

Circles of Support and Change: Transferring Successful Rural Indigenous Practices to Other Rural Contexts

Organization: Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association

Location: Nova Scotia (Antigonish)

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Background

The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services Association (AWRCSASA/Women's Centre) is an independent, feminist, community-based organization that works to create personal, community and social change for women, Two-Spirit, trans and non-binary people and their families through direct services, community development, education and celebration. The *Circles of Support and Change* project is working in partnership with three distinct under-served rural communities, to develop

community-led and community-based responses for preventing and responding to gender-based and sexualized violence. The three partnering communities are the historic African Nova Scotian rural settlements of Upper Big Tracadie, Sunnyville, and Lincolntonville; Canso and area; and the Acadian communities of Richmond County.

This project is rooted in the belief that the knowledge as well as the most appropriate and effective approaches for addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and promoting healthy relationships are held within local communities. It builds upon learning from the community-led and community-based, Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation model, a model which has been replicated in other Indigenous communities. This model includes community Elders and ensures asset mapping of the community. It offers teachings of traditional healing and craft techniques as a way of supporting survivors. The project also uses a strengths-based and trauma-informed approach to centre the voices of survivors of GBV in circles of support that include their chosen families, community members, educators and service providers.

In each community there is a site-specific community facilitator that is working with community members to identify, develop and coordinate activities that are meaningful to the community.

Circles of Support and Change provides spaces where community members can address the impact of their particular community's vulnerabilities and create community-led and community-relevant paths for responding to and addressing GBV in all its manifestations and across the life-span.

Together, communities can find their voice and language to speak about GBV; reclaim culturally relevant healing practices; build community self-reliance; and address barriers to healing. This promising practice builds on the success of previous initiatives in Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation and learns from this Indigenous experiencing in addressing GBV in community.

Working collaboratively, each community will:

- Make visible the strengths and knowledge already held in the community required to address GBV
- Create a community-relevant action plan for collaborative support and change.
- Disrupt community patterns of GBV
- Increase accessibility to survivor-specific supports and services through identifying, connecting, training, and supporting informal as well as formal service providers
- Restore power and well-being to survivors and their chosen families in the aftermath of GBV
- Reduce vicarious trauma and create sustainability for those supporting survivors
- Identify the gaps in services and supports currently available and advocate to bring in the services necessary to fill those gaps

This model, seeks to develop informal supports that are led by community, engages survivors in leading this work, builds community capacity to support survivors, and will provide a promising practice for other rural and under-served communities across the country.

Populations Served, Needs and Gaps

The gaps were different for each community. In the African Nova Scotian communities, the need was to build a sense of sisterhood between women of the three distinct communities and to build and re-build trust with service providers. The barriers to survivors of gender-based violence are compounded by systemic racism.

In Canso and area, direct services and supports to the community have been impacted by declining economic stability, loss of population, historic downturns in the inshore fish plant and processing. Organizations who provide outreach to the community have a high turnover rate and are dependant on project funding. More formal services are based further away from rural areas, rendering them less visible and accessible. The rural community is close-knit, which creates a lack of privacy for survivors and lateral and secondary violence. Overall access to information about gender-based violence, including resources and ways to seek support.

The Strait Area Campus had identified issues with a lack of knowledge about gender-based violence, some barriers to centring GBV awareness include: male dominated classrooms, particularly in trades and marine programs, majority male faculty, longstanding attitudes about sex roles and GBV that require a social shift, concerns about confidentiality in the small community. The impact of the COVID pandemic led to a shift from the college site to moving the focus to the rural Acadian communities in Richmond County.

In Richmond County, there is a lot of fear and shame in asking for help. Survivors currently feel isolated and silenced and take a “keep your head down” approach when responding to GBV. Accessing support is compounded by poor internet, poverty and a lack of outreach supports. They share the issues Canso has with living a small community where everybody knows everyone creating a lack of anonymity and confidentiality.

During the final year of the project, the Paqtnek community was added to the project. The community had been the focus of the project that produced the toolkit: <http://awrcsasa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/FINAL-Mikmaw-Community-Engagement-Toolkit-Fillable.pdf>. There had not been much progress on the issue of gender-based violence since the completion of the toolkit and it was felt that follow-up support for the community would be important to include. The important areas of focus were consent conversations, sharing information and resources and providing direct support through outreach from AWCSAS.

