

Mental Health Promotion & Well-Being for First Nations Families: Exploring Cultural Relevance and Meaning

Overview of the 2012 case study

Introduction and Background

In the early stages of development of the TF Strategy and related materials, a cultural lens was deemed essential to align the strategy with the needs of Manitoba's diverse population, with a specific focus on Aboriginal, Francophone, and immigrant and newcomer communities. Due to the large proportion of First Nations families participating in the Families First program, cultural safety for First Nations peoples was established as a priority. The primary goals of the First Nations lens on the TF Strategy were to:

1. Provide a critical review and inform the refinement of the TF Curriculum to ensure it is culturally safe, relevant and useful to First Nations families and other families in Manitoba.
2. Discuss the language and concepts of *mental health* and *wellness* and enhance understanding of the cross-cultural experiences of First Nations families for the meaningful promotion of mental health and wellness.
3. Foster collaboration with First Nations partners and experts in mental health promotion to address the mental health needs of First Nations families.

Process

Consultation with First Nations advisors and partners has been an ongoing process in the TF Project. The development of the TF Home Visiting Curriculum began in 2010. Shortly thereafter, a First Nations advisory group was formed to consult with the TF team in order to define priority mental health issues for First Nations families in Manitoba. On March 14, 2012, a knowledge exchange (KE) event called *Dialogue on Mental Health Promotion & Well-Being for First Nations Families* was held, in partnership with the *Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs* and *Winnipeg Regional Health Authority*, at the Circle of Life Thunderbird House in Winnipeg. The goal of the event was to bring together a select group of consultants/knowledge keepers in First Nations

mental health to share their personal and professional knowledge and assist the TF team in developing culturally safe materials to meet the needs of First Nations families. The KE event was followed by a half-day meeting in which the KE participants reviewed and validated the results from the analysis of the dialogue that took place on March 14th.

Participants

- ◆ 22 First Nations participants
- ◆ 12 members of the TF and planning and consulting team

Careful consideration was given to ensure that participants represented diverse First Nations perspectives. Participants were invited on the basis of their knowledge and experiences in mental health and wellness related issues with First Nations women and their families; their personal and professional experiences in living and working with First Nations peoples and communities in Manitoba; and their clear, strong vision of wellness for First Nations and all families in Manitoba. As such, a unique sample of individuals from many sectors took part in the consultation process – including Elders, front line community workers and government representatives.

Results

The process resulted in the refinement of the TF Strategy and related materials to ensure cultural safety and relevance for First Nations and all families in Manitoba, as well as the development of this case study showcasing the process taken by the TF team to ensure the cultural safety for First Nations families and the results and lessons learned from this cultural adaptation process.

What we learned about *culturally relevant aspects* to embed in curriculum development:

- ◆ Importance of building family and community relationships and including

- family in programming (i.e., inviting immediate and extended family and other close relations to celebrate successes)
- ◆ Allowing time for relationships and trust to develop
 - ◆ Connections with the land and nature
 - ◆ Importance of distinguishing between spirituality and religion
 - ◆ Diverse spiritual dimensions that resonated with First Nations participant in knowledge exchange event
 - ◆ Traditional and spiritual dimensions are key components that are integral to culturally meaningful mental health promotion for families in Manitoba
 - ◆ Cultural safety considerations, such as using practical language and terminology (e.g. several participants made reference to the term “*Mino Pimatisiwin*” which, in several First Nations languages, means “*living the good life*”)
 - ◆ Making use of meaningful images, symbols, concepts and language
 - ◆ Understanding historical contexts and current realities of First Nations peoples
 - ◆ Acknowledging historical and cultural diversity between and within First Nations groups

What we learned about the *process of cultural adaptation*:

- ◆ Need to establish and nurture relationships of trust and respect; strong relationships with community are key to establishing trust, acquiring knowledge and developing culturally safe mental health promotion materials
- ◆ Give careful consideration to varied beliefs, practices and protocols of various First Nations groups; process and protocol matter and must be established before commencing with consultations
- ◆ First Nations peoples, at the grassroots level, should be involved, not only in the initial and subsequent discussions, but also in deciding who is brought to the table to represent the voice of First Nations families

- ◆ Acknowledge diversity in the history, beliefs, practices and protocols between and within First Nations cultural groups.
- ◆ Allow time to identify collective goals and a common ground amongst First Nations peoples with diverse experiences and perspectives
- ◆ Mutual respect and an open mind is essential for effective and meaningful dialogue
- ◆ Importance of having Elders and health support workers readily available to provide emotional support or debriefing support to participants during discussions involving sensitive topics that may trigger trauma

Conclusion

This case study illustrates the importance of working with First Nations communities when culturally adapting universal programs. Although the process followed by the TF team to create a culturally safe and relevant program is similar to the process taken by other service providers and program planners, the team acknowledges that these methods have their limitations. That being said, the community engagement and meaningful consultation with First Nations representatives provide the TF team with valuable insight into important considerations that resonated with First Nations peoples, thus resulting in a number of improvements to the TF Curriculum.

Furthermore, the lessons learned encourage a more thoughtful consultation process in the future. The TF Team was successful in meeting their objectives of the cultural adaptation project. The lessons learned from the process may be adapted by other mental health promotion projects working towards culturally relevant, acceptable and useful resources for First Nations communities and other ethnocultural groups.

*** Given the different contexts and experiences that exist among and between First Nations groups, this information represents the position of participants in this project only; it does not reflect First Nations perspectives beyond this participant group***