

Enhancing mental health promotion and well-being of newcomer children, youth and families in Manitoba



Executive Summary

July 2018

A project lead by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Mental Health Promotion Program, and funded by the Children's Hospital Foundation of Manitoba Inc.

About the Report

Project Team

Ogai Sherzoi, MSW
Project Coordinator
Mental Health Promotion,
Winnipeg Regional Health
Authority and
Centre for Healthcare
Innovation

Julie-Anne McCarthy, MSc
Project Lead
Program Specialist, Mental
Health Promotion
Winnipeg Regional Health
Authority

Karen Kyliuk, BSW, RSW
Project Consultant
Resource/Education
Facilitator
Mental Health Promotion
Winnipeg Regional Health
Authority

**Heather Forrest, BA, BSW,
RSW**
Project Sponsor
Operations Lead,
Community Mental Health
Program
Winnipeg Regional Health
Authority

Ashley Struthers, MA
Report Editor
Centre for Healthcare
Innovation

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Information about this work can be obtained by contacting:

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Mental Health Promotion Program

Email: WRHAMentalHealthPromotion@wrha.mb.ca

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Executive Summary

Background

The population of newcomer children and families (including both immigrants and refugees) in Manitoba is growing. It is known that **positive mental health and well-being are vital to their successful resettlement** in this province. However, stakeholder consultations conducted by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) Mental Health Promotion Team identified concerns related to the mental health of newcomers and a lack of resources for service providers to promote positive mental health. To address this, the Mental Health Promotion Team applied for and received a Children's Hospital Foundation Child Health Advisory Committee (CHAC) grant.

The purpose of this project was to support and strengthen the mental health and well-being of newcomer families in Manitoba by developing a tool or resource to increase the community's capacity to engage newcomer populations across Manitoba, especially families, in mental health promotion. The project included three parts: (1) A literature review and environmental scan of health promotion practices targeted at newcomer families; (2) Consultations with newcomers, organizations that serve newcomers and academic researchers; and (3) The development of a resource for service providers to use to protect and strengthen the mental health and well-being of newcomer families.

Part 1: Literature review and environmental scan

Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness (Keyes, 2002). "Mental Health is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity" (PHAC, 2014). Mental health promotion supports positive mental health across the lifespan and has been defined as "the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to take control over their lives and improve their mental health" (Ballon, Gamble, Waller-Vintar, & CAMH, 2012, p.17). Three goals of mental health promotion have been identified: (1) to increase protective factors and promote resilience; (2) to decrease factors that impose risks; and (3) to reduce inequalities (Ballon et al., 2012; Kobus-Mathews, Jackson, Easlick, & Loconte, 2014).

Mental Health promotion on a population level recognizes that opportunities exist to enhance well-being for newcomer children, youth and families in key areas including: building a sense of community, inclusion, healthy family functioning, and sense of purpose.

The mental health of newcomers is influenced by many factors, starting with their experiences in their country of origin and subsequent migration. Once in Manitoba, newcomers face common challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, securing basic needs (housing, education and employment) and social integration (sense of belonging in the school system and community at large). The purpose of this project is to emphasize the **protective factors that newcomer families bring with them, and to build on these strengths to support mental health and well-being**. One important message is that all Canadians have a role in contributing to the newcomer settling experience in a positive way by being welcoming,

inclusive and supportive.

Wrap-around services and agency supports are essential, meaning that services should be comprehensive, coordinated and collaborative. Services should recognize and seek to build resilience, acknowledge the importance of family well-being and facilitate the development of social and organizational networks. Providers should be culturally competent and trained in trauma informed practice. Interpreters should be available to reduce language barriers. In essence, warm, welcoming and responsive environments should be created to promote recovery and a sense of belonging.

There are many examples of mental health promotion strategies in Manitoba, nationally and internationally. Mental health promotion is a thread throughout Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's (WRHA) adapted Stepped Care service model for immigrants and refugees (WRHA, 2014). Other mental health promotion approaches found in the literature include: settlement workers in schools, programs that support integration in schools, building community through food, sports, arts, music, free public events, having volunteer based "buddy systems" to connect newcomers to local resources, supporting immigrant and refugee community-based organizations, and creating opportunities for dialogue about mental health promotion.

Part 2: Stakeholder consultations

The literature suggests that **approaches to mental health promotion for newcomers should be grounded in the voices and perspectives of newcomers**. One key project activity was conducting consultations with newcomer-community members, newcomer advisory groups, service providers working within newcomer agencies and organizations in Winnipeg and rural Manitoba, and researchers with expertise in this field. These consultations were rooted in the idea of public engagement; that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision making process. The goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of existing mental health promotion resources, barriers and challenges to mental health and well-being, and to determine what type of new mental health promotion resource would be appropriate, meaningful and useful for newcomer families and the organizations that support them.