Project Objectives and Outcomes

The following project outcomes were developed by the team during an extensive evaluation framework activity. The entire team participated in a course offered by the StFX Coady Institute on Developmental Evaluation.

Outcome 1 Circles of Support and Change - Circles of Support provide survivors and their supporters with informal support and knowledge about how to access formal support. Survivor participants in each of the three project communities demonstrate advocacy and leadership in their communities on issues related to gender-based violence.

Outcome 2 Wellness and Healing

Survivors indicate experiencing healing from trauma and side-effects of trauma.

Outcome 3 Culturally Responsive Service Providers/Partners

Communities create networks and culturally safe practices of supporting victims/survivors of sexual violence. There is better representation and trust in service providing organizations and responsive supports for the African NS communities. Wraparound services are in place to support long term effects of trauma in the African NS communities.

Outcome 4 Create a Culture of Safety and Healthy relationships

This outcome had been intended to be youth-focussed in partnership with a local organization in Canso that had been working with youth for 25 years. The organization folded in 2019, leading to a pivot in the focus of this outcome to more general focus on healthy relationships and safety for all ages.

SECTION 3 - Promising practice

The promising practice has three components, each necessary to supporting survivors of gender-based violence in rural, underserved, isolated, and marginalized communities. More generally, all sites received training to support learning about GBV and other issues (i.e. understanding therapy programs, bystander training modified to rural areas, suicide awareness, parenting safe children, human trafficking). Referrals were made to resources, and participants increased their knowledge of services and programs available to their community.

1. Support the Supporters Approach

Working in gender-based violence is “heavy lifting” for women in rural, isolated, and often marginalized communities. After meeting with members of the Paqtnek steering committee (from the previous project) we learned that this work can be triggering, isolating and can re-traumatize survivors. It is important to ensure community supporters (including team members and members of local steering committees) have intentional supports available to them. We put in place several practices to provide support.

- Weekly time for team members to “check-in” personally and seek support with issues they are facing in the community. This included private Facebook groups for the team and community groups where staff and participants could share, receive information and be supported. During COVID, this proved to be an important way to communicate and stay connected.
- Capacity building and training for community facilitators was an important practice (i.e. courses and workshops on suicide and mental health first aid, peer support facilitation, bystander training etc.)
- Annual retreats led by Indigenous elder Andrea Currie

2. Peer Circle Support and Informal Supports for Survivors

Providing supports for survivors evolved very differently in each community. This cannot be pre-determined but should be allowed to evolve as each community responds to the needs of survivors. This approach included private Facebook groups for the community groups where Community Facilitators could share information and resources and post upcoming events to allow women to stay connected. In rural areas, and particularly during the COVID pandemic, this proved to be an important connection.

Canso and Area

In Year 1, a steering committee was developed, and an action plan generated. After Year 1, it became clear that there was a core group of women who wanted to meet more regularly than at scheduled steering committee meetings or educational activities. In Canso and area, this was called a *Peer Support Circle*. Peer Circles were developed to provide an opportunity for women to gather to work on craft or activity while talking and learning about themes and topics of interest to them or related to issues that were arising in their healing journey. Stories of experience, combined with education and support from service providers was vital. Participants valued the inter-generational experience and being with women outside of their family or social circles.

Lincolntonville, Sunnyville and Upper Big Tracadie

In the African Nova Scotian communities, a steering committee was established, and events and activities held. Annual priorities were identified by the group for action and events and activities coordinated by the Community Facilitator. The most successful approach was to gather women for annual 2-3 day retreats to allow for relaxation and healing experiences that build sisterhood and understanding.

Richmond County

In Louisdale, a project launch and needs assessment generated a list of ideas and topics of interest. Women were not interested in a formal group or committee but were happy to help with events and activities. Activities were coordinated including a well attended “around the dinner table” event to identify cultural strengths, vision board making, formal training on wellness recovery planning and parenting safe children course, coffee chats and conversations, Trauma Sensitive yoga series, and summer walks and talks with friends. These were a blend of formal supports with community partners and informal peer support / connecting survivors to local resources. Very important to meet people where they are, providing a warm, relaxed environment – with a cup of tea and a sweet.

Paqtnkek

In the final year of the project, a staffing change provided additional resources and time for a staff member to take on providing support to this rural community. A community fair was held to bring together organizations and agencies who provide support to victims of gender-based violence. This was well received. A steering committee was established to identify further actions and activities.

Consent workshops were held, positive signage created and regular staff visits from Support Workers from women's centre were coordinated.

