reality of the present moment, accepting and acknowledging it, without getting caught up in the thoughts that are about the situation or the emotional reaction to the situation” (Bishop, 2002, p. 71). The philosophy of mindfulness is to gently accept all thoughts and let them pass. During this mindfulness process people are invited to alter ruminating or reacting thought patterns. “An important consequence of mindfulness practice is the realization that most sensations, thoughts, and emotions fluctuate, or are transient, passing by ‘like waves in the sea’” (Linehan, as cited in Baer, 2003, p. 127). Achieving mindful presence in yoga was a challenge to some participants.

Bryan and Iris both identified that shutting off the mind in yoga was more difficult on some days than on others. Bryan thought that both external factors and his own attitude played a role in what happened to his thoughts during yoga. When he was

asked if yoga took his mind off his problems he replied “usually” and provided an explanation of the exceptions.

*It's usually, umm, you know, sometimes I'm just so uptight, I just can't...you know, it's, I'm up, I'm going to be uptight 'til I go to bed so there's not much you can do about it but...it happens with everybody once in a while...I think just the mood you're on. I think it's a lot having your attitude and when you're going in and saying you know “this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to enjoy it. You know, this is what I want to get out of it.” But I think you'll do, you know...you'll get out of it what you want to get out of it. But if you have the mentality of oh like “I've got to do this again, I know I have to” you know then you're not going to get much out of it so.*

Iris also considered that her thought flow varied depending on the day.

*It depends...on the day. Sometimes... it feels like I'm just doing it...it's still fun to do it but...I don't feel... that... peace. I'm not, I'm thinking about tons of other things. But sometimes I'll... even it's just... a moment or a... minute that I'm...not thinking about other things but seems like I don't have that many of those but I tend to... there's a lot going on. But then I can...it's a good time to be like, don't think about... I tell myself... don't think about things, just do yoga. But it doesn't always work. But sometimes, I'm able to...quiet my mind and just relax more. But I mean I think I'm even relaxed when I am thinking about things it's more like I have a different, I don't know, I'm not...stressing about things I'm just...thinking about things. Or sometimes I try to think about things, I don't know....I'm...just*

*sitting there... maybe not trying but I just...go from one thing to another thinking about things in my head. Instead of just... not thinking about things.*

Iris's voice seemed to echo in the wisdom of Buddhist writer Pema Chodron. "So when you realize that you're talking to yourself, label it "thinking" and notice your tone of voice. Let it be compassionate and gentle and humorous. Then you'll be changing old stuck patterns that are shared by the whole human race" (Chodron, 1994, p. 6).

For Reagan yoga provided a place to shut off his mind and release the worry or tension that haunted him all week. "*That's, that's one of my problems right now. That's why another reason I went today so I could get that off my mind for a little while.*"

Mindfulness is not an easy journey to embark upon. Pema Chodron reminds her readers that, in general, humans often struggle to be present in the moment or with their thoughts. "Usually we're so caught up in ourselves, we're hanging on to ourselves so tightly, that it takes a Mack truck knocking us down to wake us up and stop our minds" (Chodron, 1994, p. 79). For youth who are street-involved mindful yoga practice may be even more difficult as intrusive thoughts of violence, abuse and drama play like compact discs programmed on repeat. As Bryan, Iris and Reagan described, opportunities for mindful presence, in yoga, sometimes helped them to pause the cycle of stressful thoughts that permeated their minds on or near the streets.

### *Emotional*

Yoga is described as a practice that connects the entire mind and body creating changes to all aspects of physical, physiological and spiritual selves. Specifically, Iyengar (2001) identifies that some asanas can create changes to the chemistry of the body which in turn shift mental and emotional well-being.

Asanas may appear to deal with the physical body alone but, in fact, different asanas can affect the chemical messages sent to and from the brain and improve and stabilize your mental state. Yoga's unique ability to soothe the nerves, the medium between the physiological and the psychological body, calms the brain, and makes the mind fresh and tranquil, and relaxes the entire body.

(Iyengar, 2001, p. 42)

### *Anger.*

Many programmes for high risk or at risk youth contain some form of anger management training that provide youth with alternative approaches to dealing with anger. Some of the youth who participated in these interviews discovered their own way of dealing differently with anger through their yoga classes. For Paige yoga became a "timeout for myself" where she relaxed. Paige described how she was using yoga to shift her reactions to events or people that made her angry. She believed she had a "bad temperament" and used to hit signs when she got angry. Her new yogic reaction to anger was to walk away from the people or the situation and take time to sit. She described using breath and meditation for dealing with a variety of situations where she experienced frustration. "And then when I'm like out there and someone makes me mad I just take a second just breathe and then just walk away. Whatever it, you know." A specific example, she provided, focused on times when she became frustrated with her girlfriend.

*What we do is when I get mad or something I storm off and I go sit in the corner and I cross my legs and I sit there and I meditate, Yah! Yah. It makes me feel*

*better. Just sit there and breathe and just, just erase everybody and then you, you get better.*

This new found way of coping with emotions seemed exciting for Paige as she stated enthusiastically and with laughter, “YAH! Feels good!”

Reagan also discovered that yoga could be a different way of coping with anger and tension. Reagan, before yoga, bottled his emotions, especially anger, until it had to be released. He expressed his anger by yelling. For Reagan, yoga became a weekly vent for his emotions. “*When I bottle it up I still bottle it up during the week but I know its what I usually now save it for a Sunday to do yoga. And let it all come out and then go on with the rest of the week and do it again*”. Reagan articulated that he used the breathing exercises in yoga as a focus to “*make*” his negative energy “*get out*” of him.

Throughout his interview Bryan expressed his frustration with the street drama. Like Reagan and Paige he identified changes in the way he was able to deal with his anger after attending a yoga class.

*People are idiots down here. And they say stuff that are just...gets people all angry and stuff and me I get angry very easily so. Umm.(pause) Well I shouldn't say angry I should say defensive maybe...Somebody barks up at me...I bark ten times harder....Yoga really just kinda makes me...say just like well “whatever I don't want to deal with you right now, go away” (laughs). You know just lets me ignore 'em so...that's like I said the relaxation part just I've done something... I've exercise...I've exerted that energy into something else and it's, it's gone. You know I don't need to do it anymore.*

For Bryan, the people and the events continued to frustrate him but instead of reacting he would choose to walk away. Bryan recognized that his ability to walk away happened mostly on Sundays after a yoga class or after other times when he had done some form of exercise.

The findings of this research are supported by the results of David Forbes (2004) study using meditation with young urban males. Forbes found that meditation practice assisted many of the young men deal differently with their anger. "All (twenty-three) wrote positive responses about how meditation helps them. The highest number of responses (eight) referred to helping one concentrate and focus. Helping them with anger was the second most frequent response" (Forbes, 2004, p. 158). Providing alternatives for dealing with anger may have long-term implications for youth who are street-involved. These implications may include decreased numbers of interpersonal conflict, in addition to decreased chances of getting in trouble with the law due to acts of aggression and violence.

*Mood changes.*

Yoga impacted the mood of some of the participants. Paige identified feeling calmer and better after yoga class. "*Yah I think it calms me down and it just makes me feel better.*" Iris' mood shifted towards happiness throughout some yoga classes.

*It was just amazing...I could... remember that good feeling afterwards and I... had so much... motivation problems to go but then I'd just like, the days that I would go I was so much happier.*

For Reagan yoga became a profound opportunity to connect with emotions other than frustration and anger. In yoga he experienced both sadness and happiness as memories of his family filtered through his mind.

*For me maybe it brings more of the emotional side out. More of the not all hard and ahhhh bad you know more the ah of the soft and emotional stuff for me. So it helps in a way it helps me feel more but it lets me be a little depressed and that's the hardest part.*

He shared that many emotions were stirred during savasana, the final resting pose of yoga.

*I think my favourite part my favourite yoga I did was when umm when they're all done and they put on music you know and then you sit there and relax to the music that really helped my mind actually to just clear up...My emotions become revitalized.*

Reagan discussed two ways he dealt with the emotions and the memories that were evoked during yoga. He often called his family and friends after yoga class to connect with them in the only way he presently could. He also used the memories raised in savasana as a motivator to make changes in his life.

*That's what you know holds me on going day to day is remembering that when I was a kid I had happiness and I can have it again but I just have ta fix my barriers.*

Nick also experienced new emotions and shifts in mood as a result of his yoga participation. "Umm what else changed? I feel changes in my moods and my personalities because I've never been so moody until after yoga. I'm very moody now." For Nick this

shift towards increased moods and different emotional experiences was unsettling. Nick stated he was not used to feeling happy but his most recent yoga class experience had altered his mood from upset to happy. During the interview Nick struggled to wrap his head around the experience of happiness.

*But it is umm very good though for people. Like yoga is making me really happy.*

*But at the same time you know like... I'm never used to being happy.*

### *Social*

In James Garbarino's (1999) meditation work with young male prisoners and meditation the impact of the practice on their relationships was highlighted. One of the young males indicated that meditation practice had changed the way he felt with himself and with other residents (Garbarino, 1999). David Forbes (2004) meditation research with inner city male athletes also demonstrated that the practice changed ways these young men interacted with their peers. Responses from the young men included "Keeps me in the zone, out of trouble with friends, family and conflicts with strangers; Keep my cool in school. No fights with friends" (Forbes, 2004, p. 159). In this current research the impact of yoga on social relationships was also acknowledged by many of the participants. The most salient theme was the change in social dynamic that occurred between entering and exiting of yoga class. Many of the participants agreed that the yoga practice and savasana helped them to feel calmer. This internal calm experienced by some of the participants seemed to translate into a change in interactions between participants.

Some of the participants, in this research, discussed changes in interactions with other youth whom they knew from the street. Reagan noticed that after yoga classes he

was more open to talking to other youth whereas throughout the rest of the week he kept to himself. Bryan also felt yoga practice created a change in his ability to interact with other youth. The relaxed state created by the yoga practice assisted Bryan in being less defensive when situations arose with other youth on the day of the practice. Bryan believed he could walk away from conflict situations easier after a yoga practice. Tom also noticed his own ability to communicate with people grew after yoga, especially on the streets, when he acknowledged he could get really defensive.

