



**INNER IMMERSION:  
AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED MODEL  
FOR TRANSFORMATIVE MENTAL HEALTH CARE  
AND PROFESSIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This paper presents Inner Immersion, a clinically validated intervention that offers a vital contribution to addressing the complex mental health and substance use challenges in British Columbia. Amidst the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the toxic drug crisis, Inner Immersion offers a comprehensive approach addressing the needs of both mental health professionals and individuals seeking treatment. Recognizing the profound influence of early life experiences, including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), on long-term mental health outcomes, our program integrates evidence-based practices within a trauma-informed, holistic framework. Inner Immersion enhances practitioners' capacity to serve more clients effectively while providing transformative therapeutic experiences.

Importantly, the program also serves as a protective factor against professional burnout, offering mental health providers a supportive peer network, ongoing training, and a more balanced work model. This approach not only improves job satisfaction and longevity in the field but also ensures consistently high-quality care for clients. By improving accessibility to care, addressing deep-rooted issues across all age groups, and supporting the well-being of mental health professionals, Inner Immersion aims to make a significant impact on mental health outcomes throughout the province, offering a scalable and efficient response to the escalating demand for mental health services in British Columbia.

## 2. Introduction:

### **The Mental Health and Substance Use Crisis in British Columbia**

British Columbia is facing an unprecedented crisis in mental health and substance use disorders (SUDs), exacerbated by a confluence of global and local challenges. In recent years, the province has grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing toxic drug supply emergency, rising alcohol consumption, increasing housing insecurity and the escalating impacts of climate change, creating a perfect storm of stressors affecting the mental health and well-being of its residents of all ages.

The toxic drug crisis remains a critical concern in British Columbia. In 2023, the province reported more than 2,500 deaths due to toxic drugs, marking one of the highest annual totals on record. This crisis has made drug toxicity the leading cause of unnatural death in the province, surpassing fatalities from homicides, suicides, and motor vehicle incidents combined.

Alcohol use disorders also pose significant challenges. Data from the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research indicates that alcohol-related hospitalizations in British Columbia increased by 18.5% between 2015 and 2020. The economic burden of alcohol use in the province is estimated at \$2.8 billion annually, encompassing healthcare costs, lost productivity, and criminal justice expenses.

It is also important to acknowledge the impact of climate-related events on mental health, particularly among youth. The devastating wildfires of 2021 and 2023 in British Columbia have contributed to increased stress and anxiety levels, adding another layer to the existing mental health challenges, particularly on the youth.

The compounding effects of the pandemic, climate change, and the toxic drug crisis have created an unprecedented need for mental health and substance use support. The intersection of mental health issues, and substance use creates a complex web of challenges that requires comprehensive interventions. In this context, it is crucial to recognize that mental health should be treated with the same urgency and importance as physical health.

Moreover, the mental health care system itself is under strain. Mental health professionals face burnout and workforce shortages, limiting their ability to meet the growing demand for services. This creates a dual crisis: increasing mental health needs and a shortage of providers to address them.

Despite significant financial investments and policy initiatives aimed at addressing these issues, British Columbia still lacks a cohesive, high-quality system of care. The current approach often involves waiting for problems to escalate before intervening, which is costly and ineffective.

In response to these challenges, Inner Immersion offers an innovative solution that addresses the root causes rather than merely treating symptoms. Our program provides a holistic approach that integrates mind, body, and spirit through evidence-based practices such as mindfulness,

breathwork, and narrative therapy. By focusing on addressing underlying trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), Inner Immersion empowers individuals to achieve significant breakthroughs in their mental health journey.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that 75% of individuals in substance abuse treatment report histories of abuse and trauma. Our groundbreaking program offers both prevention and intervention strategies, serving as a proactive tool for building emotional resilience and as an effective intervention for those in crisis.

Furthermore, Inner Immersion addresses key challenges faced by mental health professionals. Our model allows practitioners to work more efficiently, effectively working with between 180 up to 360 unique clients per year while maintaining work-life balance. This highly effective approach not only helps prevent burnout but also increases the overall capacity of the mental health care system.

While no single solution can fully resolve the complex issues surrounding addiction and mental health crises, Inner Immersion offers an invaluable tool that addresses the core of these challenges. By treating the underlying causes rather than applying temporary fixes to symptoms, our program provides a path to recovery and resilience for British Columbians of all ages.

This white paper aims to present Inner Immersion as a comprehensive two-pronged strategy that supports both mental health professionals and individuals seeking treatment. Through our innovative approach, combining group sessions with personalized follow-up—we offer scalable, efficient solutions designed to improve mental health outcomes across the province and transform the landscape of mental health care in British Columbia.

**Inner Immersion's unique value proposition includes:**

**Efficiency and Scalability:** Our program enables mental health professionals to work with significantly more clients per year compared to traditional models, helping to address the critical shortage of mental health services. Inner Immersion facilitators can see between 180 and 360 unique clients per year, far exceeding industry standards, making a significant breakthrough in just one to two iterations of the program.

**Holistic Approach:** By integrating evidence-based practices such as mindfulness, breathwork, and narrative therapy, Inner Immersion addresses the complex needs of individuals with trauma histories and substance use disorders. This is particularly relevant given that the vast majority of individuals with SUDs have a history of trauma.

**Professional Support:** We offer mental health professionals competitive compensation, flexible scheduling, and a supportive peer network, addressing issues of burnout and job dissatisfaction in the field. Our facilitators enjoy higher than industry standard earnings, working fewer hours with more support.

**Accessibility:** Inner Immersion focuses on providing culturally competent mental health services to marginalized communities, helping to bridge the gap in care for underserved

populations. This is crucial given that the US and Canada face severe shortages of mental health professionals.