3. Building Cultural Awareness and Understanding

Indigenous Knowledge Transfer

Meeting with members of the original team who developed the toolkit and working on the previous project provided an opportunity for reflection and sharing both best practice and the areas that could have been improved. This provided a base of experience for the team to draw upon as they proceeded.

The *Aboriginal Knowledge Transfer Coordinator* position was created to provide both the project team and the AWRC S A staff opportunities for learning about:

- The meaning of two-eyed seeing and how it has evolved
- Understanding the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations and how they are, or are not, being implemented today.
- A presentation on the stories of impact from the residential schools.
- A Micmaw therapist provided several workshops to the team and the women's centre staff to build understanding about the impact of trauma in the Aboriginal communities.
- The team learned and were led in ceremony by the Indigenous Knowledge Coordinator including regular smudging to open meetings and sharing the meaning of various seasons and days of important to
- The project team organized and led three annual Truth and Reconciliation events in the Guysborough Community.
- Working with an Elder at our team retreats provided safe healing spaces for the women working on the project to de-brief, share concerns and plan together.
- Transfer of Indigenous teaching to support survivors through workshops and presentations.
- Connecting with Indigenous arts and crafts people to lead workshops in other project communities and for team learning (dream-catchers, vision boards)

Learning from the African Nova Scotian Culture

In the African Nova Scotian Community, the focus was on building trust and sisterhood and meeting women where they were. There was very initially little interest in focussing on gender-based violence – a more formal term for what is often the everyday experience of Black Women. Rather, the approach was to offer activities aligned with their values, staying true to culture. One team member studied under an elder and became a Knowledge Keeper for the African Nova Scotian community. Libations were offered at the beginning of public events, elders were invited to lead and close meetings with prayer, and our land acknowledgement

included reference to the 400 years of black settlement, racism and struggle our communities have experienced.

- Providing service providers from the communities (outreach) with connections
- Modifying the formal language of gender-based violence to be better understood was important.
- More decolonized approach – let go of structured committees, less formalized approach to evaluation and planning.
- Use culturally responsive approaches – holding events that allow community to discover patterns of strengths based on their historic timeline (i.e. resilience, working together).
- Kids First, a local community family resource centre reached out, having received provincial funding for a Cultural Connector position. The current position of Community Facilitator (14 hours per week) was felt to be similar in scope and purpose and so the two organizations developed a partnership agreement to deliver the project outcomes collectively through one full-time position. This added to the overall impact of the CoSC project in the community by providing more focus on connecting the community to services and resources and building community impact.

Canso and Area Cultural Celebration

In Canso, a community cultural celebration was held during an annual community celebration. About 40 people attended representing various community organizations and historic perspectives. An historic timeline was created and used as the basis of discussion to identify the communities' strengths and responses to trauma, crisis and diversity. The learning from this event was incorporated into the cultural fair held in March 2023 and used to provide a better understanding of the needs of the community. Canso has been a traditional fishing community for over 400 years that has been at the whim of economic forces and government patterns of withdrawing services. This pattern of social and economic isolation contributes to the barriers faces by survivors of gender-based violence. This project explored how to provide more informal supports and create capacity in local women to support each other and have the knowledge to reach out to more formal service providers as needed.

Acadian Community in Richmond County

The staff team attended a presentation on Acadian history and culture which was informative and well-received. While much of the focus has been on making health care and education more accessible in the French language, we learned that it is not as simple as that. The Acadian language has often been shamed and many community members are reluctant to use it. Strong religious ties to the Catholic church also keep women silenced about gender-based violence issues. These factors could have a significant impact on how women access services when faced with intimate partner or sexualized violence. As was found in Canso, the nature of small towns further impacts confidentiality and privacy.

A cultural activity hosted in the community brought over 70 people together to identify strengths and patterns of resilience in the community. This information informed the Community Facilitator on ways to move forward in the community in a way that was aligned with their values.

Circles of Cultural Change Forum

The highlight of the 2023 year was the Circles of Cultural Change Forum held in Tracadie in April 2023 with approximately 70 participants in attendance. Most of the participants were service providers, but there were 17 community members from Canso, the African Nova Scotian Communities, Paqtnkek and Richmond County. Community members participated in a sharing circle to reflect on what has been learned in their communities, but also identify keep barriers and challenges to supporting survivors of gender-based violence through culturally responsive approach.