*I was able to communicate a lot better with people and then with them and see them for who they were and then me for who I was. And then seeing like how they are represents a lot of attributes in the person that I am as well.*

In addition to personal changes in interaction style many of the participants noticed shifts in group dynamics during and immediately after a yoga class. Throughout the class the focus changed from the interpersonal dynamics of the street to an intrapersonal focus on the yoga stretches. Tom noted that the group dynamic seemed to change throughout a yoga class. *“And like being able to notice the needs of like all the people around you to the fullest extent is like what yoga seems to be doing.”* He noticed that after a while in the class nobody seemed mad or worried and that nothing else seemed to matter except the stretching. This he indicated was a change from the interactions outside the yoga class.

*And then the two guys are quieter and everybody's like wow. Then the two guys kinda get more like submissive towards the end. And everybody gets up in like this wonderful like form and like leaves. And then they get this brilliance. The other*

*two guys have something to work on. That's been my experience every time I go in.*

Reagan stated, *"I don't know how others are but it feels you know like we're all together and we're just you know not fighting with each other."* Bryan also noticed that yoga changed group dynamics. Like Reagan, he observed himself and other youth becoming self focused throughout the class. He identified that there was less verbal interaction between participants during yoga classes. *"Just cause people are so much focusing on doing the exercises and they're just so much more relaxed."* Bryan thought yoga took participants' minds off their problems and this, he said, helped to alleviate street drama.

Malcolm noticed that savasana was a time when the entire group became quiet. He thought this meant that each person was going to their *"place"*; a luxury he believed was not afforded in society or on the streets. *"You don't have time in society. You know just to hit the lights real quick just...And be at inner peace."*

Nick returned after his initial interview specifically to discuss the changes he noticed in group dynamics. He talked about the negative energy that was brought into yoga class from the streets. He believed this negative energy translated into self-consciousness, talking during class, some people laughing at others and people not doing the poses or squirming around. In contrast, he discussed the shift in energy through the practice of yoga. He observed participants becoming calmer throughout the class which translated into better conversations between youth after the class. The anger that entered the class Nick thought dissipated by the end of the class although he felt the anger grow again once the class finished and youth headed back to the streets. Nick did consider that

over time his calm may grow and spill into the streets. *“But it feels like when I’m going back out on the streets it’s going to come back. But I know when I go back to yoga it’s going to be two times better because I’ve already experienced that feeling of it going away. So maybe it can go away a little bit more.”*

Although the change in group dynamic or energy may have been momentary it seemed significant to these youth. Most had spoken about their own changes in mood or sense of calm. In some ways this internal calm translated into a group calm for a brief time. In my experience at the yoga programme I saw the transition from noisy shuffling in the first moments of class, to quiet practice, to a verbal argument that occurred between two of the yoga participants at the drop-in centre ten minutes after the practice ended.

Almost all of the youth attending the yoga programme knew each other. They had histories from the street. They lived together in the ‘street drama’ and yet for an hour each week the anger and mistrust that accompanied their street interactions dissipated.

It seems to me that what is held very precious by these young people is the possibility of a place within the world which is shared with others and which allows them to feel safe enough to drop deeply into the intimate spaces and roots of themselves and other human beings on the planet. In this way they may learn to accept themselves and others more profoundly and be more confident in bringing this to their relations with the world. (Pearmain, 2005, p. 289)

The question remains for future research: How often would yoga have to occur to create more permanent shifts in the social culture of street youth beyond the yoga studio?

*Spiritual*

Two articles published in the *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* addressed the coping strategies of youth who are street-involved. In both studies spirituality was identified as an important aspect of coping for youth who are street-involved. In the first article Kidd (2003), in addition to performing an extensive literature review, spoke with eighty street-involved youth to identify coping mechanisms. Youth in this study discussed the importance of connection to self and to greater meaning in life. "They said that when they were feeling very down, this sense of spirituality gave some meaning to their suffering, and that there was a "reason" why they had survived up to that point" (Kidd, 2003, p. 250). Fourteen of the participants specifically mentioned a connection to spirituality as a form of coping.

This connection to self, greater meaning and spirituality was echoed in another qualitative study conducted with twelve youth who are street-involved. Youth in this study identified the importance of learning to take care of oneself and one's health. "Trisha, a recovering substance abuser, found that it was important to learn 'how to care, take care of myself, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually'" (Lindsey et al., 2000, p. 125). In this study seven of the twelve youth identified that some connection to spirituality was important for their successful transition to adulthood.

Six of the participants in this research wove the theme of spirituality and religion into their interviews. Although not all of them spoke directly about the connection between yoga and spirituality their discussions about the topic provide an interesting window into an area of further exploration. Within the broad theme each of the youth had

a different story about the connection of spirituality or religion to his/her life and his/her yoga practice.

Two of the youth spoke about a direct connection to spirit or God during the yoga practice. Nick shared that yoga was the only place in his life where he experienced a sense of God and connection to Jesus. *“It feels like I’m letting him come inside of me and like you know like be more...umm who I’m supposed to be I guess. Be more respectful and responsible.”* During yoga practice Nick related the words used by the instructor as metaphors for a connection to God. Specifically, he stated that in tree pose he sensed his feet rooting into the ground and his arms reaching up to the Lord.

For Malcolm savasana provided an opportunity to link his mind, body and soul. *“But with yoga it’s just mind, body, soul. Putting ‘em all together really.”* Malcolm believed that during savasana he went to a place where his soul was.

In contrast to Nick and Malcolm, Bryan was adamant that yoga was solely a mental and physical practice. He did not believe in the meditative or spiritual aspects. Bryan stated that he had his own beliefs about religion and spirituality but they were not related to yoga.

For John his connection between yoga and religion may have been one of the most salient reflections during his interview. He discussed his family’s strong connection to the Baptist Christian faith. John, three months before the interview, had chosen to take a break from his religion and all religions. He stopped attending church and reading the Bible to search for his identity. This decision was made much to the surprise of his family. In discussing his desire for increased self-awareness John realized that yoga may be playing a role. Yoga, he recognized, was a good place to analyze himself.

*I actually want to stop. And I wanna have a break. And I wanna try to idolize myself, uh, not idolize excuse me, umm analyze myself and what better place to it than in yoga where I can test my strength, my actually my flexibility I should say. And I should, I mean more or less you know actually kinda, yoga is more important than I thought it was.*

Both Tom and Jack spoke more globally about life philosophy connected to Eastern spirituality. Tom discussed light and energy throughout his interview. Jack talked about his path of enlightenment and the God that existed within each person.

*So not only do you have to strive for perfection with the, the world around you, you have to also strive for perfection with the world that's inside of you. Cause that's what I'm talking about, you play, you are, you have a piece of God in you...you know what I mean. You have a piece, all of us have a piece of God in us...Goddesses whatever it doesn't matter. Cause it's nor...God doesn't have a penis or a dink or a vagina you know what I mean. So God, if you have a piece of God in you, it means you control your world.*

The connection to self or something greater than self seemed important for many of these youth. Previous research indicated that spirituality can provide a sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of youth regarded as at risk. "Spirituality or religious beliefs can cultivate a belief in adolescents that their life has meaning, and that they have some control over their fate" (Werner, as cited in Davis, Kerr & Robinson Kurpui, 2003, p. 356). Research that explores the link between yoga, spiritual connection and transition from the streets may be an important next step in understanding need of youth living street-involved and ways to help them meet these needs.

*Change Processes*

As youth explored changes in identity, habits, mind, body, relationships and spirit the question lingered, is yoga part of a greater change process or a catalyst for the change process? Although this question may be impossible to answer unilaterally some of the youth did speak directly to these ideas. Malcolm saw yoga as part of his change process.

*You grow up you start finding more ways to better yourself. And that's what I'm trying to do too. Better myself and get out of the position that I'm in and so all of that plays a role in the yoga you know. Keeps me stretched out, feeling good you know.*

Iris thought changes in her life created a readiness for her to engage in yoga. An ability to focus on one thing such as her pregnancy helped her involve her mind in the classes. Reciprocally, yoga participation helped her prepare for childbirth and find a place of relaxation. She also identified that yoga was helping her to be present and accepting with herself. She stated: *"Just like, more like happy with exactly what I'm doing."* Tom did not think yoga played much of a role in his change process but instead it was something he did along the way.

Other participants spoke indirectly about the relationship between yoga and change. They articulated shifts in self-awareness due to their yoga involvement. Mahoney (2003) identifies the possibility that inward shifts created through participation in exercises such as meditation often are a path to outward change. Nick thought that yoga was helping him get to know himself better and possibly helping him to care about himself. *"I experience like myself more umm, getting out of tune with all the bullshit."* For Bryan yoga created a sense of being *"at home"* with himself. John thought that yoga was

an excellent place to analyze and learn about himself and his capabilities. Jack thought that yoga helped individuals to focus on themselves. He stated, *"They're going to teach you how to worry about you."*

Yoga was also creating new opportunities for self-confidence and pride. Reagan shared pride in himself for creating some structure in his otherwise unstructured life on the street. For Reagan living street-involved seemed to be a place of limbo and frustration. Yoga created a focal point in his week. On the days he attended yoga he felt better about himself.

*Yoga it's like you know I'm satisfied that I actually did you know one thing that day that actually helped me so I you know I'm satisfied that I can go to bed I did something good for myself. Then go to sleep so...It helps...You know like I said being homeless there's not much structure in your life. You're like just you know not doing anything.*

Bryan also felt better about himself on the days that he did yoga or other physical activities. He could be proud of being productive on that day. Paige discovered new capabilities through her yoga participation. Learning about her ability to breathe and stretch made her feel proud. *"You do a little pride in going down there and doing seeing what you can do."*

The opportunities for shifts in self-awareness and self-confidence may in turn prompts changes to other life circumstances. Many of the youth in this research discussed their desire to transition off the streets. As youth involved in this research navigated the change process and the possibility of moving beyond the streets yoga seemed to be playing a role in encouraging or supporting this process. Other research with youth who

are street-involved has found that building self-awareness and confidence are necessary for transitioning from the street life. Lindsey et al. (2000) discovered in their research with runaway and homeless youth that 'learning about themselves' was one of the important factors for making a successful transition to adulthood. "Learning about themselves encompassed such ideas as the development of self-confidence and self-love, and learning both the importance of taking care of oneself and how to do so" (Lindsey et al., 2000, p. 124). Higgitt et al. (2003) also found that inner resources were important for successful change and transition beyond the streets.

