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Art Messaging to Engage Homeless Young Adults

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What Is the Purpose of the Study?

- To investigate, via community-based participatory research, how homeless youth have envisioned the use of the arts to design messages for their peers about the danger of initiating or continuing drug and alcohol use.

What Is the Problem?

- Homeless youth are among the most vulnerable populations in the United States. Although the transition to adulthood is in general a difficult phase, the homeless existence precipitates an even more distressing and unsafe lifestyle.
- Homeless youth cope with difficulties such as irregular sleeping habits, diet, and exposure to the elements; outcomes include increased health problems, emotional imbalance, and risk activities, including substance use and unprotected sexual behaviors.
- The use of art, in general, creates a reflective, positive environment in which people can contemplate their lives and situations; art can also provide a means for social change.

What Are the Findings?

- The youth utilized a number of delivery styles, including in-person communication, flyers, music, documentary film, and creative writing.
- The youth also provided insight into the importance of the thematic framework of messages. Such themes ranged from empowering and hopeful messages to those designed to scare youth into not experimenting with drugs.

Who Should Care Most?

- Physicians, nurses, and community outreach programs.
- University faculty and educators who are responsible for training medical and nursing staff who provide care to youth.

Recommendations for Action

- Findings of this study will lead to the implementation of an art-guided intervention to empower homeless youth to create artistic messages that will guide decision making about drug and alcohol use.
- Ongoing research is needed to determine the power that varying modalities of interactive communication has on curbing the desire to engage in or reduce the grip that drug and alcohol use has on homeless youth.