Briefly, participants identified ways to build/rebuild trust in rural, underserved, and marginalized communities through more the use of cultural practices and ceremonies, more informal and formal opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration and partnerships, building on the existing strengths and patterns of resistance and resilience, listening carefully to the needs of community and involve them in decision-making about what they need.

SPECIFIC RESOURCES NEEDED/REQUIRED TO TEST/IMPLEMENT YOUR PROMISING PRACTICE

In terms of staffing resources, at least one Community Facilitator is needed per community, ideally someone with expertise in community development and/or human services training. As well, they are likely to need access to a second person to provide specialized trauma therapy, provide support for peer support events and to facilitate educational events on gender-based violence and related issues.

Also, community cultural leaders, elders and knowledge keepers are important voices to connect to the project. This is not easy in a long-term project. Including honorariums and travel costs for members of steering committees has been raised as an important suggestion for any future projects. One of the key learnings of the project was the to hire team members who are trusted and knowledgeable community members. In particular, the African Nova Scotian community made clear their wishes to be supported by women who look like them and understand their cultural context.

Internal Resources

The COSC project staff drew upon the expertise of other women's centre staff, particularly staff focussed on youth, legal issues, health and wellness, trauma informed therapy and support counselling. This is aside from the significant administrative and project management tasks. Supporting a team of Community Facilitators from multiple project sites takes more time than anticipated. One of the significant learnings of the team has been that more time and resources should be dedicated in the first year of the project to capacity building and professional development for the project team members. The scope of practice for Community Facilitators needs to be carefully developed. While the intention was to hire individuals who could coordinate events and facilitate activities, the need was far greater for supporting individuals navigating programs and services, providing support counselling and crisis support, which were all areas outside of the scope of the position. Being able to successfully navigate disclosures, create safety plans, manage crisis calls and requests for support requires skill and experience.

External Resources

Partnerships with other service providers

Unanticipated partnerships emerged during the project based on the needs expressed by community for learning or support (i.e. suicide intervention, mental health first aid training, addiction services). The development of partnerships with other service-providers and organizations requires discussions by those in management or leadership to ensure clarity on the roles and responses that would best support the project. It takes time and coordination to develop and maintain relationships with external partners. Adequate time should be allocated for the Executive Director or Project Manager to assist and guide this process. For example, regular meetings were held with the Executive Director of Kids First to ensure the goals of both projects were being met and scheduling priorities established.

The efforts to share knowledge of what it means to be culturally responsive should have been included at the beginning of the project, rather than at the end, as in our case. This would have created a cultural circle of support for the team and provided a clearer community understanding. This needs to be intentional and thoughtful.

Professional Development

External organizations such as StFX University provided valuable formal professional development for team members (developmental evaluation, social action for change, Indigenous Women's Leadership). Courses were subsidized by the university to allow team members to participate. One team member successfully completed a course in Strategic Planning offered by IONS and four team members received certificates in Peer Support Facilitation. Team members participated in many seminars, webinars and workshops on various topics related to gender-based violence offered regionally and nationally, particularly during the time when COVID was limiting in-person activities in communities.

Steering Committees

Local steering committees were introduced after Year 1 in both Canso and the African Nova Scotian Community. These groups, most of whom were survivors of gender-based violence, were committed and thoughtful and created local action plans. They discussed community issues and provided guidance and support to the Community Facilitators. In Richmond County, there was no desire to form a committee, but a committed group of citizens and service providers came together to establish an action plan and supported the Community Facilitator with events and activities more informally. In Year 4, a steering committee of service providers, band leaders and health centre staff was established in Paqtnkek to establish priorities for the Community Facilitator.

Project Advisory Committee

A project advisory committee of staff, service providers and members of each community is recommended. This project established one, but after a few meetings it was discontinued in favour of more local committees, but the project would have benefited from a group to reflect, support and advise on the overall project. An on-going group to review evaluation findings in more depth, review on-going community plans and advise the project is recommended.

SECTION 4 - Project activities.

