



Western
Centre for School
Mental Health

The Fourth R:

*Promising Practices for School-based Mental
Health Promotion and Violence Prevention*

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Overview

History of the Fourth R

The original Fourth R program was developed in 2001 as a dating violence prevention program that could be implemented by teachers in regular grade 9 health classes. The Fourth R refers to “relationships,” because relationship skills are equally important for schools to teach as are the first three R’s (i.e., reading ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic). The Fourth R began with a dating violence prevention focus and used a social-emotional learning framework with a strong emphasis on skill development. Fourth R programs look at adolescent behavior in a holistic way, by addressing the overlaps among healthy relationships, different types of relationship violence, sexual health, and substance use and misuse. They also take a positive youth development approach to developing key assets for healthy youth development.

There are now many other Fourth R program options available in addition to the original Grade 9 program. Over the past five years, all of the programs have been revised to have a stronger focus on mental health promotion since the field in general has come to view the complementarity of social and emotional learning and mental health. Beyond the original grade 9 program, other Fourth R programs include healthy living curricula for grades 7-8 and English curricula for grades 9-12. There are slightly different versions of these curricula that align with different provincial, territorial, and state educational expectations to ensure that educators across Canada and the U.S. can meet their teaching requirements by implementing the program. We have undertaken numerous translations of the Fourth R. Both in-person and online training options are available.

A major focus of the Fourth R team is to develop programming that meets the unique needs of vulnerable groups of youth and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Since 2006, we have worked to develop a range of strengths-based, culturally-relevant programming for First Nations youth. More recently we have developed programming to promote resiliency among LGBT2Q+ youth. We have also adapted one of our programs for use with youth who face higher levels of risk due to a range of circumstances (i.e., youth who have experienced significant violence, youth involved with children’s mental health services, youth involved with the justice system, young mothers).

About the Fourth R Innovation Strategy Project

Since 2010, Dr. Claire Crooks and her team have been funded through the PHAC Innovation Strategy program to develop, adapt, implement, and evaluate healthy relationships programming under the umbrella of the Fourth R. Innovation Strategy funding spanned three phases (2010-2018) and supported partnership development, program adaptations and implementation, scale-up, evaluation and policy work. **The purpose of this report is to identify promising practices in different domains of the work based on our teams experience over all three phases of the project.**

Developing and Sustaining Effective Partnerships

Over the course of this project, we worked closely with diverse partners across the country. Some of these partnerships were based on previous working relationships and others were new. Sometimes we developed new relationships with partners of partners, and benefitted from those extended networks. We partnered with school boards, community agencies, public health units, postsecondary educations, policy makers and other researchers. These partners provided a critical national network for our scale-up of Fourth R programs. They guided us in adaptation processes and aligning with regional needs and opportunities to promote effective implementation and scale-up. Our partners included:

- School boards
- Community organizations
- Postsecondary institutions
- Funders
- Ministries and Departments of Education
- Indigenous community partners
- Policy makers
- Researchers

Promising Practices

Authentic partnerships take time and resources.

Relationship building needs to be intentional and requires dedicated resources for both time and money. Fiscal constraints have created a move towards virtual meetings, but in-person meetings remain a valuable tool in developing relationships. Even periodic in-person meetings create significant momentum that can be maintained through virtual mechanisms.

Understand decision-making processes for each of your partners.

Each of your partner organizations or systems has its own communication and decision-making processes. It is important to learn which individuals should be informed about decisions and which need to be consulted. The education system is quite hierarchical and although individual educators have much autonomy over their own classrooms, they are not able to adopt or implement programming at a larger systems level. Understanding the school board organization structure is a requirement for moving beyond classroom-by-classroom implementation.

Align with partners' mandates.

Many of our partners are interested in the Fourth R because it aligns with their work. These partners might focus on different aspects of the work, and it facilitates partnership success if you can use their particular framework. For example, educational partners might focus on the social and emotional learning components, whereas public health partners might be more interested in violence prevention. Understanding each partner's focus helps you use the right language and help them tell the story they need to tell to their other stakeholders.

Be aware that you cannot sustain the same intensity of relationships at all times.

Partnerships will wax and wane over the course of a multi-year project, depending on the phase of the work. It is not possible to maintain the same intensity of relationship with all partners at all times. There may be slower times based on the project or based on external challenges for a