**Prevention and Intervention:** Our program serves as both a proactive tool for building emotional resilience and an intervention strategy to mitigate the risk of mental health crises. This dual approach is essential in addressing the complex needs of individuals with co-occurring mental health issues and substance use disorders.

By addressing the needs of both mental health professionals and clients, Inner Immersion offers a transformative solution to the current crisis in mental health care. Our approach not only improves individual outcomes but also has the potential to significantly impact the broader mental health landscape.

In British Columbia, mental health and substance use services funding has seen significant increases in recent years. The 2021 budget allocated an additional \$500 million over three years to expand mental health and addiction services. This brings the total annual investment in mental health and addictions care to \$2.7 billion. On a national scale, the Mental Health Commission of Canada reports that the economic burden of mental illness is estimated at \$51 billion per year, which includes health care costs, lost productivity, and reductions in health-related quality of life.

Given these substantial investments and the growing recognition of mental health needs, Inner Immersion is well-positioned to make a significant impact in British Columbia's mental health landscape. Our innovative program aligns with the province's commitment to improving mental health care, combining traditional therapeutic techniques with cutting-edge methodologies to meet the escalating demands for mental health services in British Columbia and beyond.

## 3. Inner Immersion Program Overview

### 3.1 Program Overview

Inner Immersion is a pioneering and clinically validated art-based solution designed to address societal mental health challenges through a groundbreaking and holistic approach. This innovative methodology emphasizes core values including acceptance, forgiveness, self-worth, resilience, purpose, and hope. Extensive research demonstrates the vital role of spirituality in recovering from trauma, and Inner Immersion effectively addresses the deep human desires for meaning, transcendence, and connection—elements crucial for a truly comprehensive healing experience.

The program is designed to facilitate significant breakthroughs in identifying core issues and fostering transformation and healing for individuals facing a range of mental health concerns, including depression, PTSD, addiction, anxiety, and grief. It consists of two key components: a six-hour in-person group session followed by a private 60-90 minute one-on-one session with a licensed mental health professional (LMHP) via Zoom. This dual approach creates a full 360-degree process that enhances therapeutic outcomes and addresses the complexities of individual experiences.

Wilka Roig, MTP, MFA, PLC, a clinical psychologist with extensive expertise in transpersonal psychology and cultural sensitivity in healthcare, plays a vital role in validating the Inner Immersion approach. With her education from Cornell University and the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology at Sophia University, along with her extensive experience in clinical settings and advocacy for quality end-of-life care, Roig emphasizes that Inner Immersion uniquely engages multiple facets of an individual's psyche simultaneously. This multifaceted approach allows participants to connect safely with various aspects of themselves that are ready for healing.

Inner Immersion creates a safe, supportive environment where participants can identify and explore deep-seated issues while experiencing profound insights. Roig emphasizes that the program's design inherently reduces resistance and defense mechanisms, allowing for a more fluid therapeutic process. This aligns with research on creating safe therapeutic environments to facilitate change<sup>1</sup>

By combining evidence-based interventions within a transpersonal framework, Inner Immersion facilitates rapid breakthroughs that might take months or years to achieve in traditional therapy settings. The program's design allows it to engage "the whole person," including all senses, both hemispheres of the brain, intuition, and emotional processing.

The follow-up one-on-one session provides an opportunity for participants to delve deeper into their personal experiences while reinforcing insights gained during the group session. This

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<sup>1</sup> Norcross, J.C., & Wampold, B.E. (2011). Evidence-based therapy relationships: Research conclusions and clinical practices. *Psychotherapy*, 48(1), 98-102.

structure not only enhances emotional processing but also empowers clients by giving them agency over their healing journey.

Inner Immersion transforms the traditional hierarchical patient-therapist relationship into a more egalitarian and collaborative dynamic. This approach, as Roig emphasizes, is a crucial differentiator from conventional therapy models. The program begins with the founder, Jose Hernandez's, personal story, followed by the facilitator sharing their own personal story, establishing vulnerability and trust within the group. These acts of sharing breaks down traditional barriers between the "experts" and the "patients," creating a space where all participants, including the facilitator, are seen as fellow travelers on a healing journey.<sup>2</sup>

Through this comprehensive approach, Inner Immersion positions itself as a scalable solution to meet the growing demand for mental health services while addressing the complexities associated with trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). By fostering an environment where all aspects of self are welcomed and engaged, Inner Immersion offers participants a transformative path toward healing and resilience.

### 3.2 Program Components and Evidence Based Support

The Inner Immersion experience consists of two key components: a six-hour in-person group session which incorporates a number of evidence-based elements followed by a private 60-90 minute remote one-on-one follow-up session, both facilitated by a licensed mental health professional (LMHP) certified in the Inner Immersion method. This dual approach creates a full 360-degree process that enhances therapeutic outcomes and addresses the complexities of individual experiences.

The Inner Immersion experience begins with two foundational elements that establish a safe and supportive environment:

1. **Near-Death Experience (NDE) Narrative:** The session opens with the sharing of the Founder's personal story and profound insights from his near-death experience (NDE), which serves to create a transpersonal framework. This narrative fosters self-worth, meaning, purpose, and hope among participants. Research by Kenneth Ring and Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino has shown that individuals who are exposed to NDE accounts often experience positive psychological and spiritual changes similar to those reported by NDE experiencers themselves, including increased appreciation for life, reduced fear of death, and enhanced sense of purpose<sup>3</sup>.
2. **Facilitator's Personal Story:** Following the founder's NDE narrative, the LMHP shares their own personal journey. This critical step establishes vulnerability and trust within the group, creating an atmosphere conducive to open exploration. Research on the

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<sup>2</sup> Knox, S., & Hill, C. E. (2003). Therapist self-disclosure: Research-based suggestions for practitioners. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 59(5), 529-539.

