Building a Model for
Inter-Agency Collaboration
in the Niagara region of Ontario

Rowing the Boat Together I and II
(2012 - 2015) Project Summary Report
prepared by Niagara Connects,
December 2016

Shared Learning
Local Hub Sessions

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Prosperity Initiative

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**Rowing the Boat Together I and II (2012 – 2015)
Project Summary Report**

Thanks to people in the Niagara-wide community who engaged in building this model:

- Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN) Collaboration Subcommittee members
- Senior staff and front-line community service and outreach workers from agencies across Niagara who engaged in building the model
- Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) leaders, for providing funding support
- The Niagara Connects team, including Senior Associate Catherine Mindorff-Facca; Sr. Knowledge Broker Sarah Webster; and Evaluation Researcher Dr. Jennifer Boyko

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Table of Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines work undertaken between 2012 and 2015, through the Rowing the Boat Together (RTBT) I and II projects, to develop a model for inter-agency collaboration. It provides a chronological description of action steps taken and lessons collectively learned, by people working at all levels in the community service continuum in the Niagara region of Ontario – from front-line community service and outreach workers to managers and executive directors.

The desire to complete this work arose from the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN) goal: *"improve collaboration and actions in poverty reduction efforts by all stakeholders"*.

The RTBT projects were facilitated by Niagara Connects[1], in partnership with the NPRN Collaboration Subcommittee. Funding support was provided by the Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI). NPI, established by Niagara Region in 2008, provides an annual investment of $1.5 million to support poverty reduction and prevention activities in Niagara.

Niagara Prosperity Initiative goals are:

- To guide and direct investments on identified initiatives to alleviate poverty in neighbourhoods across Niagara
- To advocate for change that will reduce and prevent poverty in the community
- To develop and enhance collaborative relationships between stakeholders
- To engage people living in poverty in meaningful ways to ensure that investments reflect need

The NPI uses a research-based approach to address the root causes of poverty, allocating resources where they will have the greatest effect. While some projects are designed to meet the immediate needs of individuals living in poverty, the NPI is also focused on longer-term strategies which require stronger partnerships and improved coordination and planning across the public, private and voluntary (not for profit) sectors and among stakeholders.[2]

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[1] In late 2012, Niagara Research and Planning Council rebranded as Niagara Connects

[2] *Source*: www.niagararegion.ca/social-services/niagara-prosperity-initiatives.aspx

2.0 SUMMARY

Building a Model for
Inter-Agency Collaboration

The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN) is a group of social agencies, educators, business and government representatives, faith communities and individuals. The NPRN vision: *All Niagara residents live above the poverty line* is supported by values and goals that include collaboration as a priority.

Between 2012 and 2015, NPRN members worked together to build a model to strengthen inter-agency collaboration. This report describes building blocks gathered, and model construction steps. Refinement of the model was guided by an iterative developmental evaluation approach, to monitor and respond to the shared learning of people working in community service organizations in Niagara.

The model that emerged realistically and pragmatically meets inter-agency collaboration requirements of service providers. The intent is for the individuals and families being served to reap the benefits of a more integrated and connected system of community service delivery.

The model has developed "from the ground up", and it continues to be strengthened. An important next step is to think about and assess how this work makes a real difference in the lives of people being served. Opportunities exist to develop strategies for sustaining progress.

We know from research evidence that networking and interactivity among health professionals supports the generation of knowledge required to make quality improvement to patient care. The evidence shows that training and research opportunities about how to facilitate networking and interactivity can support the attainment of improved quality of care and health and social outcomes.

Adoption of this quality approach is just beginning to emerge in community service work. The opportunity exists to continue applying such health care-focused evidence in the community service setting, to sustain this Niagara-based model for inter-agency collaboration focused on client success.

2.1 Suggested Action Steps

Five (5) *suggested action steps* for moving forward to strengthen the inter-agency collaboration model include the following (in no particular order):

1. **Continually monitor progress:**

   Explore opportunities for creating partnerships that will leverage resources required to develop a plan for monitoring how the model is making an impact in the lives of the people and families being served.

2. **Embrace a practical, Developmental Evaluation approach:**

   Continue to embrace a developmental approach to planning, implementing and evaluating the model by adapting the model to meet the practical, on-the-ground requirements of service providers, the organizations they represent, and the clients they serve.

3. **Invest for impact:**

   Recognize the role of, and encourage philanthropic efforts that walk alongside development of the community in a manner that is supportive of risk-taking. In other words, pursue partnerships with funders who are investing for impact on the challenges of today's society, and who bring their expertise, knowledge and networking to the table.

4. **Fine-tune communication to support planning and wise decision-making:**

   Focus on fine-tuning elements of the model that require refinement. For example, while the reporting process from the Shared Learning Local Hubs (SLLH) is realistic and doable, ensure that it includes and regularly reports on relevant information to support collaborative planning and decision-making among community service organizations in Niagara. This will lead to people at all levels in the community service continuum being engaged and knowledgeable (i.e. clients; front-line and outreach workers; agency leadership including managers, directors, board members; local government leaders; and funders).

5. **Strengthen knowledge exchange to support client success:** Continue building Shared Learning Local Hubs (SLLHs) in the 5 areas of Niagara; Niagara-wide learning events such as webinars; and sharing of relevant, reliable evidence and knowledge via the niagaraknowledgeexchange.com (NKE) tool. This will foster knowledge exchange among people working at all levels in community service organizations in Niagara. It will also ensure the collective skill and knowledge base reflects working together in a different way, for the purpose of supporting client success.

To maintain momentum and interest, consider offering the following:

  o Virtual and in-person shared learning opportunities, focusing on specific topics arising from theming and analysis of Niagara-wide SLLH Burning Issues discussion summaries;

  o Backbone Support* for the SLLHs, to coordinate, support SLLH leaders, create pathways for information-sharing SLLH leaders, and summarize results of their discussions. In turn, this information can be shared with people working at all levels in the poverty reduction continuum in Niagara, to inform focused planning and wise decision-making; and

  o periodic '*burning issues*' discussion process refreshers for SLLH leaders and front-line service providers – perhaps in the context of in-person events for front-line workers to gather Niagara-wide.

*Collective Impact, Kania & Kramar, Stanford Innovation Review, Winter, 2011

2.2 *Burning Issues*: 2015 Themes arising from Shared Learning Local Hub (SLLH) Sessions

In 2015, SLLH leaders in 5 areas of Niagara recorded highlights of information shared at SLLH sessions, using the SLLH Discussion Guide (*see Appendix II, page 33-34*). This information was shared with Niagara Connects for the purpose of identifying common themes to support NPRN planning. Themes that emerged are listed on page 9.