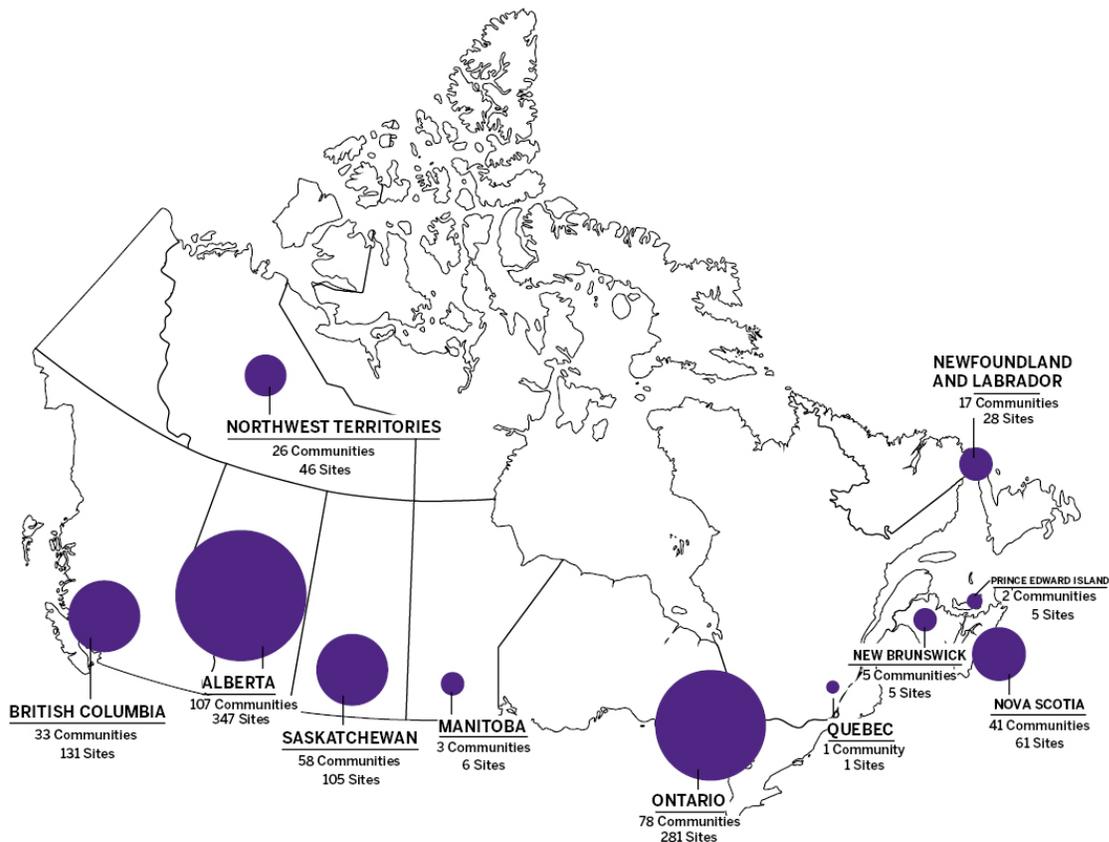
particular partner. It is important to maintain enough relationship continuity during slower periods of work that there is a connection when the opportunity arises to ramp back up again.

Provide timely feedback written in plain language.

Good partners provide feedback about project activities in a way that is both current and accessible to a wide audience. It is not helpful for school and community-based partners to receive a copy of a peer reviewed article 3 years after a project has finished. Ideally, feedback reports are created in a way that facilitates decision-making cycles (e.g., before the start of the next school year or budget cycle).

Implementing School-based Programming

Over the course of the three phases of PHAC funding, the Fourth R was implemented from coast to coast to coast and in numerous different education systems (i.e., English public, English Catholic, French public and French Catholic).



Promising Practices

Dedicate adequate resources to teacher preparation and develop an implementation plan

Although initial enthusiasm for the *Fourth R* may be high and people want to implement immediately, it is important to take the time to develop an implementation plan. A strong implementation plan is multi-year and assigns key responsibilities to specific people. Providing training is an important part of an implementation plan, and it is essential to ensure that there are adequate resources for this. Although we have developed an online training, educators still show a strong preference for in-person training and have noted that it is difficult to learn the requisite skills without having the opportunity to practice with peers.

Expect and plan for some program modification

There is an inherent tension between public health concepts of adherence and fidelity (in which an intervention is delivered exactly as designed) and implementation of programs in school settings, where educators are expected to tailor their programming to meet the needs of their youth. Since modification is going to occur, it is important to plan for it. Two strategies we use in

the *Fourth R* include providing multiple options in the curriculum where possible (such that educators can pick and choose) and the use of a stoplight approach to modification. The stoplight provides guidance about what type of modifications can be made freely (green light), what type should be undertaken with caution (yellow light) and what type should be avoided (red light).

Engage decision-makers

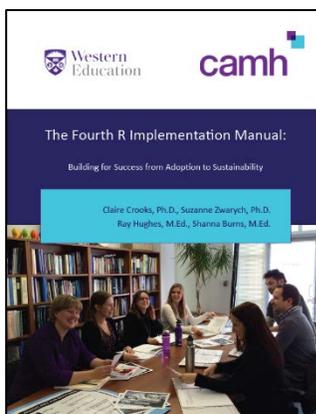
School boards have distinct decision-making protocols and it is essential to identify who the key decision-makers are in any particular board. Responsibility for healthy relationships programs can differ from one board to another. One key strategy for engaging decision-makers is to show them how evidence-based mental health promotion / violence prevention programming aligns with their particular mandate and / or other Ministry or board commitments. It is important to track turnover of key personnel and to ensure that new appointees are engaged.