While support from others was crucial to leaving the street successfully, youth in our study indicated that inner strength and resilience were also key. These young people did not see themselves as powerless individuals. A belief in one's self, a grand vision of the future, and religion or spirituality were some of the resources, which motivated them to get off the street. (Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 80)

The youth described yoga class as a place that provided opportunity to build or enhance these inner resources which opens the possibility that yoga can be a tool for some youth to use as they transition away from the streets.

## Chapter 6

## Finding Calm

The word relaxation was used by most of the youth as they shared their experiences with yoga.

Iris: *Just feel more...centred kind of just...more relaxed.*

Paige: *And I feel just more laid back. It's weird I don't know how to explain it.*

*Cause it's like a relaxation.*

Reagan: *Really my whole body was just like relaxed afterwards and I was like*

*wow*

Jack: *So man you relax. Maybe that's what relaxing really feels like.*

Tom: *Um...my brain's more clear. It's more relaxed. And like more energized.*

Bryan: *It's not as stress-based. Like there's a lot of stuff like looking for a job and*

*stuff you're just all "I need a job, I need yah, you know...I need to do this.*

*I need to do that" yoga's just you know really what relaxes you.*

Paige used words such as calm, relived and relaxed to describe her experiences with yoga. *"Yah I think it calms me down and just makes me feel better...It stretches out your muscles and stuff."* She described her transition between the street and the class as one that allowed her to let go of tension and release the drama. *"Upset. Tension. Drama. I have drama on my shoulders and a lot of tension. Upset usually...I get there and I'm like I feel better...Yah. Relieved."* Bryan also attended yoga classes for the relaxation and the escape from tension on the streets.

*It's just really relaxing. I just feel better afterwards. You know it's like any exercise you feel better afterwards you know. It makes you feel better about yourself. Umm. It really loosens you up.*

For these youth the concept and the word relaxation seemed to bridge the physical and mental realm. Some of the youth spoke about relaxation specific to a body sensation whereas others used the word in a broader or more global context. The dictionary upholds multiple definitions of relaxation, noting that the word relax can mean: 1) “to make less tense or rigid” or 2) “to relieve of nervous tension” or 3) “of a muscle or muscle fiber: to become inactive and lengthen” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, 2003, p. 1050). Whatever connotation of relaxation they used all of the youth mentioned the experience in a positive way.

### *Savasana*

Many of the youth intertwined their experience of relaxation with descriptions of savasana. Savasana or corpse pose is the final pose of a yoga practice. The posture is practiced across many different styles or forms of yoga including Hatha, Kundalini, Iyengar and Bickrams. How long the posture is practiced and what other tools are combined with the posture are dependent on the yoga teacher and the style of yoga. Sometimes the posture is combined with music or guided visualization exercises but in other settings the posture stands alone as a time to relax and to integrate the physical yoga practice.

The purpose of Relaxation Posture is to give the body an opportunity to rest and cool down after the practice, and to allow the tension, tightness, and toxins dislodged by the practice to be carried off by the various organs and systems of

elimination. Going further, the objective is to be motionless and without thought. By keeping the body still, you are training the mind to be still and relax. (Birch, 1995, p. 216)

The posture is meant to be still, like a corpse, with purposeful placements of hands and legs. Yogis in savasana are found lying on the floor, face up, with their eyes closed. Their palms are turned up to the ceiling and their arms lay about two feet from the sides of their torso. Their legs are relaxed with their feet separated about eighteen inches and falling outwards. Yogis are asked to allow the floor to support their entire body as they relax into the posture and focus on their breath.

In this asana, the body is kept as motionless as a corpse and the mind is alert, yet calm. The word sava means corpse in Sanskrit. Savasana removes fatigue and soothes the mind. Each part of the body is positioned properly to achieve total relaxation. (Iyengar, 2001, p. 150)

Iyengar (2001) identifies a variety of benefits to the practice of savasana including 1) alleviating nervous tension and migraines, 2) relieving insomnia, 3) relaxing the body, 4) soothing the nervous system, 5) bringing peace of mind, 6) easing breathing, 7) enhancing recovery from illness, 8) helping to refresh dreamless sleep and 9) reducing physical and mental fatigue. Iyengar states, "When you practice this posture, your organs of perception, the eyes, ears and tongue, withdraw from the outside world. The body and mind become one, and you experience inner silence" (p. 150). In his research with young males Derezotes (2000) found that "most also liked the time that they spent lying down on the floor at the end of the session" (p. 104).

The experience of savasana seemed to resonate with many of youth although each had their own way of expressing the experience and its significance. Paige called savasana a trance, Malcolm referred to it as a different world, Bryan thought that savasana was its own little world and Jack described the pose as a rest. Bryan shared that savasana was like a pause after the physical yoga practice.

*I mean like I think that that's mostly just (clears throat) for me, it's just a chance to, you know, just to relax after I've been working out and you know like congratulate myself saying; "Oh you did a good job. Good job." You know and just relaxing, just letting your muscles relax and you know just sitting there resting for a while until you have to get back to everyday life.*

Malcolm's experience of savasana was profound. He shared that the corpse pose was a place where he dreamed. Dreaming was an experience he enjoyed but rarely experienced because of his lifestyle. "Cause I don't get a lot of sleep. I'm kinda nocturnal. I'm up at night a lot so." The times when he did catch moments of sleep it was often void of anything. "And when I sleep most of the time I don't dream and I don't...you know, I just, I sleep and I wake up. And it's all black and it's not like little kids who have dreams." Malcolm spoke excitedly about a recent dreaming experience in savasana:

*And this is a funny example. You know how when you sleep and you have a dream that you fell? And you fall all the way and hit your bed and you realize that you're just on your bed sleeping. And you try to do it again. Yah that happened last week in yoga. I was there, you know and I was just, they said take you to a nice spot and I was walking along in the forest right by a river bank. I was like the water*

*was all clear, all blue and clear with the rocks by and I was like "oh it looks all nice" and I thought I was going to put my finger in water and oh I fell, all the way through the water. (pause) "Oh ya, I'm in yoga" (laughs) You know.*

For Malcolm, savasana brought him back to a place where dreams happened and he described feeling "*kinda pure, innocence, very calm, almost like inner child again.*" He also shared that the posture either through dreams or visualization took him to a different world, a place where his soul was.

*That's probably after I let my body relax and I don't have any tensed muscles. Just lettin' it all hang. Eyes kinda rolled back in the back of my head. My mind closed and I go to that place. That's where my soul is and that's how I know I got a good soul 'cause I'm always in a good place.*

For Jack, savasana was one of the only places he attended to yoga classes although he acknowledged the need for the other postures in order to have the intense experience of Savasana. He described corpse posture as a high.

*That certain order of stretches, even though if you're not even doing them correctly. Those stretches trigger that shit in your body and then when you lay down just to relax you shit is just like, like whoa....that's a high right there. That is a high.*

Jack also explored the experience of savasana as possible true relaxation:

*I don't know like maybe that what really rest is. You know what I mean? Like maybe that's what rest is. Maybe that's what it feels like when your body rests. It's like what if, you, when you're usually doing yoga you're usually sometimes putting your body in positions they've never been in before. So you're bringing*

*your body into like a new area, a new realm. On top of that when it's in that new realm it's working hard. You're stretching muscles. You're not just stretching you're whole body you're like picking one spot and you're like "I'm goin fuck you up and I'm going to fuck you up and I gonna get you back here and this one's not getting away either." You're getting them all. So like at the end you're shit is like wanting to relax. So man you relax. Maybe that's what relaxing really feels like.*

Iris presented conflicting experiences with savasana and described her experience of the posture as dependent on her life circumstances. On one hand she indicated that Savasana was a chance to start over.

*I think there was some days that I've done it, that were just...you can just totally be like, a corpse (laughs) and there's nothing but anything and just then...coming back into the world...and then the whole little...ritual at the end is...you start of over again for the day, or for the week or for the month or for the year or whatever (laughs). It's just kind of...a new, you just...wake up...*

Iris countered these thoughts by expressing that the experience of savasana was not as relaxing on days when stress flowed into the yoga class, particularly while she was pregnant.

*'Cause there were all...super stressful things going on in the last...months especially when I was doing yoga. And...I couldn't really quiet and then...I can't really do a corpse pose cause my back would feel like it's breaking and now I can't really do it because she's[daughter] not very relaxed.*

*The Challenge of Maintaining Calm*

Almost as often as the participants discussed the positive state of relaxation they experienced in yoga they shared that the state was fleeting and transitory when they re-entered their lives beyond the yoga studio. For many the sense of relaxation lasted for only a few hours or maybe a day after the yoga class. Paige thought the state lasted “*awhile*” or “*til you go out onto the streets or something, something bad happens to you.*” Reagan felt his tension was relieved throughout the day that he participated in yoga. Tom also considered that the effects of yoga class stuck with him for about a day. Bryan drew an interesting comparison between his experiences with relaxation and yoga at military school and those at the yoga programme. He thought that the state of relaxation lasted longer when he was in military school than it currently did leaving the yoga programme.

*Like in military school it lasts a little bit long probably just because you...I dunno you're, you're not so much stress as in here so. Just cause you're doing the same thing over and over again so. But here, you know, it's...it's hard to be (laughs) ah relaxed.*

For John the relaxed state he experienced in savasana did not last beyond the yoga class because his current experience with instable housing did not allow him any sense of relaxation. “*Because right now my living situation I really can't be relaxful. I have to always be moving in one way or another.*”

*From Savasana to Street*

I wondered about the tension between relaxation and street drama. Further, I considered how this tension fit within the process of change for these youth. For some of

the youth, participating in the yoga programme had prompted them to make room for relaxation in their life on the street. Some were finding ways to maintain calm through engaging in yoga or meditative practices throughout the week. Paige found meditation space when someone on the street made her angry. Tom also took time to meditate on the street. Further, Tom explored the idea that remembering sensations experienced in yoga class could be beneficial for the time between classes.