<sup>3</sup> Ring, K., & Valarino, E. E. (1998). *Lessons from the Light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience*. Moment Point Press



therapeutic alliance highlights the importance of trust in achieving positive treatment outcomes.

Roig notes that this approach creates a unique communal atmosphere that fosters a sense of shared journey and collective healing. This aligns with research on group therapy, which has shown that the sense of universality and group cohesion are powerful therapeutic factors.

### 3.2.1 Program Structure and Flow

Inner Immersion's six-hour group session follows a carefully orchestrated sequence of 22 steps, each building upon the previous to create a cohesive therapeutic experience. The program flow is structured in distinct phases:

#### Foundation Phase

- Establishes psychological safety through the NDE narrative and facilitator sharing
- Creates baseline measurements through initial intention, drawing and questions
- Creates group cohesion and trust
- Introduces mindfulness and grounding techniques

#### Exploration Phase

- Integrates creative expression and art-based interventions
- Incorporates breathwork and sensory integration
- Facilitates deeper emotional processing

#### Integration Phase

- Utilizes group processing and collective interpretation
- Applies narrative therapy elements
- Strengthens insights and connections

#### Completion Phase

- Establishes comparative measurements through final drawings and questionnaires, demonstrating insights and shifts achieved during the session
- Consolidates therapeutic gains
- Prepares for individual follow-up session
- Establishes ongoing support framework

Each phase incorporates multiple evidence-based elements discussed in our theoretical framework, sequenced to maximize therapeutic benefit while maintaining emotional safety. This structured yet fluid approach allows participants to engage with the material at their own pace while benefiting from the collective healing experience.

### 3.2.2. Evidence-based Aspects:

The session progresses through a process of 22 carefully curated steps in a sequence of evidence-based interventions:

#### Mindfulness and Meditation:

Participants engage in mindfulness exercises and guided meditation, which have been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression<sup>4</sup>.

#### Breathwork:

Participants engage in specific breathing techniques, including conscious connected breathing, which research has shown to be associated with reduced anxiety and improved emotional regulation. A systematic review by Zaccaro et al. (2018) found that breathing practices can positively impact psychophysiological states, including decreased anxiety and enhanced emotional control<sup>5</sup>.

#### Sound and Color Therapy:

The program incorporates carefully selected auditory and visual stimuli to enhance the therapeutic experience, promoting relaxation and emotional well-being. Research has shown that sound therapy, such as the use of singing bowls, can significantly reduce stress, enhance relaxation responses and improve mood, while exposure to certain colors can influence emotional states and psychological functioning<sup>6</sup>.

#### Guided Imagery and Visualization:

Participants engage in guided imagery exercises, which research has shown to be effective in reducing stress and facilitating emotional processing<sup>7</sup>.

#### Narrative Therapy Elements:

The program integrates aspects of narrative therapy, allowing participants to externalize their problems and reframe their personal narratives. Research has shown that narrative therapy techniques can be effective in helping individuals reconstruct their life stories and develop more empowering perspectives. A review by Etchison and Kleist (2000) found that narrative therapy approaches can lead to positive outcomes in various therapeutic contexts, including improved self-concept and problem-solving abilities<sup>8</sup>.

#### Group Processing:

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<sup>4</sup> Goyal, M., et al. (2014). Meditation programs for psychological stress and well-being: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 174(3), 357-368

<sup>5</sup> Zaccaro, A., Piarulli, A., Laurino, M., Garbella, E., Menicucci, D., Neri, B., & Gemignani, A. (2018). How Breath-Control Can Change Your Life: A Systematic Review on Psycho-Physiological Correlates of Slow Breathing. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 12, 353

<sup>6</sup> Goldsby, T. L., et al. (2017). Effects of Singing Bowl Sound Meditation on Mood, Tension, and Well-being: An Observational Study. *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine*, 22(3), 401-406.

Elliot, A. J., & Maier, M. A. (2014). Color psychology: Effects of perceiving color on psychological functioning in humans. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 95-120

<sup>7</sup> Apóstolo, J. L., & Kolcaba, K. (2009). The effects of guided imagery on comfort, depression, anxiety, and stress of psychiatric inpatients with depressive disorders. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 23(6), 403-411

<sup>8</sup> Etchison, M., & Kleist, D. M. (2000). Review of narrative therapy: Research and utility. *The Family Journal*, 8(1), 61-66.

The shared experience fosters group cohesion and support while leveraging the therapeutic benefits of collective healing. A seminal work by Yalom and Leszcz (2005) demonstrates that group therapy can be as effective as individual therapy for many conditions, providing participants with a sense of universality and group cohesion that are powerful therapeutic factors<sup>9</sup>.

#### Art-based Interventions:

Creative expression is utilized as a tool for exploring emotions and enhancing self-awareness. This component is vital in revealing subconscious processes through artistic expression. Research has shown that art therapy can be effective in promoting emotional healing and psychological growth. A systematic review by Uttley et al. (2015) found that art therapy can lead to significant improvements in mental health outcomes, including reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression and enhanced emotional regulation<sup>10</sup>.

Hernandez's art interpretation method, developed over 14 years of working with more than 2,000 participants, is integral to this process. It involves analyzing participants' artwork to uncover deeper psychological insights, drawing on principles of symbolism and unconscious expression in art. This approach aligns with research by Huss (2015), which demonstrates how art can serve as a bridge between conscious and unconscious processes, allowing for the expression and integration of implicit emotional experiences<sup>11</sup>. Wilka Roig describes this art interpretation method as "a collective dream weaving of sorts," where each participant's contribution enriches the group's understanding and healing journey. By carefully observing the group's peer interpretations and interpreting artwork according to Inner Immersion's methodology, facilitators can gain valuable insights into each participant's subconscious mind, helping them address underlying issues that may not surface through verbal communication alone.