Identify champions

Champions help create the conditions for innovative approaches to successfully take root. Champions have the primary responsibility of providing leadership and expertise at the board level and supporting colleagues as they begin to implement the program. Champions do not replace having senior staff at the board level involved in planning, training and development, monitoring program fidelity and providing implementation support – both champions and senior leadership are critical. Effective champions value and believe in the program. They are enthusiastic about the *Fourth R* and prioritize it as a strategy for schools to implement. They also promote it among their colleagues. Effective champions understand the importance of training and evidence-based practice, yet are also cognizant of the needs of classroom teachers. They also know how to navigate the education system because they understand the organizational structure of school boards in terms of cost efficiency, and the bureaucracy of school boards.

Consider a coaching and monitoring strategy

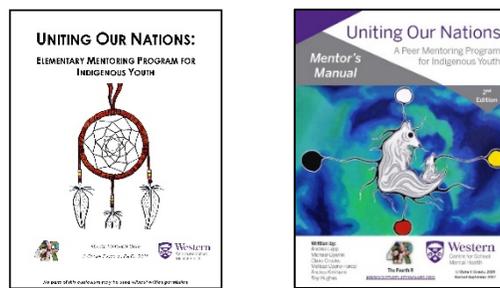
The research literature is clear that a “train and hope” model is not the most effective way to encourage high quality implementation. School boards can increase implementation quality by utilizing coaching and monitoring strategies. These strategies require a key person at the board level to oversee this as part of their portfolio.



Implementation manual

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*.



Uniting Our Nations mentoring manuals

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.

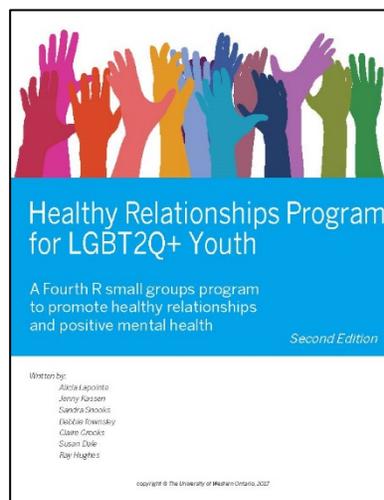


Artwork developed by students in the *Uniting Our Nations* program

Mental Health Promotion Programming with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queer/Questioning (LGBT2Q+) Youth

The Healthy Relationships Program (HRP) for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queering/Questioning (LGBT2Q+) Youth is a small group positive mental health promotion program for gender, sexual, and romantic minority youth. This program includes 18 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes. It can be delivered in Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSA) or community agencies that house LGBT2Q+ youth groups. The *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* helps build resiliency and promote well-being among LGBT2Q+ youth. It affirms, validates, and celebrates sexual and gender diversity, cultivates a caring and supportive community, and helps youth develop skills and strategies that promote healthy relationships. This trauma-informed, strengths-focused program explores stressors unique to LGBT2Q+ youth, including identity and expression invalidation, stigma, prejudice and discrimination, internalized oppression, coming out, safety, and micro-aggressions (see page 2 for outline of session topics).

The *HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth* was developed and piloted between 2015 and 2018 in partnership with two school boards (including the educators, nurse practitioners, and youth within them), and one community agency. These partners helped guide program development, implementation, refinement, and evaluation. We worked directly with LGBT2Q+ students and privileged their voices during the revision and evaluation process. We also consulted with program facilitators to enhance program training and delivery.



LGBT2Q+ manual

Session Topics

Although there are 18 sessions in the manual, there is flexibility to select fewer sessions, or to deliver the entire program in fewer sessions that last longer (i.e., 9- 90 minute sessions instead of 18- 45 minute sessions). Sessions in the HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth include:

SESSION 1: I HAVE A VOICE: Introduction to the Program

SESSION 2: MINE TO NAME: Identities/Ways of Being

SESSION 3: RECOGNIZE AND RESPECT: Values and Boundaries

SESSION 4: MY JOURNEY: Coming Out

SESSION 5: MY MIND MATTERS: Mental Health and Well-Being (Part 1)

SESSION 6: MY MIND MATTERS: Mental Health and Well-Being (Part 2)

SESSION 7: THINKING AHEAD: Making Safer Choices About Substance Use

SESSION 8: I BELONG: Communities and Connections

SESSION 9: MY SUPER-POWER: Coping with Challenges

SESSION 10: WE ALL HAVE A SAY: Rights/Responsibilities/Consent

SESSION 11: MY VOICE, YOUR VOICE: Active Listening and Communication

SESSION 12: RIGHT AND TRUE: Communication Styles

SESSION 13: WORDS AND ACTIONS: Communicating Through Conflict

SESSION 14: SHIPS: Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

SESSION 15: (RE)BUILDING TIES: Addressing Relationship Violence

SESSION 16: MY SAFETY: Exits and Safety Plans

SESSION 17: ALLIES: Being There for Others

SESSION 18: CONCLUDING CIRCLE: Share and Celebrate

Promising Practices

Balance strengths-based and trauma-informed content.