*And then if I just...remember it...I'll experience it for half an hour increments for the days following that for awhile...it's like that with a lot of things. Like if I go to dinner, or...go to a concert, or...have sex or...eat a good meal again or...sleep a lot or study...really vigilantly um...I feel really good for a long time. Or if I go swimming or driving a car or to the Rose Festival or something. Or...talk to...lots of different people or go biking or skateboarding or...Yah I just feel good for a long, long, long time. Cause I'll relate back to those little amounts of times and...I'll...yah I'll just hear them in my head and how they apply to...the next situation. And...that'll satisfy me for...years.*

Jack practiced stretching and body scans at night. Nick and his friends had found a yoga book and used it to practice throughout the week. Malcolm and Iris took additional community yoga classes throughout the week. Finally, Malcolm practiced yoga postures some mornings and evenings. Through conversations with these youth it became apparent that life on the street was chaotic, loud and always moving. The discovery that moments of calm could be integrated into this existence seemed to be a shift in both individual and group culture.

*Safety in Place*

Research conducted by Rosalind Pearmin (2005) identifies the need for safe haven in the transformational experiences of youth. Her study explored the experiences of young people attending summer programmes connected to a spiritual tradition. Specifically, young people were either involved in a week long Quaker Senior Conference or a meditation seminar in the Sahaj Marg (simple or natural way) tradition. In both situations the youth expressed a profound attachment to the safe place they discovered in these programmes.

The main narratives that emerged from the interviews were ones that stressed the opportunity for participants to be safe to become themselves, to be increasingly open to others and themselves, and to explore many avenues of learning and discovery. Intense emotional reactions might be generated in all of this and fundamentally they felt supported by the holding of a spiritual space in which they could be silent, reflect, feel connected and allow deeper meanings to surface. From this perspective, the narratives are intertwined with the difficulties of growing up and managing belonging and separateness, finding deeper inspiration and meaning as a vehicle to support their life direction and quite simply increasing confidence in themselves and the world. (Pearmain, 2005, p. 280)

As many of the youth who are street-involved explained, the streets are not a safe place for taking risks to grow and explore new aspects of self. The pressures and anxiety created by the violence and abuse on the street force youth to hide aspects of themselves. "We could imagine this environment phenomenologically as like living in a two-dimensional space where you have a front and a back but no inner space, no inner

recesses or interior domains, nor the sense of dimensions of life” (Pearmain, 2005, p. 288). A high, a different world, a trance, a new beginning and a chance for a return to an inner child; these are powerful descriptions of an experience. These descriptors explore the possibility of inner domains and multiple dimensions for these youth who are street-involved. That many of the youth spoke specifically and emphatically about the safe space that yoga and specifically savasana created is significant in juxtaposition to their greater life experience on the streets.

From this perspective, offering a place where young people can live freely within the structures that endure and are consistent while offering passionate, engaging and profound opportunities for experience and reflection in a sacred and still space of solitude may allow them to feel that they can return home again to the Self within. (Pearmain, 2005, p. 289)

Maybe yoga and savasana become, for these youth, a quiet, relaxed space that includes a sense of safety. That sense of safety then allows these youth the possibility of exploration of other aspects of self and change in life circumstances.

## Chapter 7

### Programme Considerations

The stories of these youth and their experiences with yoga provide a window into an entire realm of possibilities for assisting some youth who are street-involved. Over the years there have been many programmes and models that tried to assist youth to move off the street or reduce the harm they experience while living on the street. What is probably most salient from all of the models and programmes, both positive and negative, is that no one programme is the ultimate solution for every youth. Each youth brings a unique cultural and personal context to any programme. This diversity means that each youth will react and integrate differently with every programme. "Programmes designed for runaway and homeless youth need to be flexible and person-centred" (Kurtz et al., 2000, p. 400). Diversity and multiplicity are important in programme models working with youth who are street-involved.

Yoga is the latest health trend in North American culture. It stands to reason that as yoga reaches the mass market more helping professionals may try to integrate the practice into their work with clients. As was identified by the youth during these interviews there are many possible benefits to integrating yoga but the conversations also identified many factors that need to be considered before simply adding yoga to a programme.

To help explore some of these factors I interviewed Doug, an outreach worker, at the centre where the yoga classes occurred. Doug was the youth worker responsible for organizing the yoga classes within the centre. He attended all of the yoga classes with the youth. He had been the link between the yoga programme and the youth centre for almost

two years at the time of the interview. During our interview Doug provided information about the youth centre and the history of the yoga programme within the centre. The centre was multidimensional in the programmes and services it offered. The facility included a health clinic, an education and employment centre, transitional apartment housing and a drop-in centre. Doug stated that the drop-in centre was regarded as “*safety off the streets and daily needs*” as well as an access point to other services. The drop-in centre offered basic need services including laundry, meals, showers and hygiene supplies. Additionally the drop-in facilitated programmes including movie nights, young men’s and women’s group, active outings and yoga. The centre also offered counselling and case planning support for the youth. Doug identified that some youth used all aspects of the centre where as others simply dropped in to do laundry or check email. He also highlighted the mentoring and relationships developed between youth and workers were a key aspect of the youth centre.

The history of the yoga programme coming to settle within the structure of the drop-in centre and the culture of the youth provides some interesting learning for future programmes that are considering integrating yoga. At the time of the interviews the yoga programme had established what could be described as a delicate balance within the youth centre. Yoga classes were being offered once a week on Sundays for an hour and a half. The youth were given a five dollar gift card incentive after attending two classes and for each pair of classes they attended thereafter. Most classes saw between six and twelve youth in attendance with alternating yoga teachers each week. The classes were held in a meeting room in the basement of the facility.

The integration of yoga into the youth centre had not been smooth. In the beginning the yoga classes were offered immediately after meal times in the actual drop-in room. Doug told stories of food being thrown at youth practicing yoga and some individuals yelling things such as “*yoga sucks*”. The first step towards integration was to move the programme to a quiet room. Through my conversations with Doug and the youth a variety of issues related to successful integration of yoga classes were identified. These issues included: 1) the use of incentives, 2) negotiating sleep, 3) changing culture and 3) number of classes. Overall the negotiation of a positive place for yoga within the youth centre took about two years. “*And then finally it just organically kind of took care of itself as far as really establishing this is a space for yoga.*” (Doug)

#### *Incentives*

In the case of the yoga programme incentives were identified as external motivators set in place to prompt change. Tangibly the incentives were five dollar gift cards given to the youth for their participation in programs. Doug identified that the yoga programme and the drop-in centre had grappled with the incentives and the role the gift card would play in yoga attendance. Initially, the center debated giving incentives at all. The staff worried that they were simply bribing youth to attend and struggled with the gift cards being spent on cigarettes. When the yoga programme finally began youth received an incentive for every class attended. Classes reached up to eighteen youth and the results were often chaotic. Doug stated about those classes: “*Yelling, screaming, not wanting to do it. A couple of fights would start up.*” In the end the decision was made to offer gift cards after a youth had attended two classes. He identified that this decision helped to shift the yoga culture within the youth centre.

My initial reaction upon hearing that the youth were offered a five dollar gift card to attend two yoga classes was disappointment. I wondered if the experience could be genuine if the motivation was not 'pure'. In retrospect, I equated purity with internal or intrinsic motivation. As I considered my initial reaction I recognized many of the faulty and biased assumptions that were inherent in the statement. The first bias was that internal motivation was superior to external motivation even though I believed that change occurred as a result of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. During the interviews many youth stated that the external incentive drew them to yoga but the internal experience of yoga was what brought them back. For example, Paige shared that the five dollar incentive and her curiosity brought her to yoga but the relaxation she experienced during classes brought her back. Malcolm explained that the five dollar gift card drew him to the programme but after a few classes at the yoga programme he chose to also take additional classes in the community with a yoga studio that had offered free classes to youth who are street-involved.

*I wait for next Sunday and I really don't even care about my five dollar little gifts and cause it does...It isn't first off it's a materials, a material self and I'm not a materialistic type of person so. First time I went in I needed the five bucks. Well I figure I needed it but you know I came out with something better.*

For some of the youth motivation for practice seemed shared. *"I do go for the incentive half the time but the other time is really more fun. I like it. It's something different"* (Nick). Iris saved her incentive cards to go shopping. For her they were a bonus of the yoga programme although she went to yoga classes in the community where she received no incentive.

My bias also arose from my position of privilege which allows me to engage in yoga free from concerns about money or the cost of classes. For many youth who are street-involved money is critical to their survival therefore the incentive for attendance at yoga classes may in some cases be a necessity. “Once on the street, their focus becomes solely on the present – make money, get food, find shelter” (Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 2). Jack argued that youth who are street-involved could have no other reason for attending yoga than the money. He drew a distinction between the motivation to attend yoga of those who are street-involved and those with stable accommodation.

*I'm just like whatever man you know what I mean I'm just trying to get through it so I can get my incentive and go buy cigarettes. Regardless what any other kid I hear telling you that's same reason they're doing it... Well I mean nobody really goes there for the yoga... Specially down here. Maybe over there at real yoga classes you know people who pay to do yoga. Those cats... but these cats, no!... These cats are homeless... so five buck incentive is a five buck incentive... Regardless of whether they say jog five laps around the school and then you'll, you'll be healthier and we'll give you five, it's just they hear five dollar incentive... ok, let's go... You can tell them to roll around in like wet pavement and they would, they'd do it for five bucks.*

Although Jack argued strongly on the side of external motivation he did identify other possible benefits youth could experience through yoga practice.

Many youth who are street-involved “lack the resources to get a job, including a fixed-address, identification, education and job related skills” (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002, as cited in Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 69). Paying youth for their time in yoga may help them

to choose this as a positive alternative to other money making strategies which could have negative consequences.

They often turn to illegal activities, such as prostitution, crime, squeegeeing, or flagging for money (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2001; Caputo et al., 1997). These activities can create additional problems for youth, including criminal records and an increased risk of being the victim of violence (Ayerst, 1999; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2001, 2002; Canadian Housing and Renewal Association et al., 2002)". (Higgitt et al., 2003, p. 69-70)

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) presented an interesting perspective on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations which is useful to consider in respect to incentives for youth who are street-involved.