SLLH sessions typically involve a discussion about issues arising in the day-to-day work front-line community service workers do to support the clients they serve. Session participants may provide background information about their organization's role in the community, updates on projects, and information about new programs or initiatives. The main focus is to discuss a variety of '*burning issues'* and common concerns of frontline staff, in regard to supporting the individuals they serve.

On average, 12 people from 10 different agencies attended SLLH sessions. There were large variations by hub location and session dates: the number of participants at the various sessions around Niagara ranged from 6 to 22, while the number of agencies represented ranged from 6 to 15.

The frequency of meetings varied among the SLLH groups.

The Fort Erie and St. Catharines hubs each held four sessions in 2015. Niagara Falls held one session. The Port Colborne-Welland-Pelham hub held two sessions, and the West Niagara hub held three sessions.

'*Burning Issues'* in Niagara in 2015

A wide range of concerns were discussed at SLLH sessions around Niagara in 2015. The most common 'burning issues' emerging, Niagara-wide (in order by frequency of mentions) included:

1) Affordable, safe, stable housing, including maintenance and utilities.
2) The importance of working together toward Collective Impact*.
3) Access to affordable transportation.
4) Securing sustainable funding and meeting obligations to funders (eg. time to complete paperwork).
5) Access to employment services, including services to help newcomers utilize their existing credentials, learn the language, and find employment.
6) Access to affordable childcare.
7) Access to affordable dental care.
8) Helping clients overcome barriers to obtaining social assistance so that they have a livable income.
9) Long waitlists for mental health and other services.
10) Literacy, including financial literacy.
11) Staff burnout.
12) Engaging the community and attracting volunteers.

Other concerns included healthcare outreach, seniors, and clients' access to the Internet.

*Collective Impact, Kania & Kramar, Stanford Innovation Review, Winter, 2011

Benefits of Shared Learning Local Hub Sessions

Session leaders reported consensus among local hub participants that the sessions were valuable. The most common benefits reported were:

(i) Sharing of information about each other's organizations, agencies, activities, programs, and projects, leading to greater awareness about other resources for their clients.
(ii) Better service for clients as a result of attending the session.
(iii) Collaborating with each other as part of Collective Impact[3] to improve their clients' lives.
(iv) Networking and sharing information resources.

Limitations of Shared Learning Local Hub Sessions

Far fewer hub groups reported on disadvantages and limitations of the sessions. The most common limitations reported were:
(i) Lack of diversity in participating agencies. Participants in 2 different hub sessions reported they could not be sure whether the "right people" were at the table.
(ii) Time away from clients.

Other limitations included the fluidity of participants (making it difficult to move forward as a cohesive and stable group), not having session outcomes in hand to report back to their employers, and that many of the issues discussed were beyond their scope of control.

3.0 CONSTRUCTING A MODEL FOR INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION: RTBT I, 2012-2013

In 2012, Niagara Connects received Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) funding on behalf of the NPRN Collaboration Subcommittee, to support the RTBT I project. The purpose was to facilitate construction of a model for front-line community service and outreach workers in Niagara to connect, and strengthen relationships concerning clients' access to supports and services.

An environmental scan of global, national, provincial and local relevant, reliable evidence and validated best practice pointed to five (5) preliminary building blocks that inform construction of the model:

1. ***Putting the Pieces Together* Sessions** - Since 2008, the three United Way organizations in Niagara have hosted "Putting the Pieces Together" events across Niagara. These events enable front-line community service workers to collaborate, identify local community service assets and explore ways to work together to strengthen service delivery. Originating in Niagara Falls and Fort Erie, these sessions were led by the NPI Convenor, hosted by the local United Way, and extended to Port Colborne, Welland, West Niagara and St. Catharines.

2. **NPI *Community Conversations* Report** - The voices of Niagara citizens receiving community services were heard through this 2009 report. With a focus on service delivery, the report called for increased communication and coordination of resources between agencies, as well as agencies collaborating within local hubs to provide client-centered care.

3. **Ontario Social Assistance Review (in Niagara)** - A common theme emerged from both community service workers and Niagara citizens receiving community services, during the July, 2011 Social Assistance Review: that Niagara citizens receiving community services would benefit from increased collaboration among service providers, which, in turn could result in positive professional development and learning opportunities for community service workers.

4. **NPRN Collaboration Subcommittee** – Niagara-wide inter-agency collaboration was identified as a vital in developing a common vision and definition of "client-centered service". The NPRN as a whole includes more than 30 agencies *"working collectively to reduce poverty in Niagara through information sharing, changing attitudes, and compelling Niagara citizens to get involved and take action"*

5. **Niagara Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP)** – Inter-agency collaboration, to improve housing opportunities and prevent homelessness emerged as one of the highest priorities expressed by Niagara community service agencies responding to Niagara Region's fall 2012 Phase 1 Consultation to build the HHAP.

A video summarizing themes arising from the 2012 environmental scan is posted at:

http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/rowing-the-boat-together-video/

In September, 2012, ten front-line community service workers from around Niagara were trained as *Practice Talk* Leaders, by Dr. John Parboosingh, Professor Emeritus with the University of Calgary. *Practice Talk* is based on organizational change principles of team member interactivity, shared learning, team cohesion, and productivity. *Practice Talk* is validated by companies such as Toyota and IBM, and more recently in the Canadian health care sector.

See Appendix I for *A Practical Approach to Facilitating Practice Talk*, J. Parboosingh, 2012.

In October, 2012, 90 front-line community service workers, who are from 40 different agencies, and who are recognized as practice leaders in their agencies, attended the initial RTBT forum. *Practice Talk* was introduced as a method to better equip participants to work together and share practice knowledge.