Mental health promotion and violence prevention programs must recognize the strengths of marginalized youth and ensure that programming is emotionally safe. To be strengths-based, content needs to affirm youth's interconnected identities (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.); facilitate self-compassion; connect participants to others; and help youth develop coping strategies to manage minority stressors. Many LGBT2Q+ youth experience mental health challenges, oppression, and discrimination. Being trauma-informed includes informing students of potentially stressful topics in advance so they may self-regulate their participation.

Include diverse youth perspectives.

It is imperative to include youth's insights when developing programs that aim to serve them. Consult with a diverse group of LGBT2Q+ youth, including Black, Indigenous, and People of

Colour when creating and refining programs designed to bolster their mental health and well-being. By doing so, program developers will better meet the needs, desires, and experiences of youth who are members of multiple and varying equity-seeking groups.

Apply an intersectional approach to understanding and coping with oppression.

Youth programming should acknowledge and address compounding oppression (i.e., intersectionality), and assist participants, who may be members of various equity-seeking groups, manage their unique and multifaceted experiences with marginalization. Program training should prompt facilitators to engage in in-depth discussions about intersectionality to prepare them to spearhead nuanced anti-oppressive conversations with youth.

Offer extended program training.

Our early experience identified a need for extended training. There was a need for foundational training in mental health and wellness, and LGBT2Q+ topics and issues, prior to exploring the actual program. Beyond incorporating practice facilitation, there was also a need to address participant recruitment. A thorough training is vital because educators rarely receive pre/in/service training and professional development with respect to LGBT2Q+ matters. GSA advisors, particularly those who are less experienced, may not feel comfortable, qualified or confident in spearheading in-depth conversations or leading activities that involve mental health, intersectionality, consent, and harm reduction.

Provide ongoing support for facilitators.

Program facilitators benefit from ongoing coaching to support their role in delivering youth programs. This can involve regular check-ins via email, phone calls, or face-to-face. During check-ins, facilitators can share program implementation updates and receive feedback from supervising staff members, ask clarifying questions, and receive individualized support as needed. Building in mentorship opportunities for new or less experienced facilitators is another effective support strategy. Facilitators can also benefit from meeting with their peers to share experiences and explore alternative programmatic strategies.

Scale-up for School-based Programming

Scaling up is an intentional process whereby evidence-based programs or promising practices can be implemented and delivered to more people or places. Given the complexity of scaling up within educational settings, there is no single approach that can be universally applied to all settings, and any approach will need to be tailored to the local context. When scaling up an evidence-based program, it is important to identify and maintain the key features or core components of the program that are needed for success while tailoring the approach to the local situation.

Since 2001, the Fourth R program has been scaled across Canada, the United States, and internationally in a variety of ways. In some settings, the program was institutionalized through structural system changes (e.g., safe schools legislative policy) designed to support and sustain the program (i.e., vertical scale up). Other paths to the scale up of Fourth R have been more focused on geographic reach through replication in other sites (e.g., horizontal scale-up). Our scale-up work in the Northern communities of Canada has also taken the approach of functional scale-up, where new versions of the Fourth R were developed based on local culture groups. Finally, scale-up of the Fourth R has also been spontaneous in areas where the program was taken up in new sites without any intentional guided efforts by the Fourth R team.

The purpose of this summary is to identify promising practices in the area of scaling-up school based programming. 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.

Promising Practices

Strategic planning for the scale-up of evidence-based programs is essential

Strategic planning for scaling-up programs is essential but often does not happen. As a result, effective programs have difficulty being implemented on a larger scale and do not achieve broad impact. It might be difficult to resist the pressure to rapidly scale-up a program, especially if the program is effective and feasible to implement. There is an advantage to systematically creating an implementation team that develops a long-term strategy for implementation and wide-spread scale of the program. This will ensure that the careful balancing act between desired outcomes and the practical realities and constraints of the setting can be considered and planned for ahead of time.

Align programs with existing school and district-level priorities, frameworks, and contexts.

Integrating and aligning the Fourth R with curriculum outcomes and district-level priorities provides the opportunity to demonstrate that the program is not an add-on to existing work. Rather than seeing the program as competing for time with academic priorities, the alignment with academic achievement outcomes, legislative frameworks, and social and emotional learning has facilitated the buy-in and adoption of the program from school-board officials and decision-makers.

Understand local context to increase the potential for scale-up success.

Understanding the diverse contexts and environments within which the scaling-up of programs occurs helps to establish realistic expectations about the pace and scope for scaling up, as well as about other aspects of the process that should be considered. For example, our strategy for scaling-up the Fourth R in urban centres is different than in rural areas because the buy-in at a district level by senior leadership is sometimes more important in urban centres than it is in rural areas. In rural schools, one champion teacher might have significant decision making power to implement and scale the program in his or her board.

Consider school and district readiness and capacity before scaling up.