Quite a bit of evidence shows that whereas people feel worst when what they do is obligatory. Psychic entropy is highest instead when persons feel that what they do is motivated by not having anything else to do. Thus both intrinsic motivation (wanting to do it) and extrinsic motivation (having to do it) are preferable to the state where one acts by default, without having any goal to focus attention (p. 23).

Although Bryan and Reagan identified that yoga provided structure in their week none of the youth interviewed identified coming to yoga because they had nothing else to do on Sunday afternoon. On the other hand many youth identified a combination of wanting to attend yoga and having to come to yoga for the incentive. For example, Jack discussed yoga being beneficial in the future when he was settled with a house, car and a family but *"right now it's kinda like I need the money."*

After almost two years the yoga culture negotiated a place within the greater youth centre culture. The programme felt comfortable offering youth five dollar gift cards for their participation in two yoga classes. This system worked within this youth centre and this youth culture. Each programme that considers incorporating yoga would have to consider their own philosophy about incentives taking into account the youth's street experiences, time and programme goals.

### *Negotiating Sleep*

For the workers involved with the yoga programme their initial reaction was not to let the youth sleep during savasana practice. The staff was adamant that yoga was not a place to sleep. They did not want to pay youth for "sleeping". As understanding of the cultures of both yoga and the streets grew sleeping became accepted. Youth centre staff acknowledged the lack of quality sleep youth get living on the streets and the benefits of relaxation after a yoga class.

*I want to move more towards like acknowledging the wanting to sleep is them saying we don't get quality sleep. And that's more of like verbalizing a lack of sleep and relaxation. (Doug)*

Many of the youth did identify that they slept during savasana and that this peaceful sleep was rare for them. Although the youth discussed the value of sleep during savasana they also acknowledged the importance of the postures in bringing them to the relaxed state where they could fall asleep. As programmes serving youth who are street-involved consider incorporating yoga it is imperative that the culture of yoga and street-youth are both taken into consideration.

*Finding Safety in Shifting Culture*

Street culture is a place where individuals learn to defend and protect themselves. Often street culture necessitates survival instincts to be heightened. Many of the youth who are street-involved have histories of abuse and trauma. So when youth who are street-involved enter a yoga class how are all of these protective instincts negotiated? As Doug identified when yoga classes began at the drop-in centre they were fraught with fights and chaos. In contrast, the practice of yoga encourages a quiet and calm space. These two cultures seem to be polar opposites and initially they came crashing together at the yoga classes. What seemed to develop over time was a meeting and negotiating of these cultures to establish a new norm for the period of a yoga class. At the beginning of each yoga class youth are requested to respect each other and the vulnerability of the space. Although the entire practice is not as quiet as a traditional yoga class there are moments of calm and peace.

Although a meeting of these two cultures can be negotiated there are important considerations and safety precautions that need to be considered prior to the first class. In this study the youth identified the following cautions: 1) postures that create vulnerability or difficulty, 2) risk of trying new things and 3) lack of progression. In considering the first precaution, Nick identified that he did not like the downward dog posture. As a gay male he felt vulnerable in a posture that encouraged him to stick his buttocks in the air. He also shared that the push up postures were difficult due to the lack of strength in his wrists from shooting up drugs. Tom stated that he felt vulnerable in some of the postures.

*Like I just think of my legs 'cause they're so skinny and like stretched out on the floor. It's just vulnerable, having my knees too, like having my inner knees and stuff exposed while I'm stretching. It's just strange.*

Additionally, Iris expressed her frustration with one instructor who did not provide alternative postures for her as a pregnant woman. As the outreach worker, Doug also identified yoga as a vulnerable space for the youth.

During my interview with Troy, the founder of the yoga programme, we discussed his perspective on addressing the vulnerability of postures. He provided two strategies that were used by instructors in the yoga programme which assisted in decreasing vulnerability for participants. The first strategy was awareness of the culture and life circumstance of youth who are street-involved. That meant understanding that many of the youth, both male and female, may have been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives. The teachers considered the language they use to describe the poses. For example a teacher may ask the class to place their feet wider apart on the mat rather than stating “*open your legs wider*” or “*spread your legs*”. The other strategy was to provide youth with alternative postures throughout the yoga class. Alternative postures could mean allowing youth to try a standing posture instead of one that has them bent over. Troy felt that providing alternatives as opposed to avoiding postures altogether respected the youths’ abilities and right to choose.

*I think over time we learned that you do need to be sensitive but you don't need to back off stuff because then you unfairly victimize them. Or you unfairly take away their ability to deal with stuff. (Troy)*

Nespor (2000), as cited in Holthaus (2004), provides some additional considerations for using yoga with vulnerable populations.

She warns that although relaxation is pleasant for most people, some may react to yoga with more anxiety. It could bring back memories of intoxication or physical or sexual abuse. For this reason, she suggests giving the patients fair warning that this could be the case and to open their eyes if necessary, as well as discussing what comes up with their therapist. (p. 23)

Doug, the outreach worker, attends all of the yoga classes and recognizes that the classes provide opportunity to connect with the youth.

*And that's good too because comments come out and that's an opportunity to say...you know to talk about how that's uncomfortable to and what it means when a space is...you know exercising together and....that's an intimate space as well. So it's presented a lot of challenges and discomforts and also a good opportunity to connect.*

When programmes consider offering yoga it would be important that outreach workers, case workers, counsellors or therapists are made available to youth should a situation arise when one is triggered by a posture or a practice.

The second consideration noted by the youth was that of risk. For some youth the yoga programme was not their first experience with yoga and therefore they had some familiarity with the postures. For other youth the yoga programme was their initial exposure to the practice. Even for the youth who had done yoga elsewhere practicing new postures or attending classes with other youth who are street-involved may have been risky. The vulnerability and uncertainty created by yoga is important to consider

especially in a group of youth who are already vulnerable to each other on the streets.

Jack identified this issue by stating:

*But when I'm in front of a bunch of people like that it's kind of like embarrassing you know what I mean...It's like you're doing something that you're not even sure of in front of a lot of people.*

The yoga programme addresses this issue by allowing youth alternatives throughout the class and by keeping the class always at a beginner level. Maintaining a beginner level creates a low threshold environment where all youth are encouraged to try the practice. This approach is upheld by literature written about the use of yoga with people in the early stages of drug and alcohol treatment.

She says that these patients are often not accustomed to practicing physical exercise and their self-confidence is low, so exercises should be simple and the facilitator should be 'good humoured, friendly, respectful and calm, even if there are problems and even if the performance is far from perfect'. (Nespor, 2000, as cited in, Holthaus, 2004, p. 22)

The style of providing alternative postures is also supported in research focused on building rapport with youth who are street-involved.

In these instances, such assistance would usually be given with care taken not to rush in with a rescuing response, but rather by discussing the situation and providing at least a choice of two options from which the young person can choose. (Smith, Fischer, Cox & Stocks, 1989, as cited in Morrissette, 1992, p. 448)

On the other hand the issue of progression to keep some youth involved must also be addressed. Malcolm highlighted this issue by indicating some frustration with the

repetitive nature of the yoga programme classes. To help himself cope with his frustration Malcolm would continue his flow practice even when the teacher would stop to assist other new students with specific postures. Malcolm also chose to attend community classes so that he could further develop his practice. This opportunity was set-up by the founder of the yoga programme. The ability to provide these progression alternatives for those youth for whom yoga becomes an integral part of their life is important. Troy stated that he was hoping to increase the number of community yoga organizations that would provide spots in their classes for free to youth from the yoga programme.

*Because when they're accessing services there's always the sense of well "I'm the homeless youth accessing services from you the service provided." Whereas if they show up to this yoga class, they're taking yoga with a bunch of other people and they actually may be stronger than or more flexible than some other people.*

#### *Relationship to Teachers*

The yoga instructors were all voluntarily involved with the yoga programme. This meant that there was a rotation of teachers through the classes at the youth centre. Troy identified that some of the teachers tried teaching at the yoga programme one or two times but did not enjoy the class. Although only two of the participants mentioned the impact of teachers on their practice, I think this is an area for consideration particularly because both of these participants sought additional yoga classes beyond the yoga programme.

Iris considered the impact of a high school instructor on her early experiences with yoga. *"I didn't like the teacher. Maybe that was what was wrong with the yoga*

class.” Iris identified her need to connect with the yoga instructor as part of her yoga experience.

*Just the energy of the person I think...I feel like I connect with people differently all the time... Just, some people I...you could...profile like 20 different people and they'd all have the same... describe themselves the same way or something and ... I'd probably... match well with... 5 of them or something you know there's just some people you get along with differently. Some people just seem more awkward or more foreign... not, like just more awkward kind of, for me to be around [Brooke: Right. So that's important for you doing yoga?] Yah just... feel like, on the good level with a person.*

Woven through her yoga experiences were stories of positive and negative experiences with yoga instructors. She discussed support and encouragement from her prenatal yoga instructor and frustration with one of the yoga programme instructors for not identifying pose adaptations. She also spoke of her enjoyment of an experience with a Kundalini yoga instructor.

*I like that one. I think that might be good for...I dunno know. It was so...goofy that people were like, you know... this guy's a freak (laughs). But he was great... 'Cause he sort of just plays the part you know... he doesn't care if we think he's a weirdo... he is a weirdo, he's totally accepted the fact that... he's not, I mean, he's very unique and... following a very unique... path in life and...and that's what he's doing and he wants to share with us and that's pretty cool...He had this... big lambskin that he brought down that he was on and stuff...and then*

*he gave it to somebody who didn't have...another pregnant girl that... needed more cushions. He was really nice. I liked it.*

Malcolm identified his connection to the yoga instructor the first time he attended a the yoga programme class. *"But I actually like the teacher, the teacher was a real cool dude...And he had some nice music playing, some old school like Marvin Gay."* Malcolm appreciated the way the teacher approached new students who were uncomfortable with the practice. *"Every time there's new people laughing he 'hey that's funny. You know some things feel weird but hey'."*

Youth who are street-involved may have a difficult time building relationships due to their past experiences.