Participants cited three favourite aspects of the forum: relationship-building; learning about what other agencies do; and emphasis on the value of front-line workers collaborating and sharing practice ideas. Over 80% of participants said that they would promote use of *Practice Talk* in their workplace, and for inter-agency collaboration.
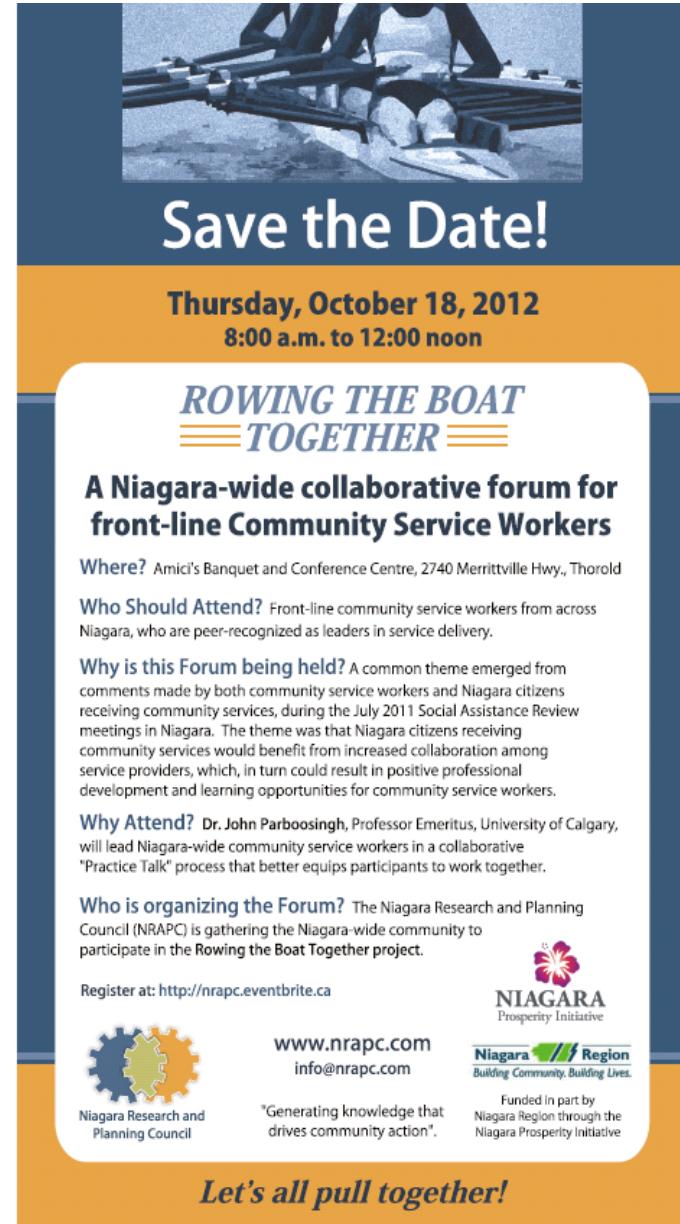
Save the Date!

Thursday, October 18, 2012
8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

ROWING THE BOAT TOGETHER

A Niagara-wide collaborative forum for front-line Community Service Workers

Where? Amici's Banquet and Conference Centre, 2740 Merrittville Hwy., Thorold

Who Should Attend? Front-line community service workers from across Niagara, who are peer-recognized as leaders in service delivery.

Why is this Forum being held? A common theme emerged from comments made by both community service workers and Niagara citizens receiving community services, during the July 2011 Social Assistance Review meetings in Niagara. The theme was that Niagara citizens receiving community services would benefit from increased collaboration among service providers, which, in turn could result in positive professional development and learning opportunities for community service workers.

Why Attend? Dr. John Parboosingh, Professor Emeritus, University of Calgary, will lead Niagara-wide community service workers in a collaborative "Practice Talk" process that better equips participants to work together.

Who is organizing the Forum? The Niagara Research and Planning Council (NRAPC) is gathering the Niagara-wide community to participate in the **Rowing the Boat Together** project.

Register at: http://nrapc.eventbrite.ca

www.nrapc.com
info@nrapc.com

Niagara Research and Planning Council

"Generating knowledge that drives community action".

NIAGARA Prosperity Initiative

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Funded in part by Niagara Region through the Niagara Prosperity Initiative

Let's all pull together!

In November 2012, forty participants from the initial RTBT Forum, and their colleagues, gathered in Welland to hone Practice Talk skills. Participants expressed a desire to build momentum through face-to-face and online opportunities to collaborate, share knowledge, build inter-agency connections, and learn about each other's resources.

- "*Sharing between agencies is very important for effective service delivery and it's good for Niagara".*
- "*Ideally we would have more in-person and online opportunities to share ideas and resources with peers at other agencies".*
- "*'Ah-ha moment' – I may not always know what's best for my clients, and I should listen to their needs".*

Throughout the fall 2012 RTBT sessions, front-line workers emphasized the importance of including agency leaders in the conversation about inter-agency collaboration, to encourage strengthening relationships between agencies' front-line workers as a planning priority.

Thus, in January, 2013, a total of 28 Executive Directors (EDs) and Managers from 20 different community service agencies gathered to examine three tools proven to support inter-agency collaboration: Practice Talk; Communities of Practice; and Network Mapping & Analysis.

These EDs and Managers expressed strong support for the value of Niagara-wide inter-agency collaboration, and envisioned their organizations being active in such.

They expressed a desire for:
- continued leadership/Backbone Support* to keep the RTBT momentum going;
- additional learning about the Practice Talk process; and
- Network Mapping to help agencies visualize opportunities for building partnerships.

An April 3, 2013 webinar gathered both front-line workers and managers/EDs to review and refine elements of the model for inter-agency collaboration. The webinar was attended by 62 participants in 27 locations. It is archived on the Niagara Knowledge Exchange (NKE) at: http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/inter-agency-collaboration-for-person-centered-service-delivery-a-model-for-niagara-event-recording/. As of April 30, 2015, the archive was viewed 133 times.

An April 17, 2013 Niagara-wide forum furthered the conversation among front-line workers, EDs and Managers, about the inter-agency collaboration model. It was attended by 57 people, working at all levels within 29 organizations.

Overall participant feedback from the April webinar and forum indicated:

- our work together in developing this Niagara-focused model for inter-agency collaboration is headed in the right direction, and should proceed to practical action
- it is important to have buy-in from people working in all parts and levels of the community service continuum in Niagara;
- a desire to participate in developing a shared measurement system for inter-agency collaboration in Niagara;
- support for further adapting the *Practice Talk* process to work in a practical way in the Niagara context, by developing sessions for front-line workers to connect in several local areas around Niagara, to engage many agencies' front-line workers; and
- interest in learning more about *Person-Centered Thinking.*

3.1 COMPONENTS OF THE MODEL

Work completed in the RTBT I project resulted in four (4) main components of the model for inter-agency collaboration being described by people working in the community service continuum in Niagara:

1. **Principles:**
   - Work together as a Niagara-wide network
   - Facilitate learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities
   - Advance a person-centered community service delivery model focused on client success
   - Engage knowledgeable people at all levels in the Niagara-wide community service delivery continuum: Clients; Front-line Workers; Agency EDs and Managers; Agency Board Members; Niagara Region Government Leaders; and Funders

2. **Tools to support Strengthened Inter-Agency Collaboration:**

   Practice Talk – Front-line workers build trusted relationships by working together to share information about practice challenges, and share ideas for best practice, thereby increasing productivity and taking value back to their organizations.