This approach aligns with research indicating that art therapy can significantly improve mental health outcomes by providing alternative avenues for self-expression and emotional processing<sup>12</sup>. This technique not only aids in individual self-discovery but also fosters a collective process of meaning-making among participants, enhancing the therapeutic experience through shared interpretation and understanding. The integration of Hernandez's art interpretation method within Inner Immersion enhances its efficacy as a holistic therapeutic modality.

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<sup>9</sup> Yalom, I.D., & Leszcz, M. (2005). *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books

<sup>10</sup> Uttley, L., et al. (2015). Systematic review and economic modelling of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of art therapy among people with non-psychotic mental health disorders. *Health Technology Assessment*, 19(18), 1-120.

<sup>11</sup> Huss, E. (2015). *A theory-based approach to art therapy: Implications for teaching, research and practice*. Routledge

<sup>12</sup> Uttley, L., et al. (2015). Systematic review and economic modelling of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of art therapy among people with non-psychotic mental health disorders\*. *Health Technology Assessment*, 19(18), 1-120.



### 3.3 Theoretical Framework

Inner Immersion's approach is rooted in established psychological theories and practices that collectively contribute to its effectiveness as a comprehensive behavioral health modality. By integrating these frameworks, Inner Immersion addresses the multifaceted nature of mental health challenges, providing participants with a holistic healing experience.

1. **Positive Regard:** A foundational aspect of Inner Immersion is the concept of Positive Regard, rooted in Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology. This principle emphasizes the importance of unconditional acceptance and support for participants throughout their healing journey. By fostering an environment where individuals feel valued and respected, Inner Immersion encourages self-exploration and vulnerability. Research has shown that when clients perceive high levels of Positive Regard from their therapists, they are more likely to engage fully in the therapeutic process and experience positive outcomes (Elliott et al., 2011<sup>13</sup>). This supportive atmosphere is essential for facilitating meaningful change and promoting resilience.
2. **Empowerment Psychology:** Inner Immersion's methodology is grounded in empowerment psychology, which emphasizes helping individuals develop internal resources for healing and self-direction. This framework focuses on guiding participants from states of disempowerment to active engagement in their healing journey. The approach aligns with established empowerment models that emphasize intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components<sup>14</sup>.

Inner Immersion's empowerment framework manifests through several key objectives:

- Exploring and understanding early influences and adverse experiences
- Developing self-awareness and emotional boundaries
- Fostering mental flexibility and present-moment orientation
- Building confidence and self-directed decision-making
- Cultivating connection with self and others

Rather than focusing solely on symptom reduction, this empowerment-based approach helps participants develop internal resources for ongoing growth and transformation. The framework supports Inner Immersion's goal of facilitating meaningful change through self-awareness, boundary setting, and enhanced decision-making capabilities.

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<sup>13</sup> Elliott, R., Watson, J., & Timulak, L. (2011). The role of therapist empathy in client outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Psychotherapy Research*, 21(3), 221-234.

<sup>14</sup> Masin-Moyer, M., Kim, J. C., Engstrom, M., & Solomon, P. (2022). A Scoping Review of the Trauma Recovery and Empowerment Model (TREM). *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 23(3), 699-715. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020967862>

3. **Psychodynamic Theory:** This theory emphasizes gaining insight into unconscious processes and how past experiences shape current behavior and emotional responses. Inner Immersion allows participants to explore deep-seated issues, facilitating self-awareness and understanding of their emotional landscape. Research indicates that psychodynamic approaches can lead to significant improvements in mental health outcomes by helping individuals process unresolved conflicts.<sup>15</sup>
4. **Mindfulness-Based Interventions:** Mindfulness practices are integral to Inner Immersion, helping participants cultivate present-moment awareness and emotional regulation. Studies have shown that mindfulness-based interventions significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, enhance emotional resilience, and promote overall well-being<sup>16</sup>. The incorporation of mindfulness techniques in Inner Immersion supports participants in grounding themselves during the therapeutic process.
5. **Sensory Integration Principles:** Inner Immersion employs sensory integration techniques to help participants regulate emotional responses effectively. Engaging multiple senses through sound, color, and art fosters a deeper connection to one's emotions and experiences. Research has demonstrated that sensory integration can enhance emotional processing and reduce stress<sup>17</sup>.
6. **Creative Expression Techniques:** The program utilizes creative expression as a means of accessing the subconscious and facilitating emotional processing. Art-based interventions allow participants to explore their feelings in a non-verbal manner, which can be particularly beneficial for those who find it challenging to articulate their emotions. Studies indicate that creative therapies can significantly improve mental health outcomes by providing alternative avenues for self-expression<sup>18</sup>.
7. **Group Therapy Elements:** Inner Immersion incorporates principles of group therapy, which leverage social support and shared experiences to enhance healing. Research shows that group therapy can be as effective as individual therapy for many conditions, providing participants with a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation<sup>19</sup>. The communal aspect of Inner Immersion fosters trust and vulnerability among participants, creating a safe space for exploration. As individuals share their interpretations of each other's artwork, they contribute to a shared narrative that enriches the group's healing

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<sup>15</sup> Shedler, J. (2010). The efficacy of psychodynamic psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, 65(2), 98-109.

<sup>16</sup> Goyal, M., et al. (2014). Meditation programs for psychological stress and well-being: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 174(3), 357-368.