Even the most comprehensive, well-designed programs can suffer from limited effectiveness if schools are not ready to adopt them. Successful scaling-up of the Fourth R is facilitated when schools and districts perceive a need for the program and are motivated to implement it. In some cases, the scale-up of the Fourth R has been successful because the timing and circumstances were right, such as in the case of the introduction of a new safe schools legislation that required all schools to implement evidence-based programming to address healthy relationships. It is also helpful if there is a general understanding of evidence-based practice within a board. Rushing the scale-up process before considering factors such as leadership buy-in, the availability of training, or understanding the need and values supportive of the program, may result in underutilized or even abandoned programs.

Consider technology to meet training needs

Training is an important part of scaling up evidence-based practice, but it can be expensive, particularly in a country as vast as Canada. In the first few years of Fourth R implementation and scale-up, the Fourth R team travelled to every district across the country to offer training to facilitators. Understanding that this approach is not always feasible or scalable, in subsequent years, we developed a Master Trainer Model where local trainers offered training to program facilitators strengthening local ownership of the program. More recently, we have developed online training modules to provide additional opportunities for training in remote and rural areas, as well as low-resource settings. It is not clear that online training replaces in-person training with respect to impact or even educator preference; however, it might be an important substitute or adjunct in certain situations.

Sustainability of School-based Programming

After significant resources are directed towards implementing school-based programming, the focus may shift to sustainability, especially if the program is perceived to have a positive impact for students and educators. Sustainability is often conceptualized as the long-term implementation of a program at a level of fidelity that continues to produce successful and valued outcomes for youth. There many factors that influence the sustained use of a program over time. For example, ongoing changes in context such as competing initiatives, changes in capacity, such as staff turnover, and changes in outcomes, such that the outcome is no longer perceived as important to schools, can all influence the sustainability of programs. Thus, sustainability is not merely a matter of continuing the same activity over time, but rather includes the capacity to adapt to changing contexts and priorities.

The purpose of this summary is to provide a brief summary of promising practice in the area of the sustainability of school based programming. 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

Sustainable school-based programs are the exception rather than the rule

Effective school-based programs are often not sustained for a variety of reasons. Staff turnover and competing and shifting priorities can impact the continued use of a program. Sustainability can be difficult to achieve in school settings in large part because the importance of sustaining the program is often directly related to the importance of the outcome the program delivers. If providing youth with evidence-based programming about healthy relationships and preventing violence is important for schools, efforts to sustain the program become relevant and a priority. If there is a shift in priorities at a school or district level, there is a good chance the program might be re-evaluated or abandoned.

Features of the program, the organizational setting, and the broader environment influence sustainability

If a program fits the values, goals, and priorities of a school district, is likeable, flexible, and produces visible benefits to students, the likelihood of sustaining that program increases. The existence of champions within settings can foster sustainability of the program. A strategic approach to identifying and supporting these champions can improve sustainability. When the program aligns with the mission of the organization, and the organization has the capacity to implement and deliver the program effectively, the continued use of that program is much more likely.

Programs are more sustainable when they are adaptable

It is likely given the dynamic and changing nature of schools that some program adaption and modification will occur. Intentional adaptations of school-based programs may not be counterproductive because programs that have some built-in flexibility to be modified might remain relevant to the school, and increase motivation to continue to implement the program long term as long as key features and core components for success are maintained. Identifying key components of an intervention and providing guidelines about acceptable modifications can help ensure high quality implementation while increasing sustainability.

Ongoing stakeholder involvement and engagement throughout implementation leads to be better sustainability

Ongoing stakeholder engagement and involvement throughout implementation will help to increase the fit between the program and the local context within which it is implemented. This engagement and involvement of stakeholders on an ongoing basis may also provide a structure early on for addressing evolving issues as they arise that might interfere with sustainability. For example, the Fourth R team has always made it a priority to meet face to face with stakeholders irrespective of distance, hold regular meetings, and co-create programs and processes that fit local settings.

Conducting Meaningful and Effective Evaluation

We undertook ongoing evaluation of our Fourth R and other Healthy Relationships Programs across all three phases of Innovation Strategy funding. For our well established classroom-based Fourth R, we conducted a large randomized controlled trial of the grade 7 and 8 program in Saskatchewan. For newer programs we conducted small feasibility and pilot studies with a focus on refining the programs. Our evaluations included a focus on both process and outcome.

Our major evaluation articles across the three phases of PHAC funding included:

- A 57 school randomized controlled trial of the grade 7/8 program in Saskatchewan
- A follow up study from our original RCT to look at the protective impact for maltreated youth
- Both a case study and a longitudinal mixed methods outcome study of our Indigenous mentoring programs
- A within group evaluation of the HRP in the context of a national implementation
- A pilot evaluation of our HRP for LGBT2Q+ youth
- A health economics evaluation of the costs associated with the Fourth R as well as potential economic benefits

The purpose of this summary is to identify promising practices for conducting meaningful and effective evaluation. It is one of eight issue-specific summaries designed to share actionable, positive strategies to improve the effectiveness of mental health promotion and violence prevention efforts.