   Communities of Practice - *Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002)*

   Knowledge Exchange – Support shared learning by leveraging the niagaraknowledgeexchange.com (NKE) tool to access and share relevant, reliable Niagara-focused information.

   Network Mapping and Analysis – Visualize connections among people and agencies in Niagara, to build on those connections, and identify new partners, resources, and opportunities to collaborate for client success.

3. **Achieving Impact:**

   Collective Impact* (CI) is a validated framework to organize NPRN inter-agency collaboration. Conditions for successful CI initiatives include:
   - Common Agenda
   - Shared Measurement Systems
   - Mutually Reinforcing Activities
   - Continuous Communication
   - Backbone Support Organization(s)

   *Collective Impact, Kania & Kramar, Stanford Innovation Review, Winter, 2011

4. **Person-Centered Service Delivery:**

   "Person-centered thinking requires service providers to find the balance between what is important *for* people and what is important *to* them. This leads service providers to support clients in "getting the life they want to live".
   Source: Kris Akilie, Mainstream Services in St. Catharines; Person Centered Thinking Trainer.

4.0 ENACTING THE MODEL FOR INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION: RTBT II, 2013–2015

RTBT ll project activities focused on creating a place, time, and validated process for front-line community service and outreach workers in Niagara to gather (in-person and virtually) to share best practice ideas and resources, discuss what is working well, explore strategies to address challenges or barriers, and ultimately strengthen inter-agency connections for the benefit of clients' success.

Project action steps included:

- coordinating the work of local leaders to organize regular shared learning local hub sessions for frontline community service workers in 5 areas around Niagara;

- augmenting local sessions with both in-person and virtual opportunities to meet and learn together as a Niagara-wide group; and

- monitoring project outcomes as a way to better understand opportunities for building/strengthening relationships and resource exchange among community service agencies' front-line workers.

"Until I started to work with that person, I didn't realize they had certain skills and knowledge. We discovered one of our local group members has expertise in assisting people with removing themselves from fixed price utility contracts. Now, we enlist that person's expertise whenever this arises with one of our clients."

Shared Learning Local Hub participant comment, 2013

4.1 BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR LOCAL HUB SESSIONS AROUND NIAGARA

In the fall of 2013, a core group of front-line workers and NPRN Collaboration Subcommittee members helped to build momentum for the inter-agency collaboration model.

These people included:

- Ruthann Brown, Women's Place of South Niagara
- Julia Dean, Quest Community Health Centre, St. Catharines
- Mary Anne Feagan, Bridges Community Health Centre, Fort Erie
- AJ Heafey, Niagara Falls Community Health Centre
- Erin Marriott, Powerhouse Project (Young Carer's Initiative)
- Bev Reimer, Community Care of West Niagara
- Wendy Taylor, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities, Niagara Region

This core group identified 4 priorities for expanding participation in local hub sessions:

1. **Dovetail with existing action initiatives, such as:**
   - *Working with Families* planning sessions in St. Catharines;
   - *Fort Erie Service Providers* quarterly meetings, hosted by the United Way of Niagara Falls and Greater Fort Erie;
   - *West Niagara Helping Hands* group;
   - Youth-focused groups including the Youth Outreach Community of Practice facilitated by Niagara Region Public Health in collaboration with YES Niagara, youth counsellors in local schools, Public Health nurses, and the RAFT;
   - Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter partners; and
   - the NPRN Housing Working Table.

2. **Track common themes arising from discussion of 'burning issues'** – Building a process for systematically recording and regularly reporting on Niagara-wide common themes arising from 'burning issues' highlights in the 5 local hub sessions will inform agencies' planning, as well as overall work of the NPRN and the Niagara Prosperity Initiative.

3. **<u>Embed shared leadership, participation, and action to enable sustainability</u>**

Sustainability of local hub session groups requires:
- Identifying emerging leadership among local hub participants, and taking a shared leadership approach to continuity;
- Keeping communication and knowledge-sharing flowing between people working at all levels in community services in Niagara;
- Respecting confidentiality by sharing only high-level summaries of 'Burning Issues' discussion;
- Setting a predictable schedule for sessions, that respects participants' busy schedules (suggested: meet on quarterly basis)
- Scanning for potential new participants – eg. Emergency Room nurses may see value in participating
- Developing a mechanism for concrete action to arise if/when issues raised in the sessions are beyond the scope of members' ability to address them (eg. legalities)
- Engaging people at all levels in the community service continuum in Niagara in understanding the value of the local hub sessions (i.e. clients, front-line workers, managers, executive directors and agency/organization board members, to funders/ decision-makers).

4. **<u>Acknowledge that 'burning issues' discussion is a less formal version of 'Practice Talk', adapted to the Niagara context</u>**

Exchanging ideas with peers about challenges, and resources available to address barriers, strengthens front-line workers' ability to support client success. Thus, workers' time spent attending local hub sessions is time well-invested. Important measures of success for local hub sessions include ensuring that all participants:
- are able to discuss 'burning issues' currently arising in their work; and they
- leave sessions clearly knowing their tasks for follow-up sharing of information and resources.

4.2 *BURNING ISSUES* RAISED, 2013

'*Burning issues*' raised by front-line community service workers in local hub sessions around Niagara in 2013 included:

- Clients' loss of money to high-interest cash stores: strengthening front-line workers' capacity to help strengthen clients' financial literacy skills

- Confusion over loss of Community Start-up Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB)

- Youth-related concerns including: Sexual promiscuity among teens (issues of influence of media, risk of STDs, lack of self-esteem within relationships, youth mentorship/youth programming); Lack of services and funding for older youth (18 – 26); Building connections for youth programs; Mental health protocols related to school

- Changes to federal support for newcomers

- Current utility program and confusion over discretionary funds

- Increased use of Food Banks

- Lack of decent housing stock, particularly in South Niagara

4.3 SHARED LEARNING AND ONLINE RESOURCE-SHARING TO SUPPORT CLIENT SUCCESS

Virtual information-sharing tools were tested, for the purpose of sharing information about best-practice and agency resources; desired and actual outcomes related to 'Burning Issues'; and collaboration arising from agency workers' participation in SLLH sessions.