<sup>17</sup> Bundy, A., Lane, S. J., & Murray, E. A. (2002). Sensory Integration: A Special Issue on Sensory Integration Theory and Practice. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 56(1), 1-9.

<sup>18</sup> Uttley, L., et al. (2015). Systematic review and economic modelling of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of art therapy among people with non-psychotic mental health disorders\*. *Health Technology Assessment*, 19(18), 1-120.

<sup>19</sup> Yalom, I.D., & Leszcz, M.(2005). *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

journey. This communal aspect not only enhances the therapeutic experience but also builds a supportive environment where participants feel seen and understood.

The interaction of these theoretical frameworks within Inner Immersion are unified by empowerment psychology as the core principle that drives transformation. While Positive Regard creates the essential foundation of safety and acceptance, empowerment psychology provides the overarching structure through which all other frameworks operate. Mindfulness practices, psychodynamic exploration, creative expression, and sensory integration work together to help participants recognize and activate their internal resources for healing.

This empowerment-based integration allows participants to move from states of disempowerment to active engagement in their healing journey. For example, as participants engage in art-based activities, they simultaneously benefit from group support while discovering their capacity for self-expression and boundary setting. The safe environment created through Positive Regard enables vulnerable sharing, while creative expression and sensory integration provide tools for accessing and processing deeper emotions. This interconnected approach, enriched by NDE narratives that expand perspectives on consciousness and healing, creates a comprehensive therapeutic experience that consistently returns to the core principle of empowerment.

As Wilka Roig observes, this integration occurs seamlessly within the Inner Immersion process, allowing participants to connect with whatever aspect of their experience is ready for healing while maintaining agency over their journey. Rather than applying these frameworks in isolation, Inner Immersion weaves them together into a dynamic, engaging process that honors both the natural flow of healing and the participant's inherent capacity for transformation.

This comprehensive theoretical framework not only enhances the effectiveness of Inner Immersion but also positions it as a pioneering approach within the evolving landscape of mental health care. By seamlessly integrating multiple psychological theories and practical interventions, Inner Immersion creates an immersive therapeutic experience that participants find deeply engaging and transformative. Despite the six-hour duration, participants consistently report high levels of engagement throughout the session, demonstrating the program's ability to facilitate meaningful change through a dynamic process that remains responsive to individual needs while fostering collective healing.

## 4. A Two-Pronged Approach to Mental Health and Mental Health *Care*

The mental health crisis in Canada and the United States is characterized by increasing demand for services, escalating rates of burnout among mental health professionals, and a significant prevalence of trauma and substance use disorders among individuals seeking help. Inner Immersion addresses these pressing challenges through a two-pronged approach that simultaneously supports LMHPs and individuals in need of mental health support. By providing innovative training and certification for LMHPs, Inner Immersion empowers practitioners with the tools and techniques necessary to facilitate meaningful change and enhance their effectiveness. At the same time, the program offers participants a holistic, evidence-based intervention designed to promote rapid transformation, emotional resilience, and a sense of community. This dual focus not only improves outcomes for clients but also revitalizes the passion and commitment of mental health professionals, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and effective mental health care system.

### Supporting Mental Health Professionals

Inner Immersion addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by mental health providers in today's demanding landscape. By offering a comprehensive and innovative program, Inner Immersion not only enhances the therapeutic experience for clients but also significantly supports mental health professionals in their practice.

**4.1 Enhancing Effectiveness:** Inner Immersion equips mental health professionals with innovative tools and techniques that enable them to achieve significant breakthroughs in fewer sessions. By integrating evidence-based practices such as mindfulness, breathwork, and narrative therapy, practitioners can facilitate deeper emotional processing and healing in their clients. Studies have shown that these techniques can lead to rapid improvements in mental health outcomes, allowing therapists to maximize their impact within limited timeframes (Goyal et al., 2014; Apóstolo & Kolcaba, 2009)<sup>20</sup>. This not only benefits clients but also enhances the professional satisfaction of therapists who witness meaningful progress.

**4.2 Facilitating Meaningful Change:** The ability to facilitate meaningful change is vital for licensed mental health professionals (LMHPs), as it directly impacts their job satisfaction and overall well-being. Research indicates that practitioners who perceive progress in their work are less likely to experience burnout and more likely to remain engaged in their roles. A longitudinal study by Rudolph and Baltes (2017)<sup>21</sup> found that perceived progress significantly reduces burnout among professionals, emphasizing the importance of witnessing tangible results in clients' progress.

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<sup>20</sup> Goyal, M., et al. (2014). Meditation programs for psychological stress and well-being: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 174(3), 357-368

<sup>21</sup> Harrison, R., & Barlow, J. (2018). The impact of client outcomes on therapist satisfaction: A study of therapists in the UK. *Psychotherapy Research*, 28(4), 565-575



Additionally, a study by Harrison and Barlow (2018)<sup>22</sup> demonstrated that therapists who see positive outcomes in their clients report higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout. Inner Immersion's structured approach allows therapists to see these results, fostering a sense of accomplishment and purpose that can rejuvenate their passion for helping others.

**4.3 Enhanced Service Capacity:** Traditional therapy models typically allow practitioners to serve between 20-40 unique clients annually, with treatment durations ranging from 12-16 weeks to 12-18 months (APA Practice Organization, 2019)<sup>23</sup>. In contrast, Inner Immersion's innovative approach enables practitioners to facilitate transformative change for 10-12 participants in each single-session program. With most participants achieving significant breakthroughs in just one or two sessions, a practitioner can meaningfully support up to 180 unique clients annually (with two program iterations per client) or 360 clients (single iteration) by facilitating just one iteration of the program in a week.