Between August and December 2017, a total of **29 consultations were conducted with over 60 participants**. The information collected through these consultations was consistent with the literature and between the three groups. Four main themes emerged:

1) Understanding of mental health and well-being: Participants identified mental health as a priority as well as the need for mental health promotion strategies. However, they also described the stigma attached to the term *mental health*, and their **preference for the term well-being**.

"This [well-being] is just as essential as food on the table"
(Community member)

2) Key factors that promote the mental health and well-being of newcomer families:

Participants identified developing a **sense of belonging and positive relationships** as one of the most important factors that support a family’s well-being during the settlement process.

Other factors thought to support newcomers’ mental health and well-being included:

- having time together as a family
- maintaining a connection to their culture,
- building connections with other local cultures and communities,
- participating in activities such as sports, music and leisure,
- volunteering, which often leads to meaningful employment, and
- having access to training such as English classes and parenting groups.

Participants acknowledged the important role that newcomer serving organizations play in supporting mental health and well-being. At a community level, neighbours, schools, and workplaces also have a role to play in the settlement process by creating a welcoming, inclusive and supportive environment.

*“When I am with a community learning from each other,
that’s when I feel most fullest.”*
(Community member)

3) Barriers or challenges impacting the mental health and well-being of newcomer families: Newcomers faced challenges at the individual level (individual stressors, employment and non-recognition of credentials, language, and literacy challenges), family level (childcare, parent-child relationships, housing, poverty), community level (racism and integration into the school system, youth gang involvement, cultural differences, social isolation,). **Given these barriers the need for a resource tool to support well-being to mitigate these stressors was validated.**

*“Well-being is physical, financial, it’s holistic. You need all areas.
For many newcomers they are missing one or more pieces... maybe
finances, language, or shelter they don’t have.”*
(Community member)

4) Key learnings and recommendations to support the mental health and well-being of newcomer families:

Participants had many ideas about how to address these challenges such as:

- coordinating services to provide wrap-around supports, thus increasing collaboration,
- providing flexible services, including access to child care and system navigation,
- engaging families by building trusting relationships and creating meaningful connections,
- offering employment and training supports, including ESL classes,
- creating opportunities to build a sense of community and belonging, particularly for youth, and
- adopting strength-based and culturally safe service delivery models.

Participants emphasized that all Canadians have a part to play in nurturing this sense of belonging, including the role and influence that media has on societal viewpoints. Schools and communities should continue to foster a sense of belonging for children, youth and families. Service providers need to have access to trauma-informed care and continuing cultural competency training; organizations should employ individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

“Remember that people are resilient! They are the experts in their own lives.”
(Community member)

“Work with the existing strengths of the community – parents are passionate about their children and are survivors, so working with that.” (Service provider)

Part 3: Resource Development

The project team explored the benefits and limitations of several types of resource tools as part of the resource development process (e.g., children’s book, video, pamphlets). Throughout the consultations it was clear that a video was the most viable option and recommended by participants. A video could reflect and include diverse cultural perspectives on well-being, highlight the importance of family, culture, language and community in a format that was accessible to most individuals and not as dependent on reading levels or English-language comprehension. As such, a video was developed.

The foundation of the video was the *Family Tree of Well-being* activity, which was adapted by the project team from the *Tree of Life* activity, developed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denbrough in 2006 (Ncube, 2006). It was chosen as the featured activity in the video because: it was visual, strengths-based, family-focused, non-stigmatizing, not focused on trauma and loss, respected cultural diversity, and had a storytelling component that is familiar to many cultures (Hughes, 2014). Additionally, the activity was free to use, did not require high literacy levels, and could be completed using drawings and language of preference. It had also been effectively used in other countries and across different cultures, and was already familiar to some service providers in Manitoba. Service providers skilled in group facilitation could guide the process and comfortably engage individuals and families in this personal reflection about well-being. The *Family Tree of Well-being* activity was adapted to include different elements of a family’s story. The prototype of the newly adapted activity was vetted through newcomer advisory groups and mental health professionals with their valued feedback incorporated into the final design.

A recruitment poster was sent to consultation participants and the project team personally reached out to newcomer serving organizations to recruit families for the video production event. Members of the project team met with each interested family prior to filming to explain the intent of the video, explain the *Family Tree of Well-being* activity, and to begin to build trusting relationships. Seven families from varied countries of origin, who had been residing in Canada for a few months to several years, volunteered to participate in the event that took place on March 3rd, 2018.

The event was held at Knox United Church which was selected in part due to its familiarity to many newcomers in Winnipeg. The video was professionally produced by Snow Angel Films,

an independent film production company in Winnipeg, MB (<http://snowangelfilms.com/>). Filming took place on a Saturday to allow for children and youth attendance outside of school hours and for parents, grandparents, extended family and/or caregiver participation. Consent forms were obtained prior to filming. Interpreter services were provided upon request. Lunch, bus tickets and honorariums were provided to recognize the families valued contributions.

The day began by welcoming families and setting the stage for a positive experience. An ice breaker activity was used to intentionally focus participants on well-being, each family then created their own unique tree of well-being. The adult participants organically encouraged the children and youth to be active participants in the development of their family’s tree of well-being and **to openly share their own perspectives on what supports their mental health and well-being** (as illustrated in the video dialogues). A closing circle provided the opportunity for families as a unit to share their trees with each other. Project team facilitation skills were important to guide the process and prompt families to explore what well-being meant to them, while also creating a safe space to encourage personal reflection and creative expression. Throughout the event, participants found commonalities, celebrated uniqueness, learned from each other’s diverse viewpoints and formed a sense of community.

The video illustrating the *Family Tree of Well-being* activity and highlighting key messages and strategies that promote mental health and well-being from newcomers’ perspectives is available on the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority’s Mental Health Promotion Website

www.wellbeingguide.ca

Next Steps: Newcomers Family Tree of Well-being Facilitator Guide

Individuals have the option of watching the video independently and using it as a personal self-reflection tool. The video can also be a tool for service providers to use in their service delivery settings as a means to begin a dialogue with newcomers about well-being, strengths, and coping with challenges.

As a supplementary resource, The WRHA Mental Health Promotion team has developed the *Newcomers Family Tree of Well-being Facilitator Guide* for service providers. The Facilitator Guide outlines a step-by-step process for service providers who wish to use the video resource in a more planned way, providing instructions on how to facilitate the *Family Tree of Well-being* activity, so that the positive and meaningful experience as noted in this project can be duplicated in other settings. The Facilitator Guide is available here: www.wellbeingguide.ca

Conclusion

Ultimately, the hope is that these tools can indeed become a resource to enhancing mental health promotion and well-being of children, youth and families who move to Manitoba, and to build the capacity of individuals, service providers and communities to imbed mental health promotion in their work and lives.

Images from *Family Tree of Well-being* filming event

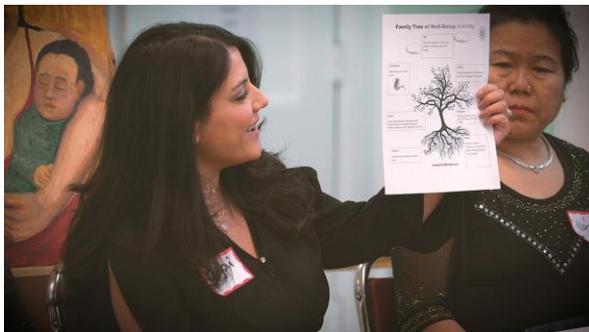
Photo credit: Snow Angel Films Company
<http://snowangelfilms.com/>

“Ice breaker” warm-up activity to get to know each other and to set the tone for a fun and positive morning



Introducing the *Family Tree of Well-being* activity

Creating a *Family Tree of Well-being*



All family members are encouraged to participate in the creation of their unique tree



Families showcase their trees to the rest of the group in a closing circle



And then... we feast!



Thank you!
The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Mental Health Promotion Program
WRHAMentalHealthPromotion@wrha.mb.ca

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Appendix A: Consultation and Video participants

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- The Kisama family
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- The Tekie family
- The Wang family
- Mr. Kashani
- Ms. Nova
- Ms. Quddus
- Mr. Teymouri
- Artbeat Studio & Studio Central
- Child and Family Services Newcomer Unit
- Coalition of Cultural Considerations for Families (CCCF)
- Family Dynamics
- George & Fay Yee Center for Healthcare Innovation (CHI)
- Immigrant Advisory Table (IAT)
- Immigrant Partnership Winnipeg (IPW)
- Knox United Church
- Manitoba Association for Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO)
- Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place)
- Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network
- Mount Carmel Clinic Winnipeg
- Neepawa Immigrant Settlement Services
- Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services Inc. (N.E.E.D.S)
- Portage Learning and Literacy Center Inc.
- Regional Connections Immigrant Services, Winkler Settlement and Integration Services
- Video Event Interpreters (Welcome Place & Winnipeg Regional Health Authority)
- WestEnd Commons
- Westman Immigrant Services (WIS), Brandon Settlement Program
- Winnipeg Child and Family Services
- Winnipeg Public Libraries
- Wolseley Family Place
- YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg
- Dr. Feldgaier, Healthy Child Manitoba and Department of Clinical Health Psychology, University of Manitoba
- Martin Itzkow, Coach, NLP M. Pract. FRSA (U.K.), Barrett Values Centre Certified CTT Consultant (U.K.) and the Canadian Values Alliance
- Dr. Wilkinson, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba
- Dr. Heinonen, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba

Appendix B: Helpful Resources Mentioned by Families and Service Providers

In order to determine what type of tool to develop to promote the well-being of newcomer children and their families, it was important to learn about resources that already existed. Many supports, services and agencies were identified by participants during the consultations as having helped them in their settlement journey. We felt as though it was important to share these in the hopes that it can be helpful for others as well. Please note however, this is not an official list of resources! There are many other helpful resources not mentioned here.

For an official list of Manitoba-based Mental Health Resources, please see the 22nd Edition of the Canadian Mental Health Association Manitoba (CMHA) Resource Guide (2018) at:

<https://mbwpg.cmha.ca/resources/mental-health-resource-guide-for-winnipeg/>

For the section specifically for newcomers, visit:

<https://mbwpg.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Newcomers-and-Refugees-Section-2017.pdf>

- Artbeat Studio <http://artbeatstudio.ca/>
- Assiniboine Park <https://www.assiniboinepark.ca/park-landing/home>
- Aurora Family Therapy Center <http://www.aurorafamilytherapy.com/>
- Calm in the storm App <http://calminthestormapp.com/>
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Manitoba and Winnipeg <https://mbwpg.cmha.ca/>
- Cantalk Third-party phone based interpretive services <http://cantalk.com/>
- Cavalry Temple Church <https://www.ctwinnipeg.com/>
- Child and Family Services <https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/cfsagencies.html>
- Children's Hospital <http://www.hsc.mb.ca/> & Children's Hospital Foundation of Manitoba <http://goodbear.mb.ca/>
- Community/cultural groups
- Employment and Income Assistance <https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/eia/>
- Flavie Laurent Centre https://www.cflc.info/?page_id=233
- Healthy Baby Community Support Programs for parents <https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/healthybaby/>
- Hockey Manitoba <http://www.hockeymanitoba.ca/>
- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM) <http://www.ircom.ca/>
- Immigrant Center <http://icmanitoba.com/>
- Jumpstart Charity <http://jumpstart.canadiantire.ca/en.html>
- Klinik Community Health <http://klinik.mb.ca/>
- Knox United Church <http://www.knoxwinnipeg.ca/>
- Manitoba Association for Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO) <http://mansomanitoba.ca/>

- Manitoba Housing <https://www.gov.mb.ca/housing/>
- Manitoba Immigration and Economic Opportunities <https://www.immigratemanitoba.com/>
- Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place) <http://miic.ca/>
- Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network <http://www.mosaicnet.ca/>
- Mount Carmel Clinic <https://www.mountcarmel.ca/>
- Naomi House Winnipeg <https://www.facebook.com/NaomiHouseWinnipeg/>
- Neighbourhood Immigrant Settlement Program <http://icmanitoba.com/services/neighbourhood-immigrant-settlement-coordinator/>
- New Directions <http://newdirections.mb.ca/>
- New Journey Housing <http://www.newjourneyhousing.com/>
- Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services Inc. (N.E.E.D.S) <http://www.needsinc.ca/>
- Nine Circles Community Health Center <http://ninecircles.ca/>
- Sources of Strength Program for schools <https://sourcesofstrength.org/>
- Southern Health/Santé Sud <https://www.southernhealth.ca/>
- Spence Neighbourhood Association <http://www.spenceneighbourhood.org/>
- Stronger Together Manitoba https://www.facebook.com/pg/strongertogethermanitoba/about/?ref=page_internal
- Support Employment & Economic Development (SEED) <http://seedwinnipeg.ca/>
- Volunteer Manitoba <https://www.volunteermanitoba.ca/>
- West Central Women's Resource Center <https://wcwrc.ca/>
- WestEnd Commons <https://www.thewestendcommons.ca/>
- Winnipeg English Language Assessment and Referral Center (Welarc) <http://www.welarc.net/>
- Winnipeg Harvest Inc. <http://winnipegharvest.org/>
- Winnipeg Public Libraries <http://wpl.winnipeg.ca/library/>
- Wolseley Family Place <http://www.wolseleyfamilyplace.com/>
- YMCA-YWCA <http://www.ywinnipeg.ca/>