- Hire the project team and establish administrative practices
- Building on the pre-project work, we facilitated conversations with circles of women in communities who wanted to be part of this work as members of either formal steering communities or informal supports and participants.
- Created the developmental evaluation plan
- Hosted formal or informal community launch activities to share with the community the outcomes and resources of the project.
- Using various formal and informal methods, we identified activities and priorities for each unique community based on its cultural and historic social and economic story.
- Created and coordinated culturally responsive healing and wellness activities for women across four communities
- Facilitated Peer Support Circle in Canso and area, informal circle gatherings in Richmond and African Nova Scotian communities
- Provided learning and knowledge opportunities related to gender-based violence and other topics of concern to community members
- Provided resources for capacity building, support and professional development to the project team and an elder for team retreats.
- Facilitated regular team meetings and quarterly planning days.
- Brought community steering committees together to reflect on the previous year, share their learning and celebrate their work in each community
- Planned and hosted the Cultural Circles of Change Forum in March 2023 bringing together 70 service providers, Elders and Knowledge Keepers and community members to share and discuss culturally responsive approaches to gender-based violence in rural, marginalized, underserved and isolated communities.
- Developed a website to share the project activities and resources.
- Met with community members and Steering Committees in the African Nova Scotian and Canso and surrounding area to celebrate the project wrapping up, reflect on next steps and to gather their input for the Blueprint.
- Planned a team day of reflection on the overall project learnings and determine what was important to be reflected in the blueprint.

Key results/findings

Achievements

- This project deepened the women's centre's understanding of the needs of more rural, underserved, and marginalized communities.

- In the African Nova Scotian communities , the project brought three distinct communities together to create opportunities to build sisterhood, and provide informal opportunities for women to come together to learn and support each other on their healing journey.
- Community Facilitators learned more about the impact of systemic racism, gender-based violence and historic trauma and improved their skills as community leaders. The benefits of this capacity building will be felt in their communities for years to come.
- The project brought awareness of GBV issues to women who would not normally be together and created opportunities for inter-generational mentoring.
- The project identified challenges in the community and the need for more services and supports such as navigators to link survivors to supports and resources, culturally responsive trauma therapy and outreach supports and programs.
- The project team and the women's centre staff learned more about cultural approaches to healing. What works in each community is different and needs to be understood in a cultural context.

What was the biggest challenge?

Covid 19 Pandemic

The Covid 19 pandemic caused considerable disruption to our project implementation plan.

- We were not able to have in-person wellness events
- Not able to have GBV information sessions
- In person therapy was not accessible
- Not able to provide resources, information, brochures etc.
- Not able to meet with Steering Committees in person
- Many people struggled with online technology
- Lack of reliable internet in many of our communities
- Concerns arose about women's safety during lock-down when they were not able to leave their homes
- Referrals were challenging as many service providers were also challenged
- Increased intimate partner violence
- Lack of resources and support
- Fear and confusion, uncertainty & isolation
- Children having to learn from home created added stress to families and survivors
- Therapy was not available virtually
- Project Administration and support

Responses to Challenge:

- Facebook community sites

- Hosting online events – soulful sisters, cooking
- Human trafficking workshop
- Bystander training
- Used Zoom to have steering committee meetings
- Online support to individual women by phone or Zoom
- Advocated for better internet service with politicians
- Team members searched and created on-line resources
- Care packages created and distributed, dropped of resources, materials for online workshops
- Partnered with other AWRC staff in outreach support to assist with financial support: i.e. Grocery gift cards, financial support and legal advocacy
- Partnered with African Nova Scotian Seniors Action Group to provide grocery cards.
- Back to school packages of supplies provided to children returning to school

Administrative Challenges

- The project proposal was developed by a long-standing AWRC Executive Director (ED) who retired just as the project was funded. A second ED was hired, who then resigned after two years, to be replaced by a team of two co-directors and in the last year that changed again to one ED. This created a lack of continuity in approach, vision and management of the project.
- Changes in project focus – AWRC staff had different visions and approaches which caused conflict and uncertainty in the implementation. This was not addressed well.
- Project scope too broad and yet too specific. Gender-based violence is not the primary issue being faced in communities. Addictions, poverty, housing, food insecurity, lack of services are all needs in all of the project communities that need to be addressed. A more focussed collective impact approach (meeting with other cultural leaders, women, partners/service providers in the communities) might have helped to clarify community needs.

Cultural Challenges

- In the African Nova Scotian communities, systemic Racism barriers and historic trauma have led to a disconnect between service providers and community members who lack trust in the “system”.
- In Canso there are significant challenges to gaining and maintaining services despite strong community advocacy and resilience. - Rural isolation – costs of getting resources, additional supports higher
- In the Indigenous community there are challenges to finding culturally appropriate supports for community members. Changes in Band Council leadership can lead to changes in priority for what services are provided in the community. Addiction services, grief counselling, and providing culturally responsive healing supports are all needed.
- Understanding the needs of the Acadian Community is complex. The provision of French-language services is not a simple fix. The unique Acadian dialect and cultural traditions have been historically shamed and eradicated over generations. Celebrating and reclaiming that cultural heritage is an on-going challenge, combined with historic sexual abuse trauma in the community that has not been addressed or healed.