Promising Practices

Undertake evaluation across the program development, pilot, and implementation cycles.

Building evaluation into all of our program activities from the outset has provided important information about every stage of development and implementation. It is particularly important to evaluate new iterations of programs that have been adapted for specific contexts. In the case of our HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth program, our first version had some significant flaws. Without several avenues for participants to provide feedback, we might not have realized the extent of revisions that were required. It is also important to measure uptake of programs and sustainability. Measuring these has helped us realize the high degree of turnover among educators (even if they are still at the same school they may have a different assignment) and that a significant minority of educators who are trained in the Fourth R do not even have the opportunity to implement it once.

Be aware of the demands that evaluation places on your partners.

As researchers, we can develop tunnel vision for the evaluation processes that we want to undertake. It is critical to remember that your partners have different mandates! Educators, for example, are expected to prioritize literacy and numeracy achievement, and anything that takes away from their time to do that needs to create value for them and their students. In some cases we have provided resources to our partners to assist with the evaluation processes. Other times we have contracted educators as research assistants and paid them an honorarium to recognize that the research work is over and above their job requirements. We also work hard to remove as many barriers as possible by ensuring that we provide adequate copies of consent

forms and measures and include pre-paid mailing envelopes if documents need to be returned by mail. We record very brief webinars and create checklists to make any research processes as clear as possible. Finally, our whole team expresses ongoing appreciation for the assistance our partners provide.

Ensure that your outcomes are meaningful to your partners.

Our most successful evaluations have emerged when we co-created the outcomes and process with our partners from the beginning. For our longitudinal evaluation of our Indigenous mentoring program, it was very important to our partners that we take a strengths-based approach and that we assess the impact of the programming on cultural connectedness. Because we could not find a good measure of cultural connectedness, we spent two years developing one for that purpose. The resulting measure has now been used by other researchers. Co-creating the process or at least the outcomes provides a strong foundation for knowledge mobilization in that there is already interest in the findings. Engaging partners at the outset of the research process ensures that we are answering the questions that they want answered.

Mixed methods approaches provide important information for different audiences.

Over the past 5-10 years, we have moved to using mixed methods approaches in all of our work. There is an important place for rigorous quantitative work and standards for what constitutes evidence-based practice still relies heavily on quantitative methods. At the same time, qualitative data provides context and story to the numbers and speaks to different audiences than statistics alone. By utilizing mixed methods, we can use different parts of our data to tell different stories to different audiences.

Provide timely and accessible feedback to partners.

As researchers, we are expected to publish our findings in academic journals. The publishing process can take a lot of time – even years. There is a high level of rigour required, preparing a manuscript takes time, and the review and revision process can be lengthy. These timelines do not meet the needs of our partners, who may be in the process of making decisions based on how a program went. We prepare plain language summaries of our findings for our partners every year, and strive to do it in a timely manner. In particular, we prioritize having reports to school boards *before* the start of the next school year. We use lots of figures and quotes in these reports to build a picture of how the program went in a way that is more accessible than listing statistical findings. Preparing these reports requires significant time and resources, but we see them as an ethical responsibility. Furthermore, they provide relevant information to partners and increase buy-in for the research and evaluation process.

Influencing Policy

The Fourth R team had opportunity to influence policy in a number of ways over the course of our Innovation Strategy project. Our National Education Coordinator was a member of the Ontario Safe Schools Action Team that developed several foundational reports to drive provincial policy. The report, *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action*, identified areas for taking action on school safety, including prevention, progressive or graduated discipline, parent and community involvement, and developing programs for students who have been suspended or expelled. The action team also released a report entitled, *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan*. The report made several important recommendations on how to make Ontario's schools safer through comprehensive, province-wide bullying prevention programs. It was based on consultations across Ontario with educators, police, parents, students, student advocates, youth and children's services workers, health care professionals, existing bullying prevention groups and others.

Our National Education Coordinator also supported the Northwest Territories Department of Education to undertake consultation and prepare its first Safe Schools legislation. The Regulations created directed every school to develop Safe and Caring School Plans that abide by the Territorial School Code of Conduct, and contain: Policies and Procedures; Prevention and Education; Intervention and Support Strategies; and a Monitoring, Evaluation and Assessment Plan. In addition he provided support to the Department of Education and all Superintendents during the implementation of the new legislation.

The purpose of this summary is to identify promising practices for influencing policy. It is one of eight issue-specific summaries designed to share actionable, positive strategies to improve the effectiveness of mental health promotion and violence prevention efforts.

Promising Practices

Engage policy makers at different levels.

When we hear the word policy, we automatically tend to think of provincial or federal policy. However, policy happens at many levels and in different organizations, and each of those can help support evidence-based practice. We have been able to help shape policy within local school boards as well as provincially or territorially. We have also engaged specific groups who can help support evidence-based practice through their policy, such as when the Religious Education Network of Alberta endorsed the Fourth R for use in Catholic schools in that province. Local influence may be particularly important when provincial or federal policy swings in ways that might not support evidence-based approaches to healthy youth relationships.