In response to 2013 'Burning Issues' themes, Niagara Connects hosted a webinar in June, 2014: _Building a Financial Literacy Toolkit for Community Service Workers in Niagara_. There were seventy (70) participants from 37 organizations.

The webinar took first steps in identifying and pulling together financial literacy information tools to enable community service workers in Niagara to better assist their clients in gaining basic money management skills. The archived webinar is posted on the NKE at: http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/building-a-financial-toolkit-for-community-service-workers-in-niagara-event-recording/ This archive was viewed 21 times in the subsequent 11 months.

A related NKE blog post outlines the NPRN's work to enhance access to income tax preparation services in Niagara: http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/community-blog/promoting-financial-literacy-in-niagara/

Financial Literacy Toolkit for Community Service Workers in Niagara webinar participants' comments, June, 2014:

"I found the webinar information interesting and will be able to share it with other staff as well as clients I support."

"The population we serve, more often than not, live in a state of constant crisis which makes it difficult to see the bigger picture. Most are just trying to get through the day. Is work being done to market the importance of budgeting regardless of income? We would be interested in learning more and hosting a workshop for our clients who have already expressed a willingness to learn more."

A bulletin board tool for online resource-sharing was collaboratively beta-tested by eight people, including one Niagara Connects Knowledge Broker (KB), three Executive Directors, and four front-line community service workers. The intent was to discover whether, in addition to using the niagaraknowledgeexchange.com (NKE) tool for communication about and among the various SLLHs, there was an opportunity to create a bulletin board forum for synchronous, real-time online exchange of information, ideas and resources to strengthen in-person connections made at SLLH sessions. The beta-testing demonstrated that integrating information on the NKE with other social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook is the most effective way of sharing such information. The Niagara Connects KB team provides ongoing support for this online technology, as

well as conceptually helping people understand how they can

leverage the NKE and related social media tools.

4.4 VALIDATING A MODEL FOR CAPTURING '*BURNING ISSUES*' THEMES

In the fall of 2014, Evaluation Researcher Dr. Jennifer Boyko did an environmental scan of best practice models for capturing themes that emerged from the Shared Learning Local Hub (SLLH) sessions around Niagara. These were combined into a draft SLLH Session Leaders Guide for recording session notes. Beta-testing by SLLH leaders and the NPRN Collaboration Subcommittee resulted in the *NPRN Inter-Agency Collaboration Shared Learning Local Hubs Discussion Guide* being refined and finalized in early 2015 (*See Appendix II, page 31*).

A summary of themes arising from '*Burning Issues*' discussed in SLLH sessions across Niagara in 2015 can be found in section 2.2 on page 7 of this document.

The NPRN *Inter-Agency Collaboration for Shared Learning* model was developed by the NPRN Collaboration Subcommittee, and approved by the NPRN in February, 2015 (*see model on page 30*). The goal is: *Inter-agency collaboration for person-centered service delivery focused on client success.*

4.5 ESTABLISHING SHARED LEARNING LOCAL HUB (SLLH) SESSION SCHEDULES

In late 2014 and throughout 2015, leadership and session schedules for SLLH sessions in all 5 areas of Niagara were refined. A system was established for posting and regularly updating the information on the NKE. Sessions were held in Fort Erie; Port Colborne/Welland/Pelham; West Niagara; St. Catharines; and Niagara Falls, for front-line community service and outreach workers to:

- Connect for shared learning;

- Share ideas and best practice information to support client success; and

- Strengthen relationships concerning clients' access to services and benefits.

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network
Interagency Collaboration for Person-Centered Service Delivery focused on Client Success
Shared Learning Local Hub Sessions

Shared Learning Local Hub Sessions are being held around Niagara, for front- line community service and outreach workers to:

- connect for shared learning;

- share ideas and best practice information to enable client success; and

- strengthen relationships concerning clients' access to services and benefits.

Contact your Shared Learning Local Hub Session Leaders to be part of up-coming sessions:

Local Hub	Local Leads	Contact Email	2015 - Session Dates & Location
Port Colborne - Welland - Pelham	• Ashley Dunbabin, Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Niagara • Meredith Eudovic, Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Niagara	ashley.dunbabin@bigbrothersbigsisters.ca meredith.eudovic@bigbrothersbigsisters.ca	• June 18, 9:30-11:30am., Niagara Women's Enterprise Centre, 41 Victoria St., Welland • September 24, 9:30-11:30am Centre de Sante communautaire, 810 East Main Street, Room 306 Welland
Fort Erie	• Mary Anne Feagan, Bridges CHC	maryanne.feagan@bridgeschc.ca	• March 5, 9am, Fort Erie Library • June 4, 9am, Bridges CHC • Sept 3, 9am, FE Native Friendship Ctre • Dec 3, 12pm, Ridgeway Legion
Niagara Falls	• AJ Heafey, Niagara Falls CHC	AJHeafey@nfchc.ca	• Friday June 19, 1:00-2:30pm, Niagara Falls CHC, 4481 Queen Street
St. Catharines	• Erica Davidson, YMCA of Niagara • Melenie Neamtz, Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre	edavidson@ymcaofniagara.ca mneamtz@folk-arts.ca	• Feb.10, 9:30-11:30am. Quest CHC • April 9, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. Quest CHC • June 11, 9:30–11:30 a.m. YMCA Employment Svces, 285 Bunting Rd.
West Niagara	• Karen Schmidt, West Niagara Adult Literacy Centre	karen@nwelrc.ca	• Jan 29, 9-11am, Employment Help Ctre, Beamsville • Mar. 24, 9-11am, Employment Help Ctre, Grimsby • May 20, 9:30-11:30 am, Community Care WN, Beamsville • June 23, 9:30-11:30 "Transit Talk", Employment Help Ctre, Beamsville

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Niagara Connects
www.niagaraconnects.ca

4.6 PERSON-CENTERED SERVICE DELIVERY

On April 22, 2015, 101 participants from 36 organizations in Niagara attended a *Person-Centered Thinking and Service Delivery in Niagara* webinar, hosted by Niagara Connects. Presenters were Kris Akilie, Mainstream Services, Person-Centered Thinking trainer; Patricia Regier, HNHB Community Support Services Niagara; and Melissa van Tuyl, Women's Place of South Niagara.

