Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health

Knowledge Exchange Initiatives - Final Report

Application #: KEI-1560

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Organization: Psychology Foundation of Canada

Project Title: Diversity in Action: Sharing our Success Stories

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Section 1: Project Overview

A. Purpose of Initiative

The Psychology Foundation of Canada, in partnership with community organizations and newcomer communities, has developed, piloted, and applied a sensible, sensitive and respectful community-owned program to help newcomer families with their mental health-related needs.

For the past five years, we have been working on a community pilot project called Diversity in Action, Scarborough: Adapting Mental Health Services for Newcomer Families (DIAS). Diversity in Action was created specifically to deal with the fact that there are very few linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health promotion services, or services to address immigrant/refugee families’ mental health-related issues.

The project has been supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Bell Canada, TD Bank, Toronto Community Foundation, The Psychology Foundation of Canada and the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. We have worked with a number of community partners to engage newcomer groups, educate agency staff about their communities, and adapt mental health services to be culturally appropriate and accessible.

DIAS brought together a range of partners within the Scarborough community and beyond to work with the different ethno-specific communities to: a) build the capacity (both knowledge and skills) of newcomers to address their mental health-related needs, including the appropriate use of community supports and services, and b) to build the capacity of mainstream agencies to deliver appropriate and needed services for newcomer children, youth and their families, including adapting existing services and supports so they are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

B) Summary of Project

With the support of the Centre of Excellence, we were given the opportunity to share our key learnings with a wide range of stakeholders across the province by creating and disseminating innovative knowledge exchange materials. These materials and approaches are designed to showcase the outcomes of the project and provide an opportunity to reach out to a range of partners to ensure the sustainability of the project.

Through the experience of the past few years developing the project, we have learned many valuable lessons about ways mainstream community agencies can learn to provide culturally relevant services to newcomer families, though strong administrative support and staff mentoring.

In this project, our focus was to design an effective, relevant, and engaging e-learning resource to build the capacity (both knowledge and skills) of those working with newcomers to address their mental health-related needs, including navigating service systems and the appropriate use of community supports and services.

This project aimed to enhance the use of evidence-informed practices such as using arts-based approaches to build community capacity, engage vulnerable populations and create meaningful
knowledge exchange materials. The project will contribute unique and accessible resources that will help to create capacity in other organizations and community members to better respond to the mental health needs of newcomers to Ontario.

C) Identification of target population and relevant stakeholders

One of the overarching goals of the DIAS initiative is to work collaboratively and directly with a range of partners, from traditional mental health service providers to community-based, culturally specific agencies and institutions.

Working with agency staff and management across the four different children’s mental health centres who are partnering on this initiative, we used this opportunity to improve the uptake of evidence-informed practices, and share them with a community of practice comprised of agencies serving newcomer families across the province.

While the learnings generated in the project highlighted our experiences working in a particular geographical area (Scarborough), and with newcomer communities primarily from Asian communities, we discovered that many of the overarching themes and key concepts are equally relevant to a wide range of newcomer groups and geographical communities. The final product – the e-learning module – will be relevant to a wide range of stakeholders and community-based agencies that serve newcomer groups.
Section 2: Activities

A) Overview of knowledge exchange activities

Working collaboratively with our partners, outreach workers and members of newcomer communities engaged through our partner agencies, and with the assistance of experts in knowledge exchange, arts-based approaches and e-learning, we developed innovative materials that demonstrate the unique successes of the Diversity in Action: Scarborough project.

By translating the experiences and insights of youth and community members into graphic-based resources that communicate information primarily through a visual medium, we were able to develop accessible, culturally relevant materials to increase community understanding of mental health, the impact of mental health problems, and increase receptivity among newcomer youth and families to seeking help for mental health-related problems. We used storytelling as a medium as a tool to share information and knowledge generated through the project.

B) Activities accomplished to date

- We engaged the outreach workers and agency staff in a reflection of the key successes and challenges in the process and outcomes of the project.

- We worked in partnership with already established youth engagement initiatives in our partner agencies, and in collaboration with e-learning developers who specialize in translating the results of community-based, evaluated projects into innovative knowledge exchange materials.

- We created an interactive e-learning curriculum tool for service providers highlighting the key learnings of providing culturally relevant ethno-specific services through mainstream community agencies.

