



## NEXT STEPS

Over the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has challenged industries, nations, and individuals to find new ways to continue moving forward while doing their part to curb infection rates. In education, these pervasive challenges were faced with innovative thinking, and a drive to provide students with the best experience that circumstances would allow. For the Centre for School Mental Health, the past two years have highlighted the importance of our community partnerships, and the remarkable opportunities that these collaborations can produce.

With the re-opening of many services and amenities, our Centre remains optimistic about returning to more commonplace teaching and supportive practices. While we look to the future, we also remember the remarkable work that has taken place throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and where our team looks to further their projects.

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# IMPACTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



57% of Canadian youth age experienced declining mental health during the pandemic. Child advocates ring the alarm as new report highlights unprecedented impact of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>

There were 38% fewer mental health assessments during 2020 compared to previous years.<sup>3</sup>



Admissions for eating disorders during school closures were 223% above capacity. Kohly R. 2021. 'Worst it has ever been': Increase in eating disorder cases among teens overwhelms Ontario's pediatric hospitals. The Globe and Mail.<sup>1</sup>



A recent Statistics Canada study reveals that immigrants and refugees are more likely than Canadian-born individuals to be worried about the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. 44% of immigrants reported having high levels of concern about the maintenance of social ties and their ability to support one another during or after the pandemic; 30% of Canadian-born individuals reported the same.<sup>4</sup>



Deterioration in mental health is higher for those who had pre-existing mental health diagnoses and those who are marginalized (e.g., racialized youth, newcomer youth, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth).<sup>5</sup>



Racialized and Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents were two times more likely to report a negative impact on their mental health after COVID-19. (47% compare to 26% national average).<sup>6</sup>

[1] Vaillancourt, T., Szatmari, P., Georgiades, K., & Krygsman, A. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Canadian children and youth.

[2] [5] Children First. 2020. Available from [childrenfirstcanada.org/press-releases/child-advocates-ring-the-alarm-as-new-report-highlights-unprecedented-impact-of-covid-19/](https://www.childrenfirstcanada.org/press-releases/child-advocates-ring-the-alarm-as-new-report-highlights-unprecedented-impact-of-covid-19/)

[3] Stewart, S. L., Vasudeva, A. S., Van Dyke, J. N., & Poss, J. W. (2021). Child and youth mental health needs and service utilization during COVID-19. *Traumatology*.

[4] LaRochelle-Côté, S., & Uppal, S. (2020, May). The social and economic concerns of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00012-eng.pdf?st=NbwtzUKO>

[6] Egale (2020). Retrieved from: <https://egale.ca/egale-in-action/covid19-impact2/#FullReport>



## SUPPORTING TRANSITION RESILIENCE OF NEWCOMER GROUPS

Over the last two years, our team has been navigating and responding to the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic similar to the rest of the world. With the pandemic timeline extending longer than anyone had anticipated, our team adapted to our current shared reality and continued to adjust and build on the work of the STRONG project.

We leveraged our lessons and successes from our first virtual STRONG group pilots. With our partners at the Mary J. Wright Child and Youth Development Clinic, the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration and the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization, we implemented an additional 6 virtual STRONG groups, serving a total of 35 newcomer participants. We delivered virtual parent sessions with newcomer parents to provide context about the STRONG intervention while also teaching and practicing the relaxation strategies their children would be learning in the program. To continue building capacity, our team delivered 3 virtual STRONG trainings to a diverse group of 80 mental health professionals across provincial school boards as well as community-based organizations.

In terms of knowledge mobilization, our team published a journal article about the need for peer interventions to better support the integration of newcomer students, entitled “Engaging Peers to Promote Wellbeing and Inclusion of Newcomer Students: A Call for Equity-Informed Peer Interventions.” You can access the full article [here](#). We created a research snapshot providing a summary of the publication in both **English** and **French**.