Kris explored key concepts of person-centered thinking and service delivery and presented a one-page profile tool, which can be used for clients and/or staff as a way to enable a more person-centered culture. Patricia and Melissa provided examples of how Community Support Services Niagara and Women's Place of South Niagara have applied concepts of person-centered thinking and service delivery. Presentations were followed by an exchange with participants.

The Webinar archive is posted on the NKE at:
http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/person-centered-thinking-and-service-delivery-in-niagara-event-recording/

Funded in part by Niagara Region through the Niagara Prosperity Initiative

Webinar: Person-Centered Thinking and Service Delivery in Niagara

Meeting Description:
During this webinar presenters will describe Person-Centered Thinking and Service Delivery and highlight how this concept is being practically applied within the Niagara context. The presentation will be followed by an opportunity for discussion and exchange.

This shared learning opportunity supports the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN) *Inter-Agency Collaboration for Person-Centered Service Delivery Focused on Client Success* framework.

Details

Date:	Wed, Apr 22, 2015
Time:	01:00 PM EDT
Duration:	1 hour
Host(s):	Niagara Connects

Presenter Information

Kris Akillie

Communications & Community Coordinator, Mainstream Services Certified Person-Centered Thinking Trainer

Patricia Regier

Director of Quality, Collaborative Partnerships & Education

Melissa van Tuyl

Director of Services, Women's Place South Niagara

4.7 SUSTAINING THE INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION MODEL

An important part of sustaining the inter-agency collaboration model is to continually engage people working at all levels in the community service delivery continuum, to help promote and strengthen the SLLH sessions around Niagara. Accordingly, a meeting was held on April 30, 2015 in order to assess progress made to date and action steps for sustainability.

Fifteen people gathered for a 90-minute working session. Participants included: Leaders of Shared Learning Local Hub sessions from all 5 areas around Niagara: Fort Erie, Port Colborne/Welland/Pelham, West Niagara, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls; NPRN Collaboration Subcommittee Members; NPRN Coordinating Committee Members; and three Niagara Connects team members.

The group reviewed steps in establishing the model, and described essential elements for sustainability of the SLLH sessions. Their discussion helped to summarize ways in which the Rowing the Boat Together (RTBT) l and ll projects (2012 to 2015) advanced the NPRN's Collaboration priority.

Ten participants responded to a brief written questionnaire at the end of the 90-minute working session held on April 30, 2015. *(See Appendix III, pages 35-38, for a full summary of questionnaire responses.)*

1. *What worked well/is working well?* All respondents provided an answer to this first question, and three key areas are apparent based on the responses.

(i) <u>Focused meetings and webinars</u>. Respondents generally perceived the face-to-face opportunities to be helpful in supporting knowledge exchange.

(ii) <u>Sharing of information and networking that took place through the meetings and webinars.</u> One respondent describes this as "Getting to know the 'extras' or details about services/programs to better support our clients".

(iii) <u>Opportunities created for building and nurturing relationships.</u> This, in turn, created a sense of belonging and commitment to the RTBT projects.

2. *What, if anything, would you do differently "if you were in charge, and had unlimited resources"?* Seven individuals responded to this second question. The suggestions that were provided were diverse and included:

- creating resources for local hubs that could be tailored to the needs of each area;
- emphasizing the benefits of participation to individuals (professionals and clients) and organizations;
- utilizing the NPI Convenor to more proactively connect the work of individual hubs; and
- continue developing and delivering resources for the NPRN to support inter-agency collaboration through regular meetings for front-line workers, with meeting notes distributed afterwards.

3. *In your opinion, what are the top three things that NPRN can do to sustain the work of the "Shared Learning Local Hubs"?* All respondents provided an answer to this third question. Responses were also diverse and can be summarized according to three key areas:

- Communication **-** respondents provided practical suggestions for improvement such as "Ensur[ing] that all shared learning hubs and their members are aware of the connection to NPRN, are encouraged to attend/join NPRN and keeping the NPRN group aware of the hubs and their contributions". Two respondents also noted the importance of communicating with new

people and organizations in order to spread the words about the opportunities created.

- Technical tools to sustain the work of the Shared Learning Local Hubs **-** specifically, offering a database of contacts for leads to connect with one another, a current calendar of events within the region, and postings on the NKE that encourage conversation and collaboration.

- Structure and infrastructure **-** including required resources, supports, and processes. The importance of ensuring leaders are well-supported was noted by three respondents. Other suggestions for sustaining the work of the hubs included: formalizing commitment through a memorandum of understanding, consistent convenors in each area, continued support for coordination of the project, as well as on-going meetings, new activities such as lunch and learn about "burning issues" raised.

While feedback received was quite diverse and requires careful consideration in terms of feasibility, it is a starting point for moving forward with a plan for sustaining the NPRN inter-agency collaboration.

Appendix I

A practical approach to facilitating practice talk sessions

J. Parboosingh

The problem

Knowledge that helps us develop and continuously improve our practice comes from many sources. Much of it is "know-how" or working knowledge that includes workarounds and improvisations created from experience and passed on during informal conversations with trusted colleagues. But many professionals, especially newcomers, are not privy to conversations between friends and close colleagues. Yet studies show that these informal interactions are where the most valuable exchanges about the way we conduct our practice take place[1,2,3]. There is a need to find more inclusive ways to assist professionals to collectively share successes and find solutions for challenges and create opportunities to continuously improve their practice.

> "...everyone in healthcare really has two jobs when they come to work every day: to do their work and to improve it".
> Batalden P, Davidoff F.[4]

Solution – Practice Talk Sessions

One solution is to assign time in our busy schedules for Practice Talk. The term **practice talk** refers to a two-way conversation or dialogue between members in a trusted relationship such as a community of practice who use stories of practice experiences to communicate their perspectives and values. The term **Practice Talk Sessions** or PTS refers to formal (education-like) sessions where multi-disciplinary members of a community of providers exchange stories of practice experiences, mimicking the informal interactions that take place at work, for instance at coffee breaks.