Inner Immersion's commitment to practitioner well-being is demonstrated through its pioneering approach to work-life balance. The program mandates quarterly restorative breaks (two weeks per quarter) - a practice that acknowledges the intensive nature of this transformative work and ensures sustained practitioner effectiveness. This intentional focus on practitioner renewal represents a paradigm shift in mental health care delivery, where burnout prevention is built into the organizational structure rather than treated as an afterthought.

**4.4 Collaborative Model:** Inner Immersion promotes a unique model where LMHPs collaborate rather than compete for clients. This collaborative environment encourages sharing of experiences and insights among practitioners, enhancing the collective knowledge base and fostering a sense of community. The program includes a mentorship model where experienced LMHPs, referred to as "elders," support newer practitioners by moderating discussions and sharing valuable insights from their own experiences. This structure not only helps reduce feelings of isolation often experienced in traditional therapy settings but also promotes a culture of shared learning and growth.

**4.5 Professional Development:** Inner Immersion offers training and certification for licensed mental health professionals (LMHPs), expanding their skill set and deepening their understanding of holistic approaches to mental health care. This professional development is crucial in a field where ongoing education is necessary to keep pace with emerging research and methodologies. The certification process

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<sup>22</sup> Rudolph, C. W., & Baltes, B. B. (2017). The role of perceived progress in the relationship between job demands and burnout: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 22*(4), 479-490

<sup>23</sup> American Psychological Association. (2020). *Clinical Practice Guideline for the Treatment of Depression Across Three Age Cohorts*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

serves as a healing journey for practitioners themselves, allowing them to engage in self-reflection and personal growth while learning to facilitate the program effectively.

**4.6 Addressing Workforce Shortages:** The need for effective mental health interventions is more pressing than ever due to increasing demand and a shortage of qualified professionals. A report from the Canadian Mental Health Association indicates that only one-third of Canadians who need mental health services receive them (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021)<sup>24</sup>. Inner Immersion’s scalable model allows LMHPs to serve more clients without compromising the quality of care. By streamlining processes and leveraging innovative methodologies, practitioners can provide comprehensive support to a larger client base.

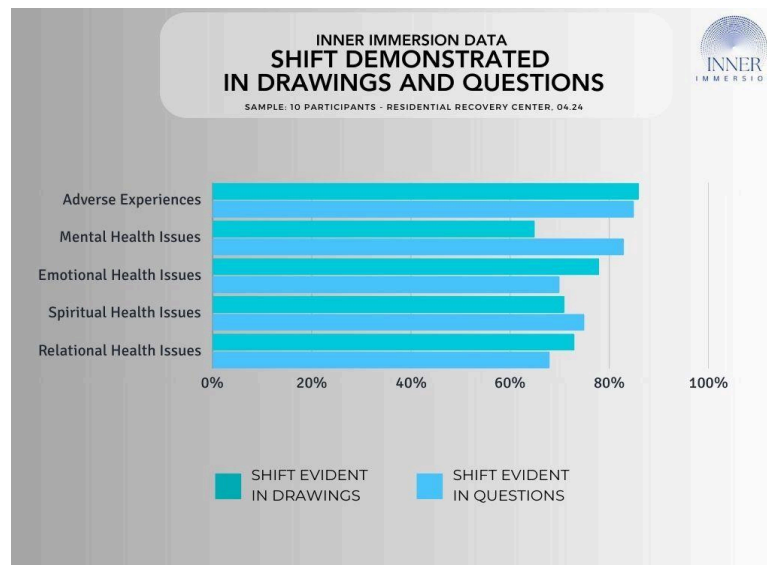
**4.7 Reducing Burnout:** The mental health care system is currently experiencing a crisis characterized by high rates of burnout among practitioners. A recent study indicated that approximately 30% of Canadian healthcare workers were considering leaving their jobs due to overwhelming stress and dissatisfaction (Canadian Medical Association, 2022). Long hours, overwhelming caseloads, and the emotional toll of working with individuals facing severe mental health challenges contribute to this issue. Inner Immersion helps mitigate these factors by providing an efficient, group-based intervention that allows therapists to work with multiple clients simultaneously. This model reduces the workload on individual therapists, enabling them to maintain a healthier work-life balance while still delivering effective care.

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<sup>24</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association. (2021). Mental Health for All: A Comprehensive Approach.

## 5. Benefiting Participants

Inner Immersion effectively addresses a range of mental health challenges including depression, addiction, PTSD, anxiety, and grief. Recent data from a residential recovery center study (n=10) demonstrates significant improvements across five key areas: adverse experiences (85-86%), mental health issues (65-83%), emotional health issues (68-70%), spiritual health issues (71-75%), and relational health issues (68-73%). These improvements manifest through specific shifts in participants' well-being and perspective.



**5.1 Rapid Transformation:** The intensive six-hour group session format allows for quick breakthroughs and immediate results. Research indicates that intensive therapeutic interventions can lead to significant improvements in mental health outcomes in a shorter time frame compared to traditional therapy. A meta-analysis by Cuijpers et al. (2016) found that brief interventions can effectively reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, demonstrating the potential for rapid transformation in participants<sup>25</sup>. Inner Immersion's intensive six-hour group session format, followed by a personalized 60-90 minute one-on-one session, facilitates significant breakthroughs and immediate results.