To further bolster our STRONG implementation, we leveraged our team’s diverse language capacities and translated, “A Terrible Thing Happened,” a STRONG elementary resource into 5 additional languages. Margaret Holmes’ storybook gently tells the story of a raccoon who witnessed an unknown traumatic event with the purpose of normalizing the impacts of such experiences, such as nightmares or stomach aches, and identifies some strategies that might be helpful to children who have experienced trauma. The storybook is now available in the following languages: Arabic, German, Korean, Kurdish, Spanish, and French.

We have some exciting video projects underway to share the lessons learned of the STRONG intervention. First, we successfully launched an engaging whiteboard video capturing the objectives, impacts, and our next steps of STRONG. You can view the video [here](#). At the same time, we are working behind the scenes to interview and capture the reflections of community-based STRONG facilitators in preparation for an upcoming training video.

As we move into a new year, we are excited to expand the implementation of STRONG into more school- and community-based settings. We aim to continue training and building the capacity of mental health professionals while also working together with institutions to deliver the STRONG intervention and better support the mental health of newcomer children and youth.



Behind the scenes of an interview for STRONG’s community facilitator video.



The STRONG community video is in production at the time of writing, and will be made available soon. Keep up to date on the video’s release date and other STRONG news by visiting the CSMH website [here](#).

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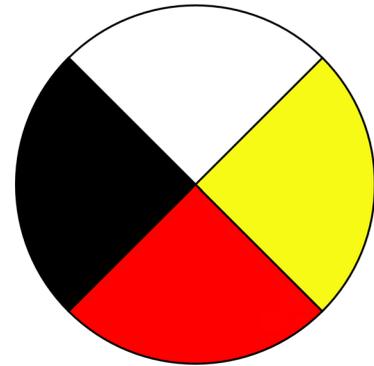
Taken during a STRONG community-based training exercise in January.

For more information on STRONG, contact Gina Kayssi, Project Manager, at [gkayssi@uwo.ca](mailto:gkayssi@uwo.ca), or visit our [Strong project page](#).

Financial contribution by Public Health Agency of Canada

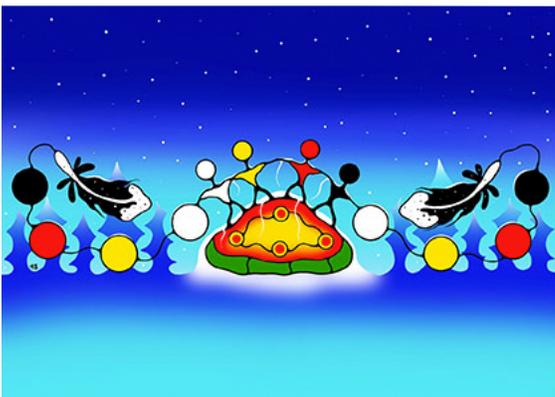
# THE FOURTH R

## UNITING OUR NATIONS: MENTORING PROGRAMS AFTER LOCKDOWNS



While provincial lockdowns left the project with an inability to coordinate in-person programming in schools, virtual implementation took its place. Although not ideal, this process was fortunately a temporary measure, and progress has been made in recent weeks with having these valuable in-person experiences again. The Uniting Our Nations secondary school programming is currently running again at both H.B. Beal Secondary School as well as Saunders Secondary School.

The primary school programming is now seeing in-person meetings beginning as well. Aberdeen Public School has seen the completion of their first eight sessions, with Woodland Heights Public School, Delaware Central Public School and Lambeth Public School beginning their programming as well.



A painting completed by Mike Cywink in January. This piece was featured in the United Way's Local Love campaign, which will keep 100 percent of donations to the United Way in the local community.

Aside from coordinating all programming events, Project Manager Mike Cywink has continued to work on murals which are proudly displayed across the London community. These murals, designed in the traditional Woodlands style, use Mike's personal culture to tell stories about the world we live in. After completing a mural for the United Way's Local Love campaign in January, Mike will now have two more on display at Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School, and G.A. Wheable Centre for Adult Education. Dates for the installation of these pieces are to be determined.

