

Newcomer Community Wellness Project

Lessons Learned

*Im/migrants' Perspective of their
Mental Health and Wellness*

APRIL 27, 2016

The Newcomer Community Wellness Project was a three-year initiative led by ISANS and funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Health & Wellness within the framework of the Nova Scotia Mental Health Strategy. The project aimed to develop a model to provide equitable and culturally competent mental health services to im/migrants and to help communities increase their ability to respond to issues of mental health, wellness and addictions.

Outcome 1

Immigrant communities are empowered to achieve mental health and wellness as well as to address challenges of mental health and addictions through collaborative efforts within their communities.

Actions Taken

Im/migrants' Perspective of their Mental Health and Wellness:

Newcomer Community Mental Health Assessment

Educational Strategy:

Learning to live with stress during the settlement process workshop: 12 sessions, 200 participants

Wellness Support Group:

12 sessions, 24 participants

Communication Strategy:

Mental Health and Wellness Resource Brochure translated into five languages

ISANS Mental Health and Wellbeing web module

Lessons Learned

Most im/migrants are mentally healthy at their arrival and are resilient. Settlement stress impacts negatively on their health when unaddressed.

Isolation, racial and systemic discrimination, including government policies, are mentioned as root causes of mental health problems.

Welcoming communities, settlement support and holistic interventions to preserve wellness are key to supporting im/migrants' wellbeing.

Im/migrants are interested in talking and learning about mental health and wellness.

Im/migrants acknowledge mental health stigma and want to challenge it.

Im/migrants have a holistic view of mental health and wellness that includes social determinants of mental health.

Because most of the im/migrants express emotional suffering through their bodies, holistic interventions that include physical approaches are preferred.

Addressing mental health problems within the framework of the settlement process helps to reduce stigma.

Im/migrants fail to access mental health services because of: lack of information about services, lack of interpretation services, lack of intercultural competency and trauma informed approaches, mistrust of the system and uncoordinated systems that are complicated to navigate.

Outcome 2

Newcomer communities are increasing their capacity, leadership and engagement in the areas of mental illness, addictions and overall wellness issues and the underlying issues related to settlement and social determinants of health.

Actions Taken

Educational Strategy - Newcomers:

Natural Helpers Workshops: series of five workshops -12 hours each, 70 participants

Two Mental Health First Aid Trainings: 18 participants

One SafeTALK workshop: 7 participants

Newcomer Community Wellness Educators Training: 2 Trained Community Wellness Educators

Knowledge Exchange with Service Providers: 3 sessions, 30 im/migrants

Educational Strategy - Settlement Staff:

- Five presentations of the Newcomer Community Mental Health Assessment Report
- Two workshops on Trauma and Resiliency Informed Care
- Two workshops on settlement stress with ISANS Life Skill Workers
- Three webinars on Refugee Mental Health

Lessons Learned

- Peer support should be used to address mental health problems and to enhance wellness when appropriate.
- Adult education strategies facilitate culturally relevant learning processes by bringing in im/migrants' experience.
- The topic of stress opens doors to address mental health and wellness with im/migrant populations.
- Mental health stigma can be challenged when recovery is viewed as possible and there is an understanding of the continuum of mental health.
- Including community members in planning of educational sessions facilitates both community participation and cultural inclusiveness in program design.
- Each settlement staff has a role in supporting im/migrant wellbeing and early identification of indicators of distress.
- Settlement staff acknowledged the positive impact that community programs (community gardens, knitting groups, etc) have on healing and recovery.

Outcome 3

Mental Health and addiction programs are providing more culturally competent services that address the needs of newcomer communities.

Actions Taken

Communication:

- Ten presentations of Newcomer Community Mental Health Assessment to Nova Scotia Mental Health & Addictions Program, IWK Health Center and Community Health Teams
- Three community events with service providers and immigrants
- Two knowledge exchange sessions between settlement staff and IWK and Community Health Teams

Collaboration:

- Creation of collaborative model of care with private practitioners
- Participation in the Trauma Informed Approach Advisory Committee
- Participation in the NS Department of Health and Wellness development of the NS Dementia Strategy
- Participation in the NS Central Zone Mental Health and Addiction Program Public Advisory Committee

Lessons Learned

- Im/migrants benefit more when there is collaboration among primary care, settlement staff and mental health service providers.
- Im/migrant needs are better addressed when they are involved in long term process of institutional change rather than when they are called for a one time consultation.
- Responding to im/migrants mental health requires flexible structures that are not currently in place.
- Mental health services are not responding to most immigrants' requests for services since they are not presenting "serious mental illnesses".
- Training interpreters on mental health issues and bringing them in to collaborate with clinicians for mutual understanding of roles, core practices and challenges improves the quality of the counselling process.
- There is still a long way to go before mental health services recognize intercultural competency as a key component in the provision of their services and not just an addition after other areas have been considered.

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