Align with the mandates and needs of policy makers.

Evidence-based healthy relationships programming can be framed in different ways because it is a comprehensive approach that promotes a range of healthy behaviours. One way to garner support among policymakers is to show the alignment between healthy relationships programs and their individual mandates, whether those are violence prevention, comprehensive sexual health education, mental health promotion, or bullying prevention. At the federal level, it is important to align with the mandate letter of a particular Minister, since that document outlines the scope of their objectives.

Develop relationships with policy makers.

Developing personal relationships with policy makers at different levels increases the likelihood that you will be seen as a credible source of information. As with other relationships, it is important to respond to requests promptly, be respectful when you disagree, and show gratitude when you feel individuals have made evidence-based decisions. These relationships can be fostered by maintaining contact through regular (but not overly frequent) communication and sending along important updates or resources. In addition, governments change and Ministers change (sometimes frequently). In some circumstances, we have been able to help support government staff through these transitions to help work plans stay on track.

Be nimble with respect to opportunities to influence policy.

Often opportunities to influence policy emerge quickly and within a limited timeframe. These openings are at inopportune times with respect to other project deadlines and workload, but all efforts should be made to prioritize providing input to policymakers. Knowing your key messages ahead of time means you can take advantage of openings without having to start developing your communications after a particular request.

Provide information at the level of detail policy makers require.

As researchers, we can get buried in details and caveats. Policymakers typically are looking for high level information. We need to be clear about our key messages and able to provide detail as requested, but not overwhelm policymakers with lengthy, overly detailed documents.

Resources by Topic

	Partnerships	Implementation	Indigenous youth	LGBT2Q+ youth	Scale Up	Sustainability	Evaluation	Policy
Reports and Manuals								
Cadieux, C., Crooks, C.V. (2018) <i>Educators' perceptions of Fourth R benefits for youth and the relationship with implementation quality</i>		X					X	
Chiodo, D. (2018) <i>Applying a Health Equity Lens to the Fourth R Program, Research and Program Partnerships</i>			X	X				X
Chiodo, D. (2018) <i>Exploring the Strengths, Impacts, and Challenges of Fourth R Partnerships: Lessons Learned from Stakeholder Interviews</i>	X				X	X		X
Chiodo, D., Exner-Cortens, D., Crooks, C. (2015). <i>Scaling Up the Fourth R Program: Facilitators, Barriers, and Problems of Practice. Final report prepared for the Public Health Agency of Canada.</i>					X			
Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Thomas, D., Burns, S., & Camillo, C. (2010). <i>Engaging and empowering Aboriginal youth: A toolkit for service providers</i> , 2nd edition. Bloomington, IN: Trafford Press. Also available in both English and French at http://youthrelationships.org/research_consulting/toolkit.html	X	X	X			X	X	X
Crooks, C. V., Hughes, R., & Sisco, A. (2015). <i>Fourth R: Uniting our Nations case study: Lessons learned from adaptation and implementation in Ontario and the Northwest Territories</i> . London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health.	X	X	X			X	X	X
Crooks, C. V., Zwarych, S., Burns, S., & Hughes, R. (2015). <i>The Fourth R implementation manual: Building for success from adoption to sustainability</i> . London, ON: Western University.	X	X			X			
Crooks, C.V., Hughes, R., Lapp, A., Kirkham, A., & Cywink, M. (2015). <i>Uniting Our Nations: Elementary Mentoring Program for Indigenous Youth</i> . London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health.			X					
Dunlop, C., Chiodo, D., Crooks, C.V. (2018) <i>Fourth R programs: Are educators implementing 1 to 2 years after training?</i>		X			X	X	X	

	Partnerships	Implementation	Indigenous youth	LGBT2Q+ youth	Scale Up	Sustainability	Evaluation	Policy
Dunlop, C., Crooks, C.V. (2018) <i>Fourth R / Healthy Relationships Plus Program Training Feedback Summary</i>		X			X		X	
Lapointe, A. (2017). <i>Teen relationship violence and wellbeing among LGBTQ+ youth</i> . Paper presented at the Canadian Conference on Promoting Healthy Relationships for Youth: Breaking Down the Silos in Addressing Mental Health & Violence, London, ON, February 15-February 17, 2017.				X				
Lapointe, A., & Crooks, C. V. (2018). <i>The Healthy Relationships Program (HRP) for LGBT2Q+ Youth: GSA members' experiences with a structured program to promote wellbeing</i> . Paper presented at the IDENTITY: Canadian Perspectives on LGBTQI2S Inclusion conference, Toronto, ON, May 23-25, 2018.				X				
Lapointe, A., & Dale, S. (2017). <i>Youth's experiences with the Healthy Relationships Program for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) Youth</i> . Paper presented at Faculty Research Partners Day: Growing, Learning and Changing in the 21st Century, Western University, London, ON, October 20, 2017.				X				
Lapointe, A., Kassen, K., Snooks, S., Townsley, D., Crooks, C. V., Dale, S., & Hughes, R. (2017). <i>Healthy Relationships Program for LGBT2Q+ Youth (2nd ed.)</i> . London, ON: Centre for School Mental Health. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Flyer: https://youthrelationships.org/uploads/hrp_lgbt2q+_flyer.pdf • Program Overview: https://youthrelationships.org/uploads/hrp_lgbt2q+_overview.pdf • Frequently Asked Questions: https://youthrelationships.org/uploads/hrp_lgbt2q+_faq.pdf 				X				
Lapp, A., Cywink, M., Crooks, C.V., Coyne-Foresi, M., Kirkham, A., Hughes, R. (2017) <i>Uniting Our Nations: A Peer Mentoring Program Indigenous Youth</i>		X	X					