**To find out more about the Elementary Mentoring program and other Indigenous informed curriculum, please visit our [Uniting Our Nations Indigenous Programs page](#)**

# mindUP FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

The MindUP for Young Children project is a trauma-informed mindfulness curriculum and small groups program in partnership between CSMH, London District Catholic School Board, and Merrymount Family Support and Crisis Centre. The project is wrapping up the final year of 6 years of PHAC funding. Throughout the project, our implementation research has demonstrated significant gains in child positive adaptive skills, reductions in children's negative executive functioning deficits and behavioural problems, and benefits for educators in the study. The MindUP for Young Children project has continued throughout the pandemic, with many educators choosing to maintain or adopt MindUP as a way of supporting their students during stressful times.

The Goldie Hawn Foundation, creators of MindUP, incorporated the CSMH research summaries into their promotional package and have been distributing our findings to all new MindUP inquiries since late 2020. CSMH and LDCSB have co-authored a third research paper on the strategic and quality implementation of MindUP and intend to publish these findings in early 2022.

On January 24th, 2022, the CSMH and LDCSB MindUP Steering Committee presented to the Board of Trustees at the LDCSB monthly meeting. This presentation was a chance to reflect on the project's accomplishments and impacts and disseminate our findings to the Board of Trustees and the wider LDCSB community. The LDCSB Mental Health Lead ended the presentation with a vision for the continuation of MindUP and trauma-informed practices in LDCSB far beyond the end of our research grant.

On February 17th, CSMH Principal Investigator Dr. Claire Crooks was a guest speaker at the 2022 Physical Health and Education Canada national conference. Dr. Crooks' presentation focused on the growth and progress of the MindUP project and the importance of social-emotional learning in the early stages of life. Dr. Crooks shared examples of students involved in the MindUP curriculum and trauma-informed framework and the many benefits of mindfulness education and social-emotional learning.

**To learn more about MindUP, visit our [MindUp for Young Children project page](#)**

Financial contribution by Public Health Agency of Canada

## INNOVATION AND SCALE UP LAB

In 2019, School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO) and the Centre for School Mental Health (CSMH) partnered to create the Innovation and Scale Up Lab (ISU Lab). The ISU Lab's mission is to examine and advance evidence-based and implementation-sensitive approaches within school mental health, and to mobilize both research and practice evidence to enhance quality, consistency, scalability, and sustainability in Ontario schools.

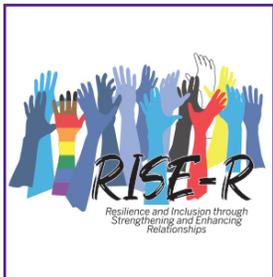


Due to COVID-19, our team has been working remotely and faced the challenges of pivoting from in-person programming to virtual. We have continued collaborating with our partners to co-develop resources and publications to share knowledge and provide more insight into best practices, challenges, and lessons learned across projects.

Resources and publications such as evidence briefs and promising practices are available on the Center for School Mental Health Ontario's Innovation and Scale Up Lab website.

**To learn more about the Innovation and Scale Up Lab, please visit: <https://smho-smsso.ca/about-us/innovation-and-scale-up-lab/>**

# RISE-R: RESILIENCE AND INCLUSION THROUGH STRENGTHENING AND ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS



**The RISE-R project** aims to address identified gaps in the areas of violence prevention and mental health promotion. The RISE-R team conducts evidence-based research, and this project's overarching objective is to work with under-served populations. The RISE-R project has been developing creative partnerships outside the Centre for School Mental Health to harness knowledge systems by sharing, understanding and building expertise. Notably, working on two fronts: Geographic Information System (Map and Data Centre – Western Libraries) and Alternative Field Experience (Western Education).