Scope of Practice for the Community Facilitator

- The intention of the role was to provide a community person who could coordinate events and activities, which turned out to be insufficient as the need is much greater for navigation, partnership development, crisis support, referrals, and specialized trauma therapy.
- The scope of practice (based on the job description) was confusing and limited and was revised by the team following a retreat.
- The role did not clarify the skills and knowledge about how to start – community development practices, cultural approaches to build trust in community ANS, finding black supports
- Not enough education and training to support survivors – the Community Facilitators should have had more information and resources to better understand intergenerational trauma and how to support communities
- The position of a CF NSCC, a local community college, didn't work well. There were conflicts between college and women's centre approaches (i.e. reporting disclosures). As the Community Facilitator position wasn't technically a college position, the CF did not have access to system emails, communications tools or support. Once COVID began, the CF had no access to students to provide on-going resources and supports.

Community Readiness to Address GBV

- The project was addressing and bringing awareness to hard issues that no one ever talked about.
- The previous sexual violence project in Paqtnkek had no follow up and therefore there had been no ongoing progress on supporting survivors and providing prevention activities.
- We opened the box – there were concerns about what would follow this project. Communities have unfortunately experienced many project in the past that did not result in long-term supports that the community can count on.
- No trauma informed culturally informed specialized gender-based violence therapy
- Historical trauma in communities never dealt with or supported

What were the most important changes as a result of your activities?

Lessons learned

Have you encountered any unanticipated issues (barriers and/or opportunities) that had a major impact on the project? If so, how did you address them? You may wish to include information on the impact of COVID-19 if you feel that it was significant for your project.

- ❖ Covid 19 exposed many issues facing rural communities including lack of cell phone and adequate internet. Older women in particular lacked skills or comfort using Zoom or other technologies for support. Organizations were not prepared or ready to pivot to virtual therapy or on-line services.
- ❖ In some communities there was a reluctance to address GBV directly due to lack of trust in outside agencies because of racism, isolation, lack of services, lack of information, historic trauma. The project responded by offering more wellness-focussed activities, providing support on a variety of issues (i.e. Suicide, mental health, etc.) As the project continued, more GBV focussed activities, learning, information sessions have been asked for and supported.
- ❖ Lack of services, navigation and support are widespread on many issues in rural Nova Scotia including housing, poverty, food insecurity, mental health, and addictions. A more focussed inter-agency or collective impact approach is needed that involves the voices of survivors, other service delivery partners, health organization and community leaders.
- ❖ These are made even more challenging by system-based violence and racism.

What did you learn that will affect (positively or negatively) the way you do your work with the targeted population? Has this project opened the door for new ways of collaborating?

Overall, the women's centre has learned a tremendous amount about how to support African Nova Scotian, Indigenous and rural communities. The organization has not been successful in finding African Nova Scotian staff members, but the commitment is there to continue trying to do so. The centre has learned about ways in which it could de-colonize its practices and approaches to service delivery. A women's support worker has been regularly going to Paqtnkek to meet with women. There has been an on-going need to improve relationships with other service providers and partners in community to ensure there is no duplication of service and there are shared outcomes.

What are your thoughts on adapting the project to other contexts and populations? Do you have specific recommendations?

This project would need significant internal resources and administration to replicate. More resources focussed on one or two communities would have more impact than part-time resources across four communities.

One of the key learnings of the project is the importance of hiring local community members who are respected, know and understand the culture of the community and has good relationships with other agencies and organizations. They become "connectors" between community members and supports and services. Given the shortage of human services and social work professionals, ensuring staff receive adequate upfront training and support is important.

Supporting the supporters is critical. Working with these issues takes a toll, and many of the women working in this field are survivors or close friends and family members. Additional effort is needed to provide counselling and support to staff members that is culturally responsive.

Guidance by community elders and partner organizations is important to ensure the project is culturally responsive, effective and well-understood in the community

Additional Resources

The project team developed a website to share its progress and provide resources to community members.

<https://circlesofsupportandchange.ca/>