Participants report shifts from:

- Self-blame and shame to understanding and confidence
- Depression and disorientation to wholeness and direction
- Negative self-image to self-understanding and satisfaction
- Spiritual query/doubt to connection with spirit
- Disconnection to belonging and cultural integration

**5.2 Holistic Approach:** Inner Immersion addresses mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of healing, offering a comprehensive framework for recovery. This holistic model is supported by research indicating that integrated approaches that consider multiple dimensions of well-being can lead to better therapeutic outcomes. For instance, a study

<sup>25</sup> Cuijpers P, Berking M, Andersson G, Quigley L, Kleiboer A, Dobson KS. A meta-analysis of cognitive-behavioural therapy for adult depression, alone and in comparison with other treatments. *Can J Psychiatry*. 2013 Jul;58(7):376-85. doi: 10.1177/070674371305800702. PMID: 23870719.

by Wampold (2015) emphasizes the importance of addressing both psychological and physiological factors in treatment to achieve lasting change<sup>26</sup>.

Participants experience improvements in multiple dimensions:

- Mental Health: From fragmented self-image to wholeness/integration
- Emotional Health: From repression/suppression to contentedness/peacefulness
- Spiritual Health: From resignation to empowerment and spiritual connection
- Relational Health: From disconnection to connection/belonging

**5.3 Group Support:** The collective healing experience fostered by group sessions reduces feelings of isolation and enhances social support among participants. Research has shown that group therapy can provide significant emotional benefits, including increased feelings of belonging and shared understanding (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005)<sup>27</sup>. Participants often report feeling less alone in their struggles, which can be a powerful motivator for engagement in the healing process.

**5.4 Accessibility:** Inner Immersion prioritizes accessibility through multiple dimensions. The program's focused duration and group format make mental health support more attainable for underserved populations, particularly those facing barriers to traditional weekly therapy. By enabling participants to work through issues entirely within a single intensive session, the program eliminates the challenges of interrupted therapeutic processes and long-term commitment requirements common in traditional settings. Inner Immersion further enhances accessibility through its emphasis on cultural competency and recruitment of LMHPs from diverse populations, ensuring culturally appropriate care for participants in addiction recovery and other mental health challenges. This comprehensive approach to accessibility addresses both structural and cultural barriers to mental health care, making the program available to broader and more diverse populations.

**5.5 Empowerment and Agency:** Inner Immersion empowers participants by giving them agency over their healing journey. The program encourages individuals to actively engage with their emotions and experiences, fostering self-discovery and resilience. Studies indicate that empowerment in therapeutic settings is linked to improved outcomes, as individuals who feel more in control of their healing process are more likely to achieve meaningful progress (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998)<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Wampold, Bruce & Imel, Z.E.. (2015). *The great psychotherapy debate: The evidence for what makes psychotherapy work*: Second edition. 10.4324/9780203582015.

<sup>27</sup> Yalom, I.D., & Leszcz, M. (2005). *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>28</sup> Masin-Moyer, M., Kim, J. C., Engstrom, M., & Solomon, P. (2022). A Scoping Review of the Trauma Recovery and Empowerment Model (TREM). *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 23(3), 699-715. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020967862>

Participants report shifts from:

- Hopelessness to hope and resourcefulness
- Feeling weak/vulnerable to confidence
- Individual struggle to spiritual receptivity
- Cultural disconnection to cultural tradition and belonging

**5.6 Seamless Integration of Individual Sessions:** Following the group session, participants have the opportunity for a 60–90-minute one-on-one session with an LMHP via Zoom. This personalized follow-up allows individuals to delve deeper into their experiences, reinforcing insights gained during the group session while providing tailored support. Research suggests that combining group therapy with individual sessions can enhance treatment effectiveness by addressing both collective dynamics and individual needs (Kivlighan & Shaughnessy, 2000).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Brossart, Daniel & Willson, Victor & Patton, Michael & Kivlighan, Dennis & Multon, Karen. (1998). A time series model of the working alliance: A key process in short-term psychoanalytic counseling. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*. 35. 197-205. 10.1037/h0087645.

## 6. Outcome Expectations and Measurement

### 6.1 Assessment Methodology

Inner Immersion employs a comprehensive before-and-after assessment methodology that measures transformation across five key dimensions: Adverse Experiences, Mental Health Issues, Emotional Health Issues, Spiritual Health Issues, and Relational Health Issues.

When participants first arrive, while still in their initial state, they complete two baseline assessments:

1. A series of 13 carefully curated questions that evaluate their current mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational states
2. A spontaneous two-minute drawing exercise using crayons, allowing for unrestricted artistic expression

Following the complete six-hour group session, participants repeat exactly the same two assessments:

