

Innovation Initiatives 2023-24 - Project Summaries

Approaches to mental health and addictions services in North America have been developed in a colonial context that centers the cultural values of white, European communities. This creates significant barriers for children, young people and families from racialized and Indigenous communities seeking mental health supports and not finding options that reflect their values and traditions.

The Innovation Initiatives projects presented here demonstrate how child and youth mental health and addictions agencies in Ontario are collaborating with other local agencies and community partners to make existing services more culturally responsive to children, young people and families from racialized and Indigenous communities, leading to better mental health outcomes.



Black SNAP®: Culturally adapting Stop Now and Plan (SNAP) for Black children and families

CAFCAN – Caribbean, African Canadian Social Services

What's the issue?

Black-led agencies in Toronto have offered the evidence-based program Stop Now And Plan (SNAP®) to predominantly Black communities for four years. The program is relevant and helpful, but it has not been culturally adapted. It does not address experiences of anti-Black racism, nor the trauma and ongoing survival issues it causes for Black children and young people.

What's the innovation?

Three agencies in Toronto will partner with the Child Development Institute (CDI), the agency that designed the original SNAP® program. These agencies are CAFCAN Social Services, Delta Family Resource Centre, and Tropicana Community Services. They will determine the key components of culturally adapting the SNAP® program to better serve Black children, young people, families and communities. Their approach will use the Ghanaian concept of Sankofa (“Go back and get it”) to learn from past experiences of offering SNAP® to Black young people and use those experiences to improve future offerings. Feedback from Black SNAP® participants and practitioners will guide the development of these improvements.

What impact is anticipated?

Modifying the program to better meet the unique needs of Black children, young people, and families has the potential to increase the effectiveness of SNAP® at reducing disruptive behaviour, substance use, and mental health challenges. This initiative can serve as a best practice model in creating cultural adaptations of SNAP® for other racialized and culturally diverse people.



Adapting CBT for newcomer, immigrant, and refugee families from Middle Eastern countries

Vanier Children's Mental Wellness, Humana Community Services, Craigwood Youth Services, and the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration

What's the issue?

Vanier Children's Mental Wellness has offered an evidence-based Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) program to newcomer, immigrant and refugee families from Middle Eastern countries. The agency discovered that the CBT model and its top-down approach was not meeting the mental health needs of children, young people and families in these communities, many of whom experience high levels of trauma and barriers to accessing supports and education.

What's the innovation?

Vanier, Humana Community Services, and Craigwood Youth Services, in partnership with the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI), will adapt a CBT program to include elements of narrative therapy. This style of therapy focuses on the stories we develop to describe moments in our lives. Staff from these agencies, along with experts from local Muslim communities and program participants, will design the program together. Clinicians will focus on the strengths of the children, young people and adults participating, and the ways their Middle Eastern cultural background shapes their experiences. The agencies will modify how the program is offered so that everyone can take part in it at the same time. Clinicians will also walk through the program alongside parents and children, increasing trust and creating relationships where participants are acknowledged as experts in their own experiences.

What impact is anticipated?

Building on CBT programming by adding narrative therapy elements and offering concurrent programming for the whole family will make the program more respectful and culturally responsive to participants. Structuring the program to emphasize participants' strengths and expertise in their own experiences will improve their confidence and emphasize that growth and change are possible. Participating in the program will also make parents and children more aware that they are part of a community. By adapting and co-developing this program with MCSSI and Muslim community partners, staff at Vanier, Humana Community Services and Craigwood Youth Services will build their capacity to provide culturally responsive care to Muslim communities.



Lincking with New Immigrant Families

Linck

What's the issue?

There's a need in the Chatham-Kent region for culturally relevant anti-violence programming and evidence-based child and youth mental health interventions. The program aims to improve the safety and well-being of Muslim immigrant and refugee children, young people, and families while maintaining their connections with their loved ones and communities.

What's the innovation?

For this innovation, Linck will partner with members of the Chatham Islamic Resource Centre, the London Ontario Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI), the London Centre for Culturally Integrative Responses (CCIR) and Chatham-Kent Muslim community representatives. Together, partners will explore how best to provide trauma-informed mental health services for Muslim immigrant and refugee children, young people and families. A key focus will be addressing experiences of Islamophobic violence, gender-based violence and the impacts of adjusting to North American cultural and social norms. This program will use messaging focused on wellness, to better reach community members who might otherwise feel stigma about accessing mental health care.

What impact is anticipated?

Culturally adapting services in partnership with local agencies serving Muslim communities will lead to better mental health care outcomes and increased well-being for Muslim children, young people and families. Relationships and communication between Muslim communities and Linck will be strengthened. Staff from Linck will learn how to better serve Muslim community members. Participating Muslim children, young people and families will learn more about Linck's services, which will help to relieve misunderstandings or concerns about the agency or mental health services in general.



Adapting an evidence-based program to achieve better outcomes for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, young people, and families involved with the child welfare system

New Path and Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiyag Child & Family Services

What's the issue?

Commonly used evidence-based mental health and parental attachment programs are not culturally adapted to meet the needs of Indigenous children, young people and their families. There is a need for agency staff to deepen their knowledge of how to best serve Indigenous families, challenge the norms of the organization's Eurocentric programming and expand services to align with the worldviews of the Indigenous communities they serve.

What's the innovation?

New Path will partner with the Indigenous Child Well-being Agency Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiyag Child & Family Services to adapt an existing evidence-based program to be more culturally informed by Indigenous knowledge, wisdom and expertise. Fifteen Indigenous family support workers will take training in the evidence-based program in two roles: learner and teacher. Support workers will provide feedback on how to adapt the curriculum and draw parallels between the evidence-based program and similar concepts and practices in Indigenous communities.

What impact is anticipated?

Incorporating Indigenous practices and perspectives into the delivery methods of an evidence-based program will improve the program for Indigenous families. The guidance of Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag will build the capacity of staff at New Path to center Indigenous ways of thinking, knowing and being.



Mental health enhancement through cultural activities

Child & Youth Milopemahtesewin Services

What's the issue?

Access to Indigenous cultural teachings, language, arts activities and land-based learning are important supports to the mental health and well-being of Indigenous children, young people and their families. Opportunities for cultural programming available to children and young people are always deeply needed in communities in the James Bay region. However, the costs associated with offering these activities makes it difficult to provide them. This means opportunities are missed for healthy sharing, learning, social connection and cultural knowledge transmission within communities.

What's the innovation?

The agency will offer programming in Indigenous communities in the region. The focus will be on cultural teachings, language learning, arts activities and land-based learning in a safe environment. The goal is to promote healthy lifestyles and improve mental health and well-being for community members.

What impact is anticipated?

Identity formation is a crucial component of the development of children and young people and supports their well-being as they grow. Offering cultural programming will support access to traditional teachings, harvesting practices, historical knowledge, customs and ceremonies. This programming will increase children and young people's sense of self-worth and equip them with valuable life skills and knowledge.