Rejection by agency workers, ineffectiveness of care professionals and tolerance by providers of what appears to homeless persons intolerable conditions have made many homeless persons wary of providers or professionals. (Jahiel, 1987, as cited in Morrissette, 1992, p. 447)

Although youth who are street-involved may take time to develop trusting relationships research with this population has discovered that relationships with both formal and non-formal helpers are important for these youth in reducing the harms they experience and making successful transitions from the street. Kurtz et al. (2000) identified five types of help that youth who are street-involved "perceived as important; caring, trustworthiness, setting boundaries and holding youth accountable, concrete assistance and counselling"(p. 387). Higgitt et al. (2003) identified that most youth in their study "reported that a mentor or an exceptional person within an agency was instrumental in getting them off the street" (p. 80).

Both Iris and Malcolm expressed that the yoga teachers were important aspects of their yoga experience. Although the yoga teachers would not be considered formal helpers in the traditional counselling approach the fact that the teachers are involved with the youth through a change process may necessitate the need to consider them in the role of helper. Further, yoga can be a vulnerable place for many youth therefore developing trust in an instructor may be important for a youth's long term engagement. Troy expressed that yoga teachers at the yoga programme are aware of the relationships they build with the youth and the importance of honouring these.

*I mean we're very respectful of their boundaries and their privacy. So we never go asking them questions or something like that because since we do see them regularly there is a bit of a relationship. And you learn their names and you know some of their stories and stuff comes out. (Troy)*

As programmes consider incorporating yoga they must also address the role of the teacher. Yoga teachers must possess or be provided with some understanding about building relationships with street youth. Considerations of instructor boundaries may also be a necessary area for exploration prior to the start of classes.

The other important point that Troy expressed around building and maintaining relationships with youth was the need to maintain consistency of classes. He believed that it was crucial to ensure that someone showed up every week to provide the class so that the yoga programme became something in which the youth could trust and rely upon. "I don't ever want to take on a commitment without knowing that we can follow through with it over the long term."

Ultimately yoga teachers hold the potential to function as a helper, a mentor or a role model in the lives of some street-involved youth. “This positive mirroring, which reflects the young person’s potential without ignoring the challenging realities they face, provides a powerful navigation tool for these young ‘sailors’” (Kurtz et al., 2003, p. 401).

### *The Yoga Space*

During the initial integration of the yoga programme into the youth centre, classes were held in the drop-in centre. The public space where the classes were being held increased the perceived risk for many youth considering yoga for the first time. The number of youth attending the classes and the ability for the youth to achieve calm during the classes increased when the space was moved from the drop-in centre to a large room in the basement. The room was a large boardroom which was cleared out to make space for the yoga mats. Although this space provided a quiet and secluded alternative to the drop-in centre, Iris highlighted that even the boardroom lacked the sensation of a yoga studio.

*Downstairs is hard to like...it's just got really artificial. It's not the nice yoga space. The yoga place is...the space that's called the yoga place is like, most yoga studios are pretty like, designed to...nice, relaxing inside and it's... warm and the walls are... this really warm colour yellow and there's...big plants on the windowsills that... and...a big altar thing. It's really nice. It's really... it's really warm in there, but not too warm. I don't know, it's just nice and they...have good, those big bolsters and pillows and just...it's a nice place.*

I have attended yoga classes in traditional studios and in fitness centres. I sense a difference in my practice in each of those locations. When I practice in a fitness studio I

have trouble focusing as I feel the frenetic energy left from the aerobics class and I can see myself in all angles of mirrors. In a traditional yoga studio there is often the smell of incense, calming pictures and decorations that draw you into a peaceful state. Although it may not be possible for programmes to consider a space solely for yoga practice, it may be possible to use a room that is set aside for quiet activities. Programmes could consider bringing items to place around the room during yoga class which may help youth to consider the space a special place unique to their yoga experience.

#### *Time*

Another issue for programmes to consider when integrating yoga is the number of classes offered each week. At the yoga programme classes were offered one day a week. A few of the youth expressed interest in attending more than one class each week. Nick stated: *"I wish there was like three. At least three. Like one every other few days. You know Monday, Thursday, Sunday."* Paige wanted classes every other day. Reagan wanted to do yoga more often and indicated that if circumstances in his life were different he would attend more classes. *"Well I bet if I had an apartment and stuff yah I'd be doing it everyday. You know if I had a regular class to go to but you know."* Reagan thought there should be two classes each week, one on Sunday and one Wednesday. Tom also thought he would attend more classes if they were offered each week.

As many of the youth explained during their interviews, the yoga studio was a reprieve from the pressure and stress of life on the streets. Offering two or three classes each week provides youth with the opportunity to escape the streets throughout the week. Additionally, many of the youth discussed the challenge of transitioning between the yoga studio and the streets. They identified that the calm of the studio faded as the street

life enveloped them. With a shorter duration between classes there may be a way for youth to maintain the calm state between the classes or at least not swing so far into their street persona that the transition back to yoga is hard.

*Where does Yoga fit into Working with Street-Involved Youth?*

Can yoga fit into programmes working with street-involved youth? Lindsey et al. (2000) indicate that a strength-based approach to working with youth living street-involved may be the most suitable. “Young people in this study indicated that recognizing their own value was an important step in making significant changes” (Lindsey et al., 2000, p. 137). Yoga can be part of a strength-based approach to working with youth who are street-involved because yoga can provide the opportunity for youth to experience new ways to solve problems and undertake self-care. As the youth in these interviews explained, yoga can provide the opportunity to learn about and acknowledge their strengths. If yoga is understood as one component of a larger strength-based approach to working with youth who are street-involved, then the ability for yoga to fit within the change process of some youth is possible.

*Future Recommendations*

This research explored the connection between youth who are street-involved and yoga. This research had some limitations and at the conclusion there remains a variety of areas for further or more in-depth exploration.

First, this research process involved single interviews with youth therefore the study offers only a snapshot of the impact of yoga within the lives of these youth. A three to six month project that would document, through verbal or visual means, the relationship between yoga and change processes for street-involved youth may help to

deepen understanding of this connection. Visual means may include photography, videography or drawing to capture the story and the experience through different mediums.

Second, this research interviewed youth who were currently street-involved and participating in yoga. A study that included youth who were formerly street-involved and who used yoga as part of their transition from the streets would be beneficial to understanding this process.

Third, this research did not involve any youth who were not impacted or who were negatively impacted by yoga. A study that involved youth who had attended a yoga class and then chose not to return may provide a more holistic picture of yoga and street life.

Fourth, this research was conducted in a large American city where programmes and resources, as well as the experiences of youth who are street-involved are different from Canada. The opportunity to conduct research in Canada on this topic may provide valuable insight for programmes north of the border.

Finally, there were questions that came out of this research process which could become the foundation of future projects. The connection between yoga and shifting street culture or street relationships would provide a fascinating longer term study. Additionally, an in-depth exploration of the link between yoga, spiritual connections and the transition process from the streets would be an important study to broaden the literature base in this area.

## Chapter 8

### Returning to Self

I entered this research project with my own yoga experiences. I came to this research with bias and hopes. The exploration has served to alter some of my perceptions and illuminate more possibilities. It is perhaps at the intersection of stories, mine and the participants, that my greatest learning occurred. I was not ready for the intersection of my yoga story with those of the participants and the new story that was created for me. Listening to their words framed in yoga experiences challenged me to reflect deeper on my own story of yoga.

Throughout this research process, as I considered the youths' experiences with yoga, I began to question my own identity with yoga. I recognized that my internal dialogue coached me to believe that yoga would return to my life when I had time for that peace. Even on the days when I provided myself what seemed like the luxury of a forty-five minute yoga practice I would turn the tape off before savasana. Corpse posture, I believed, was wasted time. I began to wonder if yoga really was part of who I was. Maybe instead it was simply who I want to be or who I thought I should be. As these thoughts filtered through my mind I read the words of the youth who were also grappling with where or how yoga fit into their lives. The theme of the future also seemed to resonate for them. The youth thought that when they were more settled or more stable then yoga might fit better into their lives. Their yoga stories provided me some clarity on my own story.

As Iris discussed her future yoga seemed to be one aspect of her plan. She expressed hope that she would find a yoga class at the college she would attend in the fall

and saw herself taking classes when her daughter started school. She thought it would be easier to practice when she did not have to worry about her daughter throughout class.

*Mommy and baby yoga is very different... You know... No, or just, I mean, or either way just like having a baby, and doing yoga in the same space is different... You can't really relax yourselves you know it's not. Even once she's quiet it's like what's she going to do?... But when she gets older umm I'll do yoga.*

Iris saw her own relationship with yoga as having room to grow and change with the settling of her own life. As Iris walked away from her interview I was left to ponder the question “does yoga create a sense of focus and stability” or “does yoga participation occur more easily once there is stability and focus”.

Having a personal yoga routine, Iris believed, came with experience and a quiet space to practice. Iris thought yoga might fit into a morning routine when she had a nice space such as a garden in which to practice. She thought yoga may be easier if her life was completely stable. “*But maybe if my whole life was like in order and I was focused... I might be able to do it really well.*” Reagan also thought yoga would fit better when he had his own place to practice. “*Well. I would... I say I don't have time but I do but it's like really there's no where to so it. Well I bet if I had an apartment and stuff yah I'd be doing it everyday.*” Jack expressed so perfectly when he might have room in his life for yoga.

*When I or no fuck it when I get my house. And I, and I, and I have a wife and I got some kids. And I have a car and everything's all set up and I can go and cook my own damn macaroni and I can sleep in my own bed and all this. Then, then, maybe on, on those Saturdays when I got shit to do, like yoga comes up. And it'll*

*be beneficial towards my life. You know what I mean? So yah then I think yoga will play some part in my life. But right now it's kinda like I need the money.*

As their words and thoughts intersected with my own I had to wonder when yoga would fit into my life again. I have a beautiful home surrounded by trees and a peaceful spot in which to practice. I can cook my own “*damn macaroni*” or whatever I choose. I have a wonderful and understanding partner who encourages my practice. Granted not all is stable in my life. I am in the middle of changing jobs for the third time in one year, in addition to trying to teach a course and write a thesis. But as their words intersect with my own I realize that the stability I am seeking is internal and in my past experiences internal stability has come through my practice of yoga.