Practice Talk sessions are different from traditional meetings that commonly begin with a description of a best practice which inevitably triggers defensive ("*I cannot do this because...*") conversation. In contrast, participants at Practice Talk sessions provide perspectives on issues by sharing stories of practice experiences, a process we term **narrative based dialogue**. Expressions of emotions, similar to those included in stories[5] we informally share with friends for instance in the lunchroom at work are encouraged. Later, we will provide research evidence that expressions of inner feelings (that is, our perceptions, emotions and motivations), traditionally suppressed during conversations at formal meetings, help us to learn and enhance our practice in non-threating ways. Hence, the primary purpose of practice talk is to excite participants into a "*how can we do this better* "conversation[6].

According to Senge[7], exchanging stories about "*how we do this now*", builds a creative tension between current practice and a shared vision of a better practice that fosters genuine motivation to change. '*As people talk, the vision grows clearer. As it gets clearer, enthusiasm for its benefits grow*'. The process is used in some industries to excite team members to be creative about improvements in practice.

> "*The rule here is that improving something starts after understanding how we do it now*".
> P. Gritton, VP, Toyota North America[8]

As communities of practice (CoPs) are introduced into management practices in health care[9] we are seeing increased interest by health professionals to learn the skills to facilitate practice talk sessions.[10]

The three components of practice we talk about

When members of a Community talk about work it helps to make the conversations productive and efficient if they focus the conversation on one of 3 kinds of stories.

a) Stories that make you feel good about practice & make you want to come to work;
b) Stories that describe challenges and frustrations at work; and,
c) Stories about the tensions you feel between what you do and what you need in order to improve your practice.

We suggest that stories shared at your first Practice Talk session should be success stories. Leave stories of frustrations at work until CoP members have developed trusting relationships and created a safe environment to share these stories.

How to encourage storytelling at practice talk sessions

While we willingly share stories when we talk among friends informally, simply asking members of your group to tell a story at a formal meeting rarely works. Below we share some practical tips that facilitators of practice talk sessions can use to encourage participants to recall stories about their practice experiences.

- Encourage group members, weeks before the session, to determine the component of their shared practice they wish to explore at a session. This way they can select a relevant story as they conduct their practice. Looking out for a good story as we practice has the added advantages of encouraging practice reflection and community building.
- View a practice talk session as a project aimed at helping participants to gain a better understanding of a specific aspect of their practice and make suggestions for doing it better. Encouraging members to volunteer their stories hinges on the facilitator creating a safe environment, establishing trust and asking questions that will encourage storytelling.
- Avoid the term 'story'. Instead, when a participant offers an opinion, use phrases like "*can you give an example….. or can you recall an episode….*"
- Encourage storytelling by asking emotionally charged questions. We frequently link past events with strong emotions and using emotional words helps us to conjure those memories. Try prefacing the questions with a phrase like "*Tell us about the last time you felt elated, (or angry, honored, stressed, remorse, sad, excited, shocked, proud…?)*"
- Build the question: Start with an image building phrase, such as "*think about the last time…*" or "*imagine*" or "*consider…*". People remember events when they can picture an image reminding them of a specific situation. Then add the open question with emotive words: for example, "*when have you felt disappointed…or pleasantly surprised…?*"
- Offer the first story at the meeting. Alternatively, invite a trusted member to prepare and tell the opening story. Novices to storytelling often feel more comfortable once they have heard a story from a colleague, as they realize they also have similar stories to share.

What are the ingredients of a good practice story?

Since the purpose of sharing practice stories is to stimulate learning that prompts us to make changes in practice, any story that promotes this process is a "good practice story".

In general, good stories about practice:

1. **have a hook** – for instance, start by describing the status quo. "*I usually do…and then one day…* " ie. something unique disrupts the status quo.

2. **are about people** – include a patient, family member, a colleague or other staff, a referring practitioner, etc.

3. **include information** - but don't rely on its accuracy, as this is not a story's main contribution. (Sharing data is the major purpose of a case report, not a story)

4. **include anecdotes** that inform community members of your values, norms and perspectives.

5. **include tacit knowledge** - workarounds and thoughts that are shared with the listeners.

6. **share my network** (people connections) with community members.

7. **should take about 4-5 minutes to tell.**

A practical approach to facilitating Practice Talk – October 2012

Preparing for your first practice talk session

Who should be invited to the first meeting?

First, invite peers who regularly share practice stories informally for instance, at coffee and lunch breaks. When this group is established, you can add a few more with whom you have talked individually about 'meeting regularly'. Limit the numbers at your first practice talk to 10 or less. For the first meeting, only invite practitioners from the same discipline (ie. peers). By the third session, with the blessing of the group, you should be inviting people from other disciplines (eg. physicians, nurses, receptionist) whose job involves a similar client or patient mix.

What should we talk about at the first meeting?

Invite participants to tell a story about a success in their practice, something that makes them feel good about work. For instance, you may suggest that participants recall a story about the network of professionals that help them do their work; or a story about a satisfied client.

Preparation for the meeting

For a typical 90 minute meeting, three participants should each be invited to prepare a story that describes a personal experience.

We all have numerous stories about incidents and encounters we experience in a week at work. We suggest you select one, soon after it occurs, while saying to yourself *"I would like to hear what my colleagues think of this encounter in my practice"*.

We don't suggest writing it out and reading the transcript as this tends to sanitize its content and remove emotional expressions. If you can record it on an I-phone or digital recorder when the feelings are still with you and play it back during the session, this is best. Recorded stories save time at meetings. Avoid reading transcripts!

Facilitating the discussion after a story is shared

> *"I encourage people to focus on a particular story and take time to slow down and gain deeper insight rather than hearing a story and moving on without further dialogue".*
>
> Statement by a member of our CoP Facilitator Course

Structuring the discussion helps the group to make sense of the story they have just heard.

The conversation should lead to a better understanding of the practice and its significance and should prompt answers to the question, *"how can we do this better?"* The conversation, which may be enriched by the facilitator asking for similar stories from other participants, often continues informally after the meeting and may be picked up again in later practice talk sessions. This gives group members the opportunity to reflect and interact and return to the issue with suggestions for moving forward.

Participants at a practice talk session should be reminded that the telling of a story is just the means to the end, the end being the learning that emerges from the discussion and any motivation for change that follows. Notes and sound files of stories can be archived on a website, thus creating a corporate memory and a convenient way to orient new members. Most websites, blogs and even organizational intranets have the capacity to store such files. A website archive can be set up so that it is password protected, and files can be organized in such a way that CoP members can access information easily and do searches for stories about select topics.