The team has been fortunate enough to leverage a great deal of expertise in building our Geographic Information System (GIS) platform to showcase project deliverables. Very early on, it was apparent that a project our size and scope needed to expand its visual data in the realm of the general public. Sharing data this way allowed us to think more about knowledge dissemination. Working under the guidance of Liz Sutherland, we attended several open days at Western and presented our vision of the RISE-R GIS. We now look forward to presenting to an international audience in April 2022. Our continued work with the Map and Data Centre has been fruitful on many fronts. By sharing our learnings with project teams at the Centre, we realized that there is so much more that we can do. Particularly in the way we visually represent data, how we harness project 'working' philosophies and why we are so passionate about the work we do!

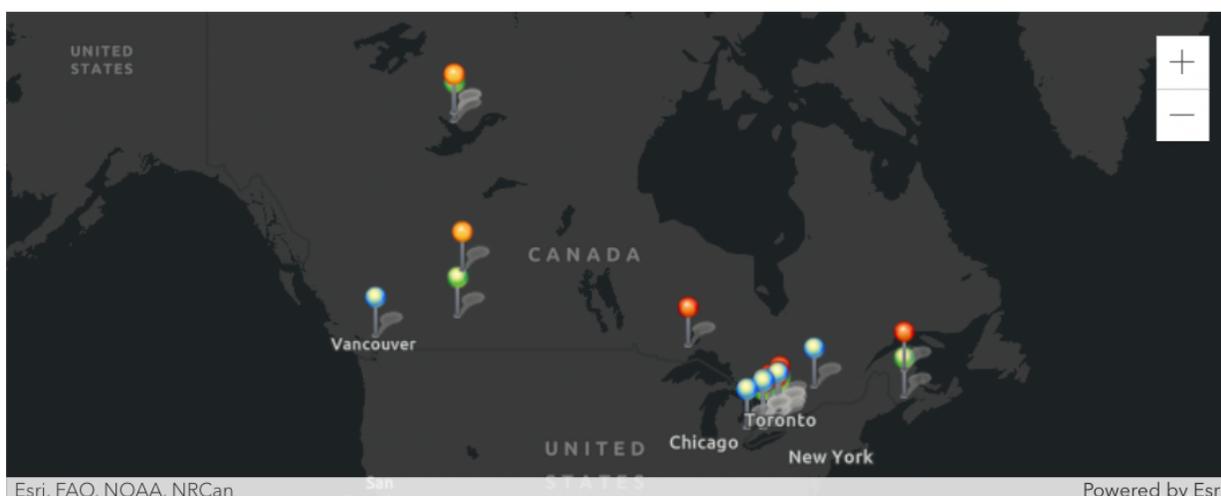
It doesn't stop there, the wealth of knowledge that exists at the Centre and amongst its staff is also why we recently added our proposal to the Alternative Field Experience database at Western Education. The RISE-R project works with various stakeholders both in Community and Mainstream Education. By creating these fruitful partnerships and sharing our product (Healthy Relationship Program), it is evident that there was a niche in which we could explore with students outside The Centre. Carving out opportunities to share this knowledge and also support Western Education was essential. The project looks forward to welcoming its first candidate in 2022.

Building partnerships outside the Centre is more significant than ever as we begin to reacquaint ourselves back into "office life." When we share resources and expertise, we create learning opportunities for project teams and students!

Upcoming Healthy Relationship Program trainings are scheduled in April with our existing community partners. As community organizations begin to re-emerge out of COVID restrictions, the demand for HRP-E youth classes has increased. We are excited to welcome back our community partners from both a research and program evaluation perspective.

**For more information on this project, visit our [RISE-R Project Page](#)**

Financial contribution by Public Health Agency of Canada



Map of locations where RISE-R programming has taken place over the life of the project. To date, RISE-R has worked with 38 partner organizations, and facilitated 257 groups with a total of over 2200 youth reached. To explore the above map, visit the RISE-R webpage [here](#).