The salience of this understanding is powerful. If I wait until my external life is completely stable then I will likely wait my entire life to practice yoga because as much as I crave stability, I thrive on change.

This research process and the stories shared by nine youth heightened my own awareness and increased clarity of my own yoga story. I am thankful for the stories that they shared and hope in the sharing the youth also gained new understanding of the role of yoga within their lives.

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## Appendix A

### *Interview Questions*

#### *Interviews with Youth*

- 1) How did you come to decide to take a yoga class?
- 2) Can you tell me about your first experiences with yoga?
- 3) What parts of the yoga classes stand out for you?
- 4) How do you feel after yoga classes?
- 5) What do you take with you from classes?
- 6) What keeps you coming back to the classes?

#### *Background and Context Interviews*

##### *Yoga Instructor.*

- 1) How long have you been teaching yoga to marginalized or at-risk populations?
- 2) What style of yoga do you currently use?
- 3) Are there any theoretical perspectives you bring to yoga classes with youth who are street-involved?
- 4) Are there any considerations (physical, mental, emotional) to using yoga with this population? What adjustments do you make to classes or postures?

##### *Outreach Worker.*

- 1) Can you tell me a little about your centre and the programmes you offer?
- 2) How does yoga fit within the other programmes at your centre?
- 3) Can you tell me a little about the other services offered to youth living on the streets in your area or city?
- 4) In general what are some of the issues you come across in working with youth who access the centre?

## Appendix B

*Participant Waivers**Youth***A New Twist: Yoga Within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved****Researcher**

Brooke Alsbury, BRec., CTRS  
School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, Canada  
Graduate Student  
(867) 668-3123

- You are being invited to participate in a study entitled A New Twist: Yoga within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved that is being conducted by Brooke Alsbury.
- I, Brooke Alsbury, am a graduate student in the department of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. You may contact me at 867-668-3123 or [balsbury@northwestel.net](mailto:balsbury@northwestel.net) if you have questions about the research.
- This research is carried out under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Scott. You may also contact him with questions or concerns about the research at 250-472-4770 or [dgscott@uvic.ca](mailto:dgscott@uvic.ca).
- This investigation seeks to gather stories and knowledge about the experiences of yoga within the lives of youth who are street-involved. This research is offered as a way to gather information about the impact of yoga in the lives youth who are living on or near the streets and to share this information with other youth, communities, researchers and youth workers through presentations and articles.
- The study also fulfills partial requirements for a Master's of Child and Youth Care degree and is partially funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.
- You have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. Through a series of two or three one or one and a half hour interviews you will be asked to share your stories about how yoga has impacted your life on the street. You are welcome to shorten or lengthen this interview time. You will be asked to reflect on your experiences of yoga and discuss how these experiences have fit into or made changes in your life. The interview will be semi-structured leaving plenty of space for you to tell your stories about yoga in your life. With your permission the interviews will be audio-taped. The interviews can occur in a public place and at a time where you feel most comfortable and where you believe your privacy will be most protected.

- There is a risk that through sharing your stories of yoga in these interviews emotions may be triggered. To help you deal with these emotions if they arise, you may choose not to answer any question or stop the interview any time. Additionally, outreach workers will be available to process any issues that come up for you during the interviews. I can help you connect with the worker if that is needed.
- In addition to the potential risk, there are also possible benefits to your participation in this research. Involvement in this study may provide you with the opportunity for self-reflection and the chance to develop a deeper understanding of your experiences with yoga. Additionally, your involvement provides an opportunity to share your story and provide new ideas and information to professionals, researchers and society about ways to help or work with youth who are living street-involved.
- You will be provided with a gift of Northern Food from the researcher as my appreciation for the sharing of your story. The yoga programme will provide \$5 for the sharing of your time and story. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY AND IF YOU ARE ONLY WILING TO DO IT IN ORDER TO BE PAID THAN YOU SHOULD REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE.
- As your involvement is strictly voluntary, you may decide to withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, I will ask for your verbal permission to include any data or stories previously gathered in the interviews. Your refusal to include this data will be accepted without any consequences or need for explanation. You will receive the gift of food even if you decide to leave the study before completion.
- Neither your real name nor identifying information will be used in this research in order to protect your confidentiality. Confidentiality may be limited in this study due to the help of workers at the youth centre in connecting you to me, the researcher, and the small numbers of youth participating in yoga classes. To assist in maintaining your confidentiality any worker who helped to connect you to the research has signed a confidentiality form stating they will not share the names of the people involved in this research. Additionally, you will be able to choose the site of the interview.
- Confidentiality cannot be assured if you disclose information which the researcher is legally obligated to report to authorities including indications of harm to yourself or to other people.
- To protect the stories you shared all audio recordings and written transcripts will be password protected on computers and/or locked in a secure location. All records of the research will be kept for seven years and then erased, deleted or shredded. I will be the only person with access to this data.
- The stories you share will become part of the researcher's Master's Thesis and may be used by the researcher in future projects including a doctoral dissertation. Your stories may also be shared through presentations to youth workers and other researchers or in articles in magazines or journals.

- You will be given copies of your written transcripts as well as a copy of the final report.
- In addition to being able to contact me, the researcher or Daniel Scott, my supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may also verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you may have by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria 250-472-4545 or [ovprhe@uvic.ca](mailto:ovprhe@uvic.ca).
- A copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher and one will be given to you, the participant.

By signing this form, you certify that you have read and understood all of the information regarding your participation in this study and that you had the opportunity to have your questions answered by Brooke, the researcher.

I give informed consent to participate in this project and I agree to allow the researcher, Brooke Alsbury to audio record our conversations.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Outreach Worker***A New Twist: Yoga Within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved****Researcher**

Brooke Alsbury, BRec., CTRS  
 School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, Canada  
 Graduate Student  
 (867) 668-3123

- You are being invited to participate in a study entitled A New Twist: Yoga within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved that is being conducted by Brooke Alsbury.
- I, Brooke Alsbury, am a graduate student in the department of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. You may contact me at 867-668-3123 or balsbury@northwestel.net if you have questions about the research.
- This research is carried out under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Scott. You may also contact him with questions or concerns about the research at 250-472-4770 or dgscott@uvic.ca.
- This investigation seeks to gather stories and knowledge about the experiences of yoga within the lives of youth who are street-involved. This research is offered as a way to gather information about the impact of yoga in the lives youth who are living on or near the streets and to share this information with other youth, communities, researchers and youth workers through presentations and articles.
- The study also fulfills partial requirements for a Master's of Child and Youth Care degree and is partially funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.
- You have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. Through a one hour interview you will be asked to discuss the services available to youth who are street-involved both at youth centre and throughout the city. The interview will also be an opportunity to discuss theories, perspectives and philosophies used by the youth centre in working with youth who are street-involved. You are welcome to shorten or lengthen this interview time. The interview will be semi-structured leaving plenty of space for you to discuss your thoughts. With your permission the interview will be audio-taped. The interview time and place can be flexible to fit into your schedule.
- Your involvement provides an opportunity to share your thoughts and provide new ideas and information to professionals, researchers and society about ways to help or work with youth who are living street-involved.
- You will be provided with a gift of Northern Food from the researcher as my appreciation for the sharing of your thoughts and your time.

- As your involvement is strictly voluntary, you may decide to withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, I will ask for your verbal permission to include any data or stories previously gathered in the interview. Your refusal to include this data will be accepted without any consequences or need for explanation. You will receive the gift of food even if you decide to leave the study before completion.
- Neither your real name nor identifying information will be used in this research in order to protect your confidentiality. Confidentiality cannot be assured if you disclose information which the researcher is legally obligated to report to authorities including indications of harm to yourself or to other people.
- To protect the thoughts you shared all audio recordings and written transcripts will be password protected on computers and/or locked in a secure location. All records of the research will be kept for seven years and then erased, deleted or shredded. I will be the only person with access to this data.
- The information you share will become part of the researcher's Master's Thesis and may be used by the researcher in future projects including a doctoral dissertation. Your information may also be shared through presentations to youth workers and other researchers or in articles in magazines or journals.
- You will be given copies of your written transcripts as well as a copy of the final report.
- In addition to being able to contact me, the researcher or Daniel Scott, my supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may also verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you may have by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria 250-472-4545 or [ovprhe@uvic.ca](mailto:ovprhe@uvic.ca).
- A copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher and one will be given to you, the participant.

By signing this form, you certify that you have read and understood all of the information regarding your participation in this study and that you had the opportunity to have your questions answered by Brooke, the researcher.

I give informed consent to participate in this project and I agree to allow the researcher, Brooke Alsbury to audio record our conversations.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Yoga Instructor***A New Twist: Yoga Within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved****Researcher**

Brooke Alsbury, BRec., CTRS  
School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, Canada  
Graduate Student  
(867) 668-3123

- You are being invited to participate in a study entitled A New Twist: Yoga within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved that is being conducted by Brooke Alsbury.
- I, Brooke Alsbury, am a graduate student in the department of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. You may contact me at 867-668-3123 or balsbury@northwestel.net if you have questions about the research.
- This research is carried out under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Scott. You may also contact him with questions or concerns about the research at 250-472-4770 or dgscott@uvic.ca.
- This investigation seeks to gather stories and knowledge about the experiences of yoga within the lives of youth who are street-involved. This research is offered as a way to gather information about the impact of yoga in the lives youth who are living on or near the streets and to share this information with other youth, communities, researchers and youth workers through presentations and articles.
- The study also fulfills partial requirements for a Master's of Child and Youth Care degree and is partially funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.
- You have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. Through a one hour interview you will be asked to share the philosophies and styles you bring to yoga practice with youth who are street-involved. The interview will also be an opportunity to discuss unique adaptations to using yoga with youth who are street-involved. You are welcome to shorten or lengthen this interview time. The interview will be semi-structured leaving plenty of space for you to discuss your thoughts. With your permission the interview will be audio-taped. The interview time and place can be flexible to fit into your schedule.
- There are possible benefits to your participation in this research. Involvement in this study may provide you with the opportunity for self-reflection and the chance to develop a deeper understanding of your experiences with yoga. Additionally, your involvement provides an opportunity to share your thoughts and provide new ideas and information to professionals, researchers and society about ways to help or work with youth who are living street-involved.