A simple method or "scaffolding" for the post-story telling discussion

This method is based on research by Amabile and Kramer[11] who studied 12,000 responses from questionnaires submitted daily by 230 project leaders throughout the duration of a single project. These workers found that project managers hold conversations with themselves, expressing their perceptions, emotions, and motivations as they react to and make sense of events that arise while managing their work project.

An important finding of the research is that the perceptions, emotions, and motivations expressed by the project managers in response to a single event impacted their performance (including their creativity, productivity, collegiality, and commitment). In some cases the impact on performance lasted for many days after the event. Most project managers stated that writing down their reactions to events (requested by the study protocol) increased their willingness to act (motivation) in response to their feelings.

The findings of Amabile and Kramer are supported by other research. For instance, workers report that clinicians commonly express perceptions and emotions and motivations as they informally share practice incidents with colleagues with whom they have trusting relationships [1,3,6]. Psychological researchers report that the three major processes that influence our habits and performance are our perceptions (also called thoughts or cognitions), emotions (or feelings) and motivation (or drive). And, ACCORDING TO Amabile and Kramer, recent research in brain imaging helps explain how our feelings influence our performance.

Using the research findings to guide the discussion after a story

We recommend that participants be invited to express the perceptions, emotions and motivations they experience in response to each story told at a practice talk session. Since they are in a 'safe' environment, namely one in which there is a high level of trust among participants, they should feel safe to share inner feelings with colleagues.

We recommend that the steps described below and shown in figure 1 be followed, although the process in a practice talk session is rarely linear.

Step 1: Each person listening to the story, including the storyteller, provides responses to the following requests:

a) Provide your **perceptions** of the story. Perceptions can range from immediate impressions to fully developed theories about what is happening in the story and what it means to them, sometimes called "sense-making";

b) Provide your **emotional reactions** to the story. (Research reveals that positive and negative emotions can impact a range of work behaviors including creativity, decision making and negotiations).

c) Describe if the story **motivated you** in any way. (Motivation is a person's grasp of what needs to be done and his or her drive to do it at any given moment).

Step 2: Participants are encouraged to write their responses on 3 post-it notes and post them on a board (at face-to-face or virtual meetings).

Step 3: Each member of the group is given the opportunity to expand on their notes and interact with comments from group members as they describe the perceptions, emotions, and motivations the story has generated within the members.

Step 4: The facilitator summarizes the responses, spending additional time reviewing the comments regarding motivation to act. This is the beginning of a "how can we do this better conversation", where participants, expanding on their own comments, offer ways of improving on the practice area under discussion. This way, a shared vision of a better practice is created by the group.

Step 5: Facilitator (or other member) shares with the group the results of a literature search to determine the best (evidence-based) practice.

Step 6. The group decides on a "new" practice that best fits their culture and environment and plans a pilot trial in the practices over a period of time, before reporting back at a later practice talk session. A group member volunteers to be the lead on the pilot.

Step 7: Facilitator keeps records of the practice talk session as described below, archiving the stories and post-it notes and feeding back to the group members' summaries of the discussions and proposed actions.

As mentioned above, the conversation at a session which may be enriched by the facilitator asking for similar stories from other members, will continue informally after the meeting and may be picked up again in later practice talk sessions. This gives group members the opportunity to reflect and interact and return to the issue with suggestions for moving forward.

Keeping records of Practice Talks

The process of managing stories, namely archiving, coding, retrieving, and distributing stories, is an essential step to making Practice Talk an integral part of knowledge management and continuous practice improvement.

Records of stories and the post-story discussion should be posted on a website or intranet or listserv. At the end of a time period, say one year, the group will have a comprehensive account of learning, decision making, creative ideas, pilots, and practice improvements that have emerged from a series of practice talk sessions.

Three types of records may be kept:

a) Practice stories can be recorded as mp3/4 files and archived on a website;

b) The discussion that transpired after each story in the form of perceptions, emotions and motivations can be summarized and used to annotate the stories on a website; and

c) A Practice Talk Journal, (see table 1 below) may be kept:

Figure 1:   Seven steps to facilitating a practice talk session

STEP 1: Listen to a colleague's story about a practice experience

STEP 2: Record your perceptions, & emotional reactions to the story & any motivations on separate post-it notes

STEP 3: Share your reactions & similar stories you may have with your colleagues

STEP 4: Create the motivation for a better way of doing things

STEP 5: Is there a Best (E-B) Practice out there?

STEP 6: Decision to pilot an improved practice

STEP 7: Keep notes & distribute them to CoP members

Table 1: An example of a CoP Journal for keeping records of practice talk sessions

Three views of practice	List issues, stories & topics discussed	List SOURCES of information	List ACTIONS to be taken
Successes perceived What is running smoothly and providing job satisfaction? Share proud or exemplary practices			
Work Barriers What problems are bugging members and creating frustration in the job? What fires have you had to put out?			
Practice Development needs What new skills members wish to achieve? What literature is shared? Who is in our network?			

References

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Appendix II – NPRN Inter-agency Collaboration: a snapshot in time, as of late 2014
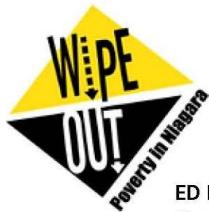
NPRN Interagency Collaboration for Shared Learning
Developed by Collaboration Subcommittee – FINAL DRAFT

Goal: Interagency collaboration for person-centered service delivery focused on client success

ED Forum:
Communication & knowledge sharing are KEY:
- Niagara Knowledge Exchange
- Niagara Region/Government
- Executive Director Meetings
- Agencies' staff meetings
Leads: United Ways

Shared Learning Local Hub Sessions:
- Smaller ongoing local group meetings of frontline staff working together to track and address burning issues, find and share best practices, solutions and learn from each other to enhance service delivery
- Issues are tracked and shared with Collaboration Subcommittee
Leads: Niagara Connects and Local Hub Leads

Report to Community:
The endorsed post session report will be disseminated to:
- NPI, NPRN, NPRN Subcommittees & Groups
- MPs/MPPs, Mayors & Councillors and Ministries
- Niagara Region Departments, Medical Officer
- ED/Community Meetings/Local Providers
- Niagara Knowledge Exchange and InCommunities/211
- Local Shared Learning Hubs and other local community groups
- NRP, EMS, Fire, and other groups/associations
Letter to include:
- year to year stats, synergies and similarities across region
- identify success and share challenges, offer solutions, most immediate need
- request meetings with Mayor & Regional Council
Lead: As determined by NPRN
