



Promising Practices:

Strengths-based programming with Indigenous youth

Fourth R Overview

The Fourth R includes a range of healthy relationships programs that have been shown to promote positive peer interactions and reduce dating and peer violence. There are different components for different grades, as well as community-based versions. Some of the recent program components have a particular emphasis on promoting positive mental health. In addition, we have developed strengths-based programming that is uniquely designed to meet the needs of Indigenous youth, LGBT2Q+ youth, and vulnerable youth. Between 2010 and 2018 we were funded through the Innovation Strategy of the Public Health Agency of Canada. Across three project phases we developed new programming components, evaluated programs, made regional adaptations, and scaled up nationally. By 2018 Fourth R programs were implemented in more than 5000 schools and community organizations nationally.

Strengths-based programming with Indigenous youth

The Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations program includes multiple components developed specifically for Indigenous youth (with the exception of the Indigenous Informed *Fourth R*, which was adapted from the original *Fourth R* program). These programs share the *Fourth R*'s strengths-based, positive youth development framework, and focus on healthy relationships and social-emotional skill development, yet differ from the original *Fourth R* program in their emphasis on cultural identity development and mentoring, utilization of culturally appropriate teaching methods, and inclusion of Indigenous community members and locally relevant teachings. Since 2006, our team has worked in close, ongoing partnership with local community partners to co-develop, implement, and evaluate multiple initiatives and program components comprising *The Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations* program for Indigenous youth, including: 1) Elementary Mentoring Program, 2) Peer Mentoring Program (for secondary school students), 3) Cultural Leadership Camp, 4) FNMI Student Leadership Council, and 5) Indigenous Informed *Fourth R*.

The purpose of this summary is to identify promising practices in the area of providing strengths-based programming for Indigenous youth. It is one of eight issue-specific summaries designed to share actionable, positive strategies to improve effectiveness in the mental health promotion and violence prevention efforts underway.



Promising Practices

Authentic partnerships are essential

For researchers and educators to work in partnership with Indigenous community members, it is essential that adequate time and resources go into developing authentic partnerships. Good partnerships are important for all community-based projects, but they are especially important in working with Indigenous partners because of the context of colonization and power imbalance. There is a history of research that either reinforced negative stereotypes, or alternatively, appropriated cultural knowledge. Indigenous communities have many good reasons to mistrust both educators and researchers. Moving forward together requires mutually beneficial and respectful relationships.

Cultural connectedness is an important protective factor

Community members have always recognized the power of culture. There is a growing body of research that recognizes the importance of cultural connectedness as a protective factor for Indigenous youth and adults. All of our *Uniting Our Nations* programs were developed to promote positive cultural identity and connectedness. Our research has repeatedly shown that this connection to culture is a critical part of what makes the programs engaging and effective. Providing space in the school setting to promote positive cultural identity is particularly powerful in light of the harm perpetrated within the education system through residential schools.

Programs must be locally relevant

There is significant cultural diversity across First Nations communities, and Métis and Inuit cultural differences are also vast. Creating evidence-based pan-Indigenous programming is not a good goal. Culturally relevant programming needs to fit the context of the community where it is being delivered. It is only through genuine partnerships that program developers and evaluators can learn about the appropriate context and how cultural teachings should be integrated into the program. For *Uniting Our Nations*, we developed the programming to be relevant to our southwestern Ontario context, but also developed some guidance for adapting the program to fit other communities.

Provide a range of programming options

We have found it useful to develop different healthy relationships programming options because schools have different needs based on their composition. For example, schools that might not have enough Indigenous students to offer our mentoring program can still involve students in the cultural leadership camp or student leadership council.

Commit to longer timeframes

To move forward working in partnership with Indigenous communities in a good way requires adequate time. In our experience, we have sometimes underestimated the time required at every level of the project – from sorting out logistics of program delivery to obtaining guardian consent to co-creating research goals. Part of our success in developing and expanding the *Uniting Our Nations* programming was our early commitment to partner on this work for the long haul, rather than for a one-year pilot.

School-based Implementation: Fourth R Research and Resources

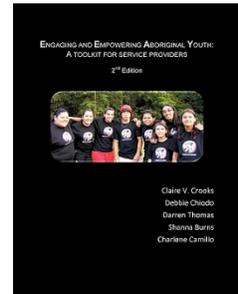
Engaging Aboriginal Youth Manual

This toolkit has many strategies and checklists to support respectful and effective work with Indigenous partners. There is a section on working with schools and numerous case studies. It is available in both English and French.