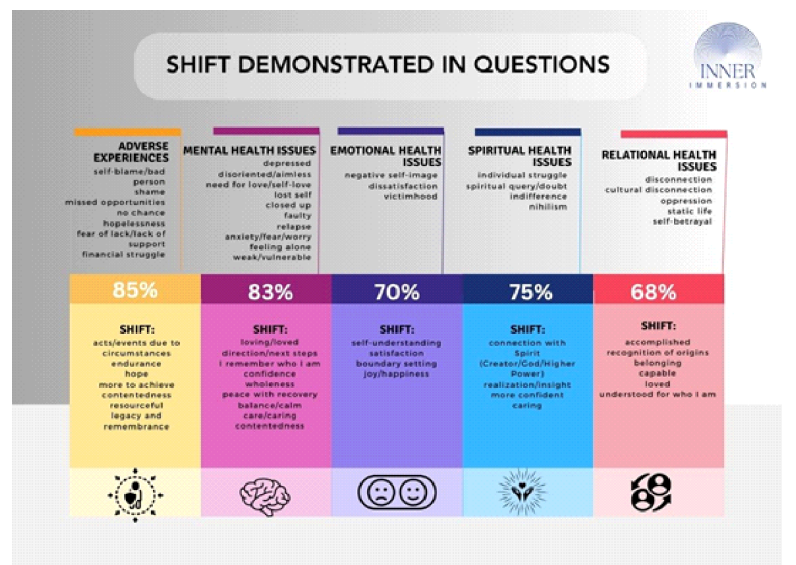
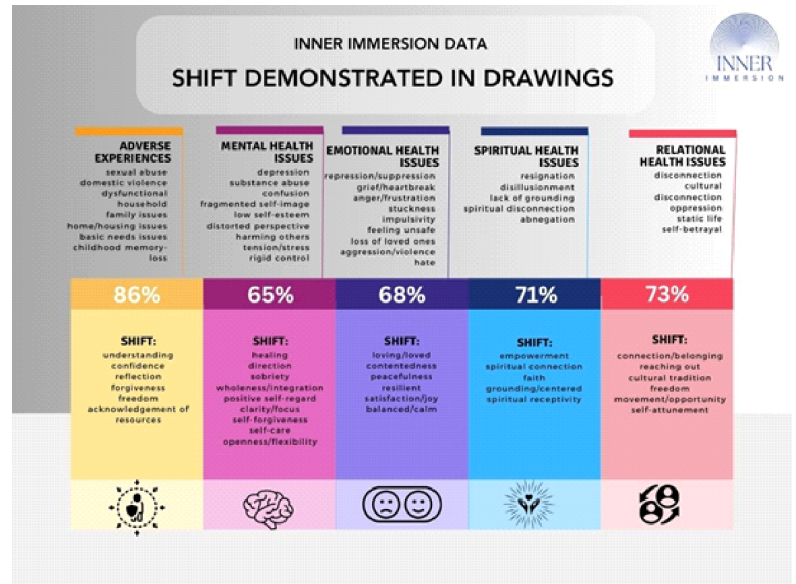
1. The identical 13 questions
2. Another two-minute drawing exercise

This dual approach provides two independent methods of measuring transformation:

- The questionnaire responses capture conscious, verbalized shifts in perspective and well-being
- The drawings reveal subconscious changes through artistic expression

The data shows remarkable consistency between both assessment methods, with improvements ranging from 65-86% across all five dimensions, validating the effectiveness of this dual measurement approach.

The images demonstrate that shifts are evident both in participants' conscious responses to questions and in their spontaneous artistic expression, providing complementary evidence of transformation.



### **Art Interpretation Methodology**

Inner Immersion's unique art interpretation method, developed by Jose Hernandez through work with over 2,000 participants, provides deeper insight into participants' transformative experience. This method:

- Analyzes symbolic elements in drawings
- Reveals subconscious patterns and emotional states
- Correlates with participants' self-reported changes
- Demonstrates consistent patterns across diverse groups

### **6.2 Documented Outcomes**

A pilot study conducted at a residential recovery center (n=10) demonstrated significant shifts across five key dimensions:

Adverse Experiences (85-86% improvement)

- Initial States: Self-blame, domestic violence, dysfunctional household
- Observed Shifts: Understanding, confidence, acknowledgment of resources

Mental Health Issues (65-83% improvement)

- Initial States: Depression, confusion, fragmented self-image
- Observed Shifts: Healing, direction, wholeness/integration

Emotional Health Issues (68-70% improvement)

- Initial States: Repression/suppression, anger/frustration
- Observed Shifts: Contentedness, resilience, balance/calm

Spiritual Health Issues (71-75% improvement)

- Initial States: Resignation, spiritual disconnection
- Observed Shifts: Empowerment, spiritual connection, grounding

Relational Health Issues (68-73% improvement)

- Initial States: Disconnection, cultural disconnection
- Observed Shifts: Connection/belonging, cultural tradition

## **Participant Feedback**

The testimonials in Appendix I were collected during follow-up surveys conducted after participants completed their one-on-one sessions. These personal accounts provide additional qualitative evidence of the program's impact across the five measured dimensions.

These firsthand accounts complement the quantitative data and artistic expression analysis, offering deeper insight into the lasting effects of the Inner Immersion experience.

## **6.3 Future Research Opportunities**

While initial results are promising, Inner Immersion welcomes:

- Larger-scale studies with diverse populations
- Longitudinal research tracking sustained outcomes
- Validation of the art interpretation methodology
- Comparative studies with traditional therapeutic approaches
- Implementation of standardized assessment tools

This comprehensive approach to outcome measurement demonstrates Inner Immersion's commitment to evidence-based practice while acknowledging the need for continued research validation.



## 7. Conclusion

Inner Immersion represents an innovative and effective approach to mental health care that addresses critical gaps in current service delivery. The program's dual focus on supporting licensed mental health professionals while providing accessible, transformative care for participants demonstrates its potential for significant impact in the behavioral health field.

Initial data from the residential recovery center pilot study shows remarkable improvements across five key dimensions, with positive shifts ranging from 65% to 86% in both artistic expression and questionnaire responses. These improvements span adverse experiences, mental health, emotional health, spiritual health, and relational health domains, suggesting the program's effectiveness in facilitating comprehensive healing and transformation.

The program's unique methodology, combining intensive group sessions with individual follow-up care, offers a promising alternative to traditional therapeutic approaches. By addressing both practitioner burnout and client accessibility needs, Inner Immersion provides a scalable solution to current mental health care challenges.

As the mental health crisis continues to evolve, Inner Immersion's evidence-based, culturally competent approach positions it as a valuable resource in the field of behavioral health. While initial results are promising, continued research and evaluation will further validate the program's effectiveness and potential for broader implementation.

Through its commitment to empowerment, accessibility, and measurable outcomes, Inner Immersion demonstrates the potential to transform mental health care delivery while supporting both practitioners and participants in their journey toward healing and growth.

## Appendix I

See Participant Surveys to follow