## HRP FOR 2SLGBTQIA+ YOUTH

Returning to in-person professional development delivery and supporting the implementation and evaluation of the HRP for 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth in physical spaces, such as schools and community agencies, requires an awareness of and appreciation for traditional lands, regional treaties, local histories, and original and contemporary Indigenous peoples and worldviews. Whether we occupy virtual or physical spaces across Turtle Island, it is vital for settlers to - genuinely and continually - revisit our efforts and impacts with respect to decolonizing our minds, hearts, and actions. With this sentiment in mind, we aim to understand, appreciate, and infuse traditional ways of knowing and being into our queer- and trans-informed educator/facilitator capacity-building and youth programming project.

As we continue to learn and grow through personal and professional anti-colonial pursuits and infuse Indigeneity into our HRP for 2SLGBTQIA+ training, delivery, and empirical endeavors, we encourage folks who draw on our resources to work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples by recognizing and revitalizing Two-Spirit, Two-Heart, Indigiqueer, and LGBTQIA+ and/or gender diverse Indigenous insights and experiences in virtual and in-person settings. One resource that has shaped our understandings and informed our work is You are Made of Medicine ([available here](#)) by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network.

### Resources and Additional Information

**Parting Covid19 Clouds: Partnering to Provide Rainbow Professional Development with School Staff in New Brunswick.** Retrieved from: <https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/news/2021/hrp-for-2slgbtqia-in-New-Brunswick.html>

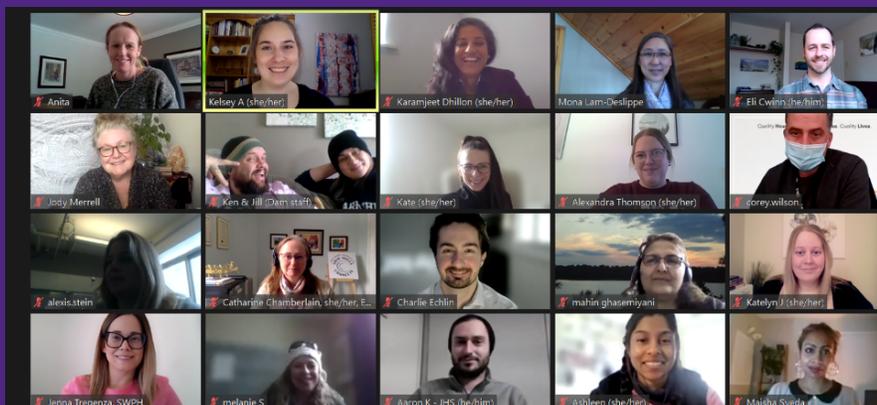
**Literature review: Best practices for creating safer spaces online for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.** Retrieved from: <https://youthdatingviolence.prevnet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Lit-Review-Safer-Online-Spaces-LGBTQ2S-Youth.pdf>

**For more information on HRP for 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth training, delivery, and evaluation, please visit the following:** [https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/research/hrp\\_for\\_lgbt2q.html](https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/research/hrp_for_lgbt2q.html)

# PRESENTATION SPOTLIGHT

On February 23rd, the Healthy Relationships Plus (HRP) Partner Day brought together program leaders from across Ontario to learn how they have incorporated the HRP program. The program also served as the premiering of the HRP App, which has been in development for over a year.

The HRP App looks to provide users with a digital version of HRP programming, with the goal of making content accessible and engaging for the remainder of the pandemic and beyond. The HRP team would like to thank MLD Solutions for their continued work in the development of the App, World Discoveries and the App Working Group for their feedback on the user-friendly portion of development, as well as HRP's partners for their continued help in performing and evaluating our programming.





# STAY CONNECTED

[www.csmh.uwo.ca](http://www.csmh.uwo.ca)

[www.youthrelationships.org](http://www.youthrelationships.org)



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