Available at: <https://youthrelationships.org/engaging-aboriginal-youth-toolkit>

English: https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/docs/toolkit_text_-_english-1.pdf

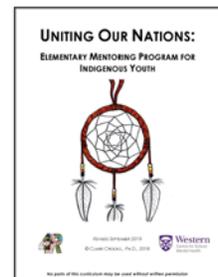
French: https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/docs/toolkit_text_-_french.pdf



Elementary Mentoring Manual

The elementary mentoring program manual has 16 sessions that are organized consistent with the Medicine Wheel. The program is run in small groups of grade 7 and 8 students and facilitated by an adult mentor.

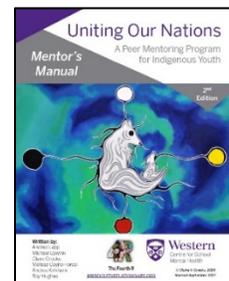
Crooks, C.V., Hughes, R., Lapp, A., Kirkham, A., & Cywink, M. (2015). *Uniting Our Nations: Elementary Mentoring Program for Indigenous Youth*. London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health.



Secondary Peer Mentoring Manual

The peer mentoring program includes 16 sessions designed for secondary students to work in pairs or small groups. Each session is aligned with one of the Seven Grandfather teachings. The program is facilitated by an adult mentor.

Lapp, A., Cywink, M., Crooks, C.V., Coyne-Foresi, M., Kirkham, A., Hughes, R. (2017). *Uniting Our Nations: A Peer Mentoring Program for Indigenous Youth, second edition*. London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health.



Ontario and Northwest Territories Case Study

Crooks, C. V., Hughes, R., & Sisco, A. (2015). *Fourth R: Uniting our Nations case study: Lessons learned from adaptation and implementation in Ontario and the Northwest Territories*. London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health.

Available at: <https://youthrelationships.org/uploads/4rcasestudyfinal1.9.pdf>

Journal Articles and Chapters

- Crooks, C. V., Burleigh, D., & Sisco, A. (2015). Promoting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth wellbeing through culturally-relevant programming: The role of cultural connectedness and identity. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience*, 3(1), 101-116.
- Crooks, C.V., Burleigh, D., Snowshoe, A., Lapp, A., Hughes, R. & Sisco, A. (2015). A case study of culturally relevant school-based programming for First Nations youth: Improved relationships, confidence and leadership, and school success. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*. DOI: 10.1080/1754730X.2015.1064775
- Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Dunlop, C., Lapointe, A., & Kerry, A. (2018). The Fourth R: Considerations for implementing evidence-based healthy relationships and mental health promotion programming in diverse contexts. In A. W. Leschied, D. Saklofske, & G. Flett (eds.) *The Handbook of Implementation of School Based Mental Programs* (pp.299-321). Springer Publishing, New York, NY.
- Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D. C., Thomas, D., & Hughes, R. (2009). Strengths-based programming for First Nations youth in schools: Building engagement through healthy relationships and leadership skills. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. DOI: 10.1007/s11469-009-9242-0
- Crooks, C. V. & Dunlop, C. (2017). Mental health promotion with Aboriginal youth: Lessons learned from the Uniting Our Nations program. In J. R. Harrison, B. K. Schultz, & S. W. Evans (Eds). *School Mental Health Services for Adolescents* (pp. 306-328). London: Oxford University Press.
- Crooks, C. V., Exner-Cortens, D., Burm, S., Lapointe, A., & Chiodo, D. (2017). Two years of relationship-focused mentoring for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit adolescents: Promoting positive mental health. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 38(1-2), 87-104. DOI 10.1007/s10935-016-0457-0
- Crooks, C. V., Snowshoe, A., Chiodo, D., & Brunette-Debassige, C. (2013). Navigating between rigor and community-based research partnerships: Building the evaluation of the *Uniting Our Nations* health promotion program for FNMI youth. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 32, 13-25, 10.7870/cjcmh-2013-016.
- Coyne-Foresi, M., Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Nowicki, E., & Dare, L. (2018). A mixed methods exploration of benefits for youth mentors in an Indigenous high school peer mentoring program. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Snowshoe, A., Crooks, C. V., Tremblay, P., Craig, W., & Hinson, R. (2014). Development of a cultural connectedness measure for First Nations youth. *Journal of Psychological Assessment*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0037867>
- Snowshoe, A., Crooks, C. V., Tremblay, P. F., & Hinson, R. E. (2017). Cultural connectedness and its relation to mental health for First Nations youth. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 38(1-2), 67-86. DOI:10.1007/s10935-016-0454-3.



Artwork developed by students in the *Uniting Our Nations* program