

# Gearing violence programs to First Nations youth

BY PAUL MAYNE

Claire Crooks knows there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to preventing youth violence. Geographical, financial and age differences play enormous factors in deciding the best action.

A three-year federally funded Uniting Our Nations' project will investigate existing violence prevention programs for use with First Nations youth.

With Western the only Canadian university to receive Public Health Agency funding (\$292,000), Crooks is thrilled at the chance to learn how violence prevention programs can be adapted with this under-served group.

"At a time when a First Nations adolescent in Canada has a greater chance of being incarcerated than graduating from high school, it is really exciting to be focusing on the strength of First Nations youth and ways to empower them to be leaders in violence prevention," she says.

Crooks is co-project leader and assistant professor at the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children in the Faculty of Education.

While the project is centred at Western's Research Park - at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's (CAMH) Centre for

Prevention Science - the scope is national with partners in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Ottawa and Nuxalk.

Although there are existing programs for First Nations youth, how they get selected and implemented is unknown, says Crooks.

"Other programs for mainstream youth get implemented with minimal adaptation for First Nations youth," says Crooks, who is also associate director at the Centre for Prevention Science. "We're trying to see what's currently out there and then identify the gaps that need to be filled."

The project will seek to engage First Nations youth in creating solutions, which already include a problem solving video project and a mentoring program.

"Youth engagement is a big piece in the research design," says Deb Chiodo, co-project leader and lecturer in Psychology at King's University College. "We expect that we'll have First Nation youth participation on advisory committees and will be research consultants in some cases, such as at our Winnipeg site."

Meaningful participation by youth will avoid the top-down approach too often used with First Nations groups, adds Chiodo, manager of the Centre for

## Quiet spot



Paul Mayne, Western News

Fourth-year History/Film student Laurie Ross finds the perfect reading nook on a landing in University College.

Prevention Science.

Crooks and Chiodo developed the project as part of ongoing work with the Fourth R, a cur-

riculum-based program that promotes healthy adolescent relationship skills and reduces risky behaviours such as substance

abuse, dating violence and unsafe sexual practices.

For more information, visit [www.thefourthr.ca](http://www.thefourthr.ca).