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Journal Articles								
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.			X				X	
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. <i>International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience</i> , 3(1), 101-116.			X				X	
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. <i>International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction</i> . DOI: 10.1007/s11469-009-9242-0			X				X	
Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Zwarych, S., Hughes, R., & Wolfe, D. A. (2013). Predicting implementation success of an evidence-based program to promote healthy relationships among students two to eight years after teacher training. <i>Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health</i> , 32, 125-138.		X			X	X	X	
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. <i>Journal of Primary Prevention</i> , 38(1-2), 87-104. DOI 10.1007/s10935-016-0457-0			X				X	
Crooks, C. V., Exner-Cortens, D., Siebold, W., Moore, K., Grassgreen, L., Owen, P., Rausch, A., & Rossier, M. (2018). The role of relationships in collaborative partnership success: Lessons from the Alaska Fourth R project. <i>Evaluation and Program Planning</i> , 67, 97-104. DOI: 10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2017.12.007	X	X				X	X	X

	Partnerships	Implementation	Indigenous youth	LGBT2Q+ youth	Scale Up	Sustainability	Evaluation	Policy
Crooks, C. V., Snowshoe, A., Chiodo, D., & Brunette-Debassige, C. (2013). Navigating between rigor and community-based research partnerships: Building the evaluation of the <i>Uniting Our Nations</i> health promotion program for FNMI youth. <i>Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health</i> , 32, 13-25, 10.7870/cjcmh-2013-016.	X		X				X	
Crooks, C. V., Zwicker, J., Wells, L., Hughes, R., Langlois, A., & Emery, J. C. H. (2017). Estimating costs and benefits associated with evidence-based prevention: Four case studies based on the Fourth R program. <i>The School of Public Policy, SPP Research Papers</i> , 10(10), 1-27.		X			X		X	X
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. <i>Advances in School Mental Health Promotion</i> . DOI: 10.1080/1754730X.2015.1064775			X				X	
Lapointe, A. & Crooks, C. V. (2018). GSA members' experiences with a structured program to promote wellbeing. <i>Journal of LGBT Youth</i> . DOI:10.1080/19361653.2018.1479672		X		X			X	
Lapointe, A., Dunlop, C., Crooks, C. V. (accepted). Feasibility and fit of a mental health promotion program for LGBTQ+ youth. <i>Journal of Youth Development</i> .	X	X		X			X	
Snowshoe, A., Crooks, C. V., Tremblay, P. F., & Hinson, R. E. (2017). Cultural connectedness and its relation to mental health for First Nations youth. <i>Journal of Primary Prevention</i> , 38(1-2), 67-86. DOI:10.1007/s10935-016-0454-3.			X				X	
Snowshoe, A., Crooks, C. V., Tremblay, P., Craig, W., & Hinson, R. (2014). Development of a cultural connectedness measure for First Nations youth. <i>Journal of Psychological Assessment</i> . http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0037867			X				X	

	Partnerships	Implementation	Indigenous youth	LGBT2Q+ youth	Scale Up	Sustainability	Evaluation	Policy
Chapters								
Chiodo, D., & Kolpin, H. (2018). Both promising and problematic: Reviewing the evidence for implementation science. In A. W. Leschied, D. Saklofske, & G. Flett (eds.) (2018). <i>The Handbook of Implementation of School Based Mental Health Promotion: An Evidence-Informed Framework for Implementation</i> (pp.11-31). New York, NY. Springer Publishing.		X						
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). <i>School Mental Health Services for Adolescents</i> (pp. 306-328). London: Oxford University Press.	X		X				X	
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.) <i>The Handbook of Implementation of School Based Mental Health Promotion: An Evidence-Informed Framework for Implementation</i> (pp. 299-321). New York, NY. Springer Publishing.	X	X	X	X			X	
Crooks, C. V., Exner-Cortens, Siebold, W., Rosier, M., & Baker, K (2018). Building capacity to implement teen dating violence prevention: Lessons learned from the Alaska Fourth R initiative. In D. Wolfe and J. Temple (Eds.) <i>Dating violence: Theory, research, and prevention</i> (pp. 503-521). New York: Academics Press/Elsevier.	X	X			X	X	X	X