- You will be provided with a gift of Northern Food from the researcher as my appreciation for the sharing of your thoughts and your time.
- As your involvement is strictly voluntary, you may decide to withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, I will ask for your verbal permission to include any data or stories previously gathered in the interview. Your refusal to include this data will be accepted without any consequences or need for explanation. You will receive the gift of food even if you decide to leave the study before completion.
- Neither your real name nor identifying information will be used in this research in order to protect your confidentiality. Confidentiality cannot be assured if you disclose information which the researcher is legally obligated to report to authorities including indications of harm to yourself or to other people.
- To protect the thoughts you shared all audio recordings and written transcripts will be password protected on computers and/or locked in a secure location. All records of the research will be kept for seven years and then erased, deleted or shredded. I will be the only person with access to this data.
- The information you share will become part of the researcher's Master's Thesis and may be used by the researcher in future projects including a doctoral dissertation. Your information may also be shared through presentations to youth workers and other researchers or in articles in magazines or journals.
- You will be given copies of your written transcripts as well as a copy of the final report.
- In addition to being able to contact me, the researcher or Daniel Scott, my supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may also verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you may have by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria 250-472-4545 or [ovprhe@uvic.ca](mailto:ovprhe@uvic.ca).
- A copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher and one will be given to you, the participant.

By signing this form, you certify that you have read and understood all of the information regarding your participation in this study and that you had the opportunity to have your questions answered by Brooke, the researcher.

I give informed consent to participate in this project and I agree to allow the researcher, Brooke Alsbury to audio record our conversations.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

*Recruiter Confidentiality Waiver*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand that importance of protecting the confidentiality of the youth participants involved in the research project, A New Twist: Yoga within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved, being conducted by Brooke Alsbury through the University of Victoria School of Child and Youth Care.

I agree not to divulge the names or any identifying characteristics of the youth participants involved in this research to anyone other than the researcher, Brooke Alsbury:

- a) during the recruitment process or;
- b) during the conducting of the interviews or;
- c) after the completion of the research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Recruiter

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D

### *Site Permission*

#### *Introduction Letter*

My name is Brooke Alsbury and I am currently completing my Master of Arts in Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. The working title for my MA degree is: A New Twist: Yoga Within the Stories of Youth who are Street-Involved.

Through two or three conversational interviews I hope to explore, with youth, how yoga fits within their stories of living on the street. Through background discussions with yoga instructors and outreach workers I want to gather information about the context in which youth locate their stories including the theoretical or philosophical perspectives used by these workers.

#### Why Yoga and Youth

My curiosity and interest in this topic arise from using yoga and meditation in my own practice as a recreation therapist and counsellor with youth. I have observed many youth attach to these practices and seek ways to continue participation. More and more I have heard of other programmes and individuals using these practices with youth. There are a series of questions guiding my interest: Why yoga? Is yoga used a tool by youth to cope with stress, trauma or emotions? Is yoga a vehicle for spiritual connection? How do youth fit yoga within their larger life story? No one has asked these questions of youth who are street-involved, nor is there published research on programmes using yoga with these youth. This inquiry is offered as a way to begin to dialogue with youth who are street-involved and to gather their stories to share with other youth, communities and professionals.

#### Time Commitments and Process

With your permission, I hope to work with your centre as the research site and establish a process that fits with your centre, your yoga programme and the youth who access your programme. I estimate the time commitment for youth participants will be between 2 and 4 hours. I would like to involve between 5 and 10 youth in 2 or 3 interviews over the period of two weeks.

I will need some assistance during the recruiting process. I will provide one or two people whom your organization designates with posters and letters of invitation to be given to youth currently participating in yoga classes at your centre. Youth who are interested can contact that designated person who can provide the names to myself, the researcher, and help me connect with the youth to set up initial meetings. The designated people will be asked to sign a confidentiality waiver to protect the identities of those youth who choose to be involved in the research.

An initial meeting between the youth and me will be held. During this meeting the research process will be explained and any questions participants may have will be answered. A consent form outlining all aspects of the research will be given to the youth for signing after the form has been explained in detail. An initial interview will be scheduled upon signing the consent form. A blank copy of this consent form will be provided to your centre for your records.

The interviews will be semi-structured with broad questions to promote conversation. They interviews will be audio-taped with the permission of the youth. The first interview will ask youth to share stories of their experiences with yoga. In the time period between interviews the first sessions will be transcribed and questions for the second interview will arise from these transcriptions.

Prior to interviews with the youth I hope to meet with a yoga instructor and an outreach worker connected to your programme to gather background and contextual information on your programme and philosophy.

Upon completion of the interviews I will be transcribing, analyzing and synthesizing the stories shared. Participants will be given copies of their interview transcripts in addition to final copies of the thesis.

For more information about this research please contact Brooke Alsbury at 867-668-3123 or balsbury@northwestel.net. This research is carried out under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Scott. You may also contact him with questions or concerns about the research at 250-472-4770 or dgscott@uvic.ca.

#### Research Site Permission

By signing this form, you certify that your agency understands the nature of the research project A New Twist: Yoga Within the Lives of Youth who are Street-Involved conducted by Brooke Alsbury. Additionally, your signature indicates that you have had an opportunity to have any questions regarding the research answered. Finally, your signature identifies that your agency is agreeable to be a site for recruitment of youth to participate in this research.

The agency \_\_\_\_\_ gives informed consent to participate as a site in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Agency

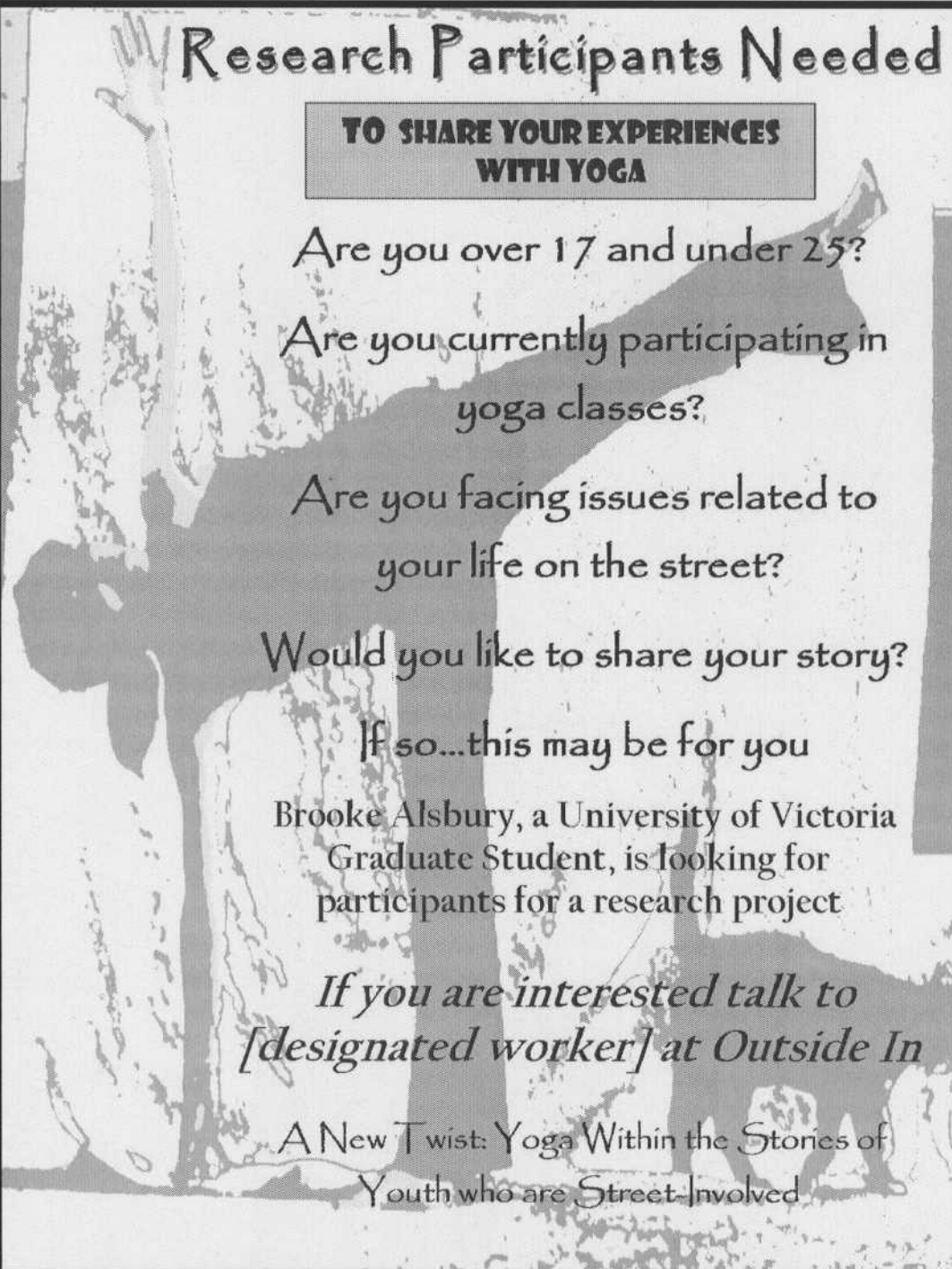
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Agency Officer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E

## Recruitment Poster



**Research Participants Needed**

**TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES  
WITH YOGA**

Are you over 17 and under 25?

Are you currently participating in  
yoga classes?

Are you facing issues related to  
your life on the street?

Would you like to share your story?

If so...this may be for you

Brooke Alsbury, a University of Victoria  
Graduate Student, is looking for  
participants for a research project

*If you are interested talk to  
[designated worker] at Outside In*

*A New Twist: Yoga Within the Stories of  
Youth who are Street-Involved*