- We also worked with our partners and newcomer youth to develop 10 digital stories, which are available on the Diversity in Action website. The e-learning module showcases a number of the digital stories and uses them to help those who are accessing the e-learning to gain a sense of the realities and challenges faced by newcomer youth directly from their own experiences - the homes, friends and family they left behind, the struggles they met when they arrived, the transitions and adjustments they continue to make as they seek to create meaningful and satisfying lives in their new communities.

- We were featured on Canada AM in February, with an interview which included our Afghan Outreach worker, the chair of the Diversity in Action Committee, and one of the newcomer youth who participated in the digital story project. The youth’s digital story was also featured on the broadcast.
Section 3: Conclusions and next steps

A) Lessons learned

Working on the knowledge exchange component of this project has underlined the key lessons and learnings that have guided the development of the project since its inception, and have been central to its success. The development of the e-learning helped us to provide concrete examples and illustrations of the key learnings, and provide a way of communicating them to new audiences across the province:

The purpose of the e-learning is to empower the service providers by giving them info and insight to help them work better with diversity, to view the community they serve as a whole and not just specific sub-groups

Specifically:

• to help people think more broadly about what mental health services are;
• to look for opportunities to be out of the office and in the community.

What we’ve attempted to do is to provide a series of questions for service providers, rather than trying to answer all of them. So many cultures are present in newcomer communities, and there’s such diversity even within each community. By asking certain key questions, staff can learn a great deal about any newcomer family / community (e.g. What are interactions / relationships like within families? What do people regard as important? What is the common basis of the culture? How is the community organized (i.e. language, religion?) etc.

a) Need to look at "Diversity Lens" and highlight biases we’re unaware of. It can be effective and important to organize workshops on working with families from different cultures - inviting a member of the community to share information with staff - e.g. working with Tamil families. Ask people about their knowledge of the culture - what they are coming in with – What are staff impressions about why people came to Canada?

b) It’s important to continuously try to recognize and work to address cultural barriers to service, for example:

• the concept of "children's mental health" may not even translate, depending upon people’s culture / country of origin

• Don’t assume that people understand "the system" - even though they may speak English - they don’t know how to navigate - need to act as a guide - provide full explanations

c) Providing effective mental health-related education and information for newcomer families can require staff to “think outside the box” by engaging local newcomer community leaders, and working in venues not traditionally associated with mental health, such as mosques, libraries, malls, and other community –based, rather than agency based locations. Go where the newcomers are at - find the hub (e.g. libraries -- free computers and internet).
d) Effective outreach work facilitates and supports new partnerships, networks and linkages to effectively manage existing services and other resources. In the e-learning we provide examples of innovative and non-threatening ways of doing outreach with different communities –

- e.g. hosting a soccer club, finding out who the key people are within the community and liaising with them (e.g. elders, parents, etc.).
- Find agencies, e.g. settlement, culture, etc., that will work as partners - go beyond "usual suspects" in mental health field.

e) Respect the influence of values and customs and work within these important influencers. Need to keep the focus on providing a better life for kids (rather than naming information as “mental health”, which may keep people away. Provide information and parenting support - helping parents and children understand one another and get along better.

B) Impact of project in stakeholders and community groups

The impact of the project on those who participated in it has been very positive. The newcomer youth who took part in the digital story process were provided with an opportunity to reflect on their own experience as newcomers, work together with skilled digital media and youth outreach staff, and help each other to create work that they know will help others. They are very proud of what they have accomplished, and what they know will be shared broadly with other youth, families and those who work in newcomer-serving and mental health agencies across the province.

For the outreach workers and agency staff who participated, it was very satisfying to be involved in the process of reflecting on their important work in the community, distilling the key learnings and finding creative ways of sharing the knowledge with those working in similar roles in agencies across the province. All of those involved are eager to promote the new resource broadly among their networks in children’s mental health in Ontario and beyond.

C) Further plans regarding knowledge exchange activities, including promotion

By making the final products and resources available on the internet, we will be able to track site visits and downloads. All of our partner organizations will also be posting the resources on their sites.

We will also ensure maximum dissemination by sharing the project’s process and outcomes through communities of practice and relevant conferences.