

The Pikangikum Model: Prevention Initiatives in Remote High-Need First Nation Communities

Background:

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) has led a prevention initiative to improve socio-economic outcomes for children, youth and their families in Pikangikum First Nation (PFN).

The Pikangikum model is an approach that develops relationships through recreation-based programming to help identify community priorities and needs for children, youth and their families. The model mobilizes multi-sector collaboration, resources and supports to address the identified needs.

In many of Ontario's First Nation communities, there are high rates of poverty, unemployment, substance abuse and other challenges. In 2012, *Maclean's* magazine called PFN the "suicide capital of the world"¹. Many families live in substandard housing without access to adequate food, running water or the appropriate supportive services.

Since 2014, MCYS has led a collaborative initiative to help address PFNs complex challenges by focusing on building capacity within the community to design, deliver and maintain prevention programs and services. To date, MCYS has worked with the non-profit sector, other ministries and the PFN community to create safe places for children to play, opportunities for youth to develop employment skills, and options designed to increase access and availability of social programs and services for children, youth and their families.

How MCYS got started in Pikangikum

In June 2014, MCYS partnered with the non-profit Right to Play², the National Lacrosse League and the local Ontario Provincial Police to deliver a three-day program for children and youth in PFN. Through the program, youth participants developed sportsmanship, confidence and leadership skills while MCYS staff developed a lasting relationship with PFN's Chief and Council. As a result of the success of the three day visit, the Chief and Council identified community priorities to help the community's children and youth reach their full potential. These included the need for safe places to play and youth job skills training/employment opportunities.

Building partnerships for better outcomes

In Fall 2014, just months after visiting PFN, MCYS Assistant Deputy Ministers (Youth Justice Services Division and Service Delivery Division) began to identify opportunities for collaboration through ministry mandate letters and strategic priorities. This included engagement with various

¹ Patriquin, M. (2012, March 30). Canada, home to the suicide capital of the world. *Maclean's*. Retrieved from <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/canada-home-to-the-suicide-capital-of-the-world/>

² Right to Play is a global organization –with an established presence in Pikangikum and prior experience working with MCYS in other parts of Ontario– that uses the transformative power of play to educate and empower children facing adversity.

ministries to discuss potential cross-sector prevention opportunities to improve outcomes for children, youth and their families in PFN.

Two inter-related projects resulted from MCYS engagement with key partners: 1) the Remote Community Employability (RCE) Pilot Project which provided a group of PFN youth with mentorship, training, work experience and career planning opportunities with local organizations and businesses (funded through the Ministry of Economic Development and Infrastructure (MEDEI)); and 2) building of three playgrounds and a dock.

In October 2015, ministry staff returned to PFN to meet with the Chief and Council, Right to Play, Ontario Provincial Police and community partners (i.e. Project Journey, Ontario Works and the RCE Project Coordinators). The meeting focused on the success of the program, lessons learned and the recommendation for this program to be extended.

Continued collaboration and partnerships

Currently in 2016 this model has expanded in PFN, including supporting Year Two of the RCE program. While the prevention initiatives have been successfully launched in PFN, the overarching program model continues to evolve. More recently, MCYS has begun engagement with Sandy Lake First Nation and RTP has run the Sport for Development Program to begin to identify opportunities in the community.

Conclusion

MCYS **leadership** has played a key role in responding to the needs of at-risk children and youth in remote high-need First Nation communities. This was demonstrated by:

- Utilizing the opportunity to turn a short-term program into a long-term initiative to improve socio-economic outcomes for children, youth and their families;
- Taking **bold** steps to move away from a “siloe” approach to addressing complex social problems like those faced in remote high-need First Nation communities;
- The will to act quickly and engaged ministries across sectors to implement **innovative** solutions to community-identified priorities; and
- Representing a concrete example of the Government of Ontario’s wider policy of cross-sector **collaboration**.

Further, the Prevention Initiatives in Remote High-Need First Nation Communities model relies not only on collaboration, but also **co-development** with First Nations communities. One of the main goals of the model is to strengthen relationships with the communities through meaningful engagement and create true partnerships with community-led organizations.

While this work is still in progress, the experience is showing initial positive **results** among individual youth participants, who have reported gaining new skills and expanded career options. For MCYS, the initiative has made an **impact** in the way it engages with and supports at-risk First Nation communities across the province.

Through leadership, MCYS has demonstrated that a grassroots idea can lead to the **execution** of a **replicable** model that can be adapted and implemented within other remote high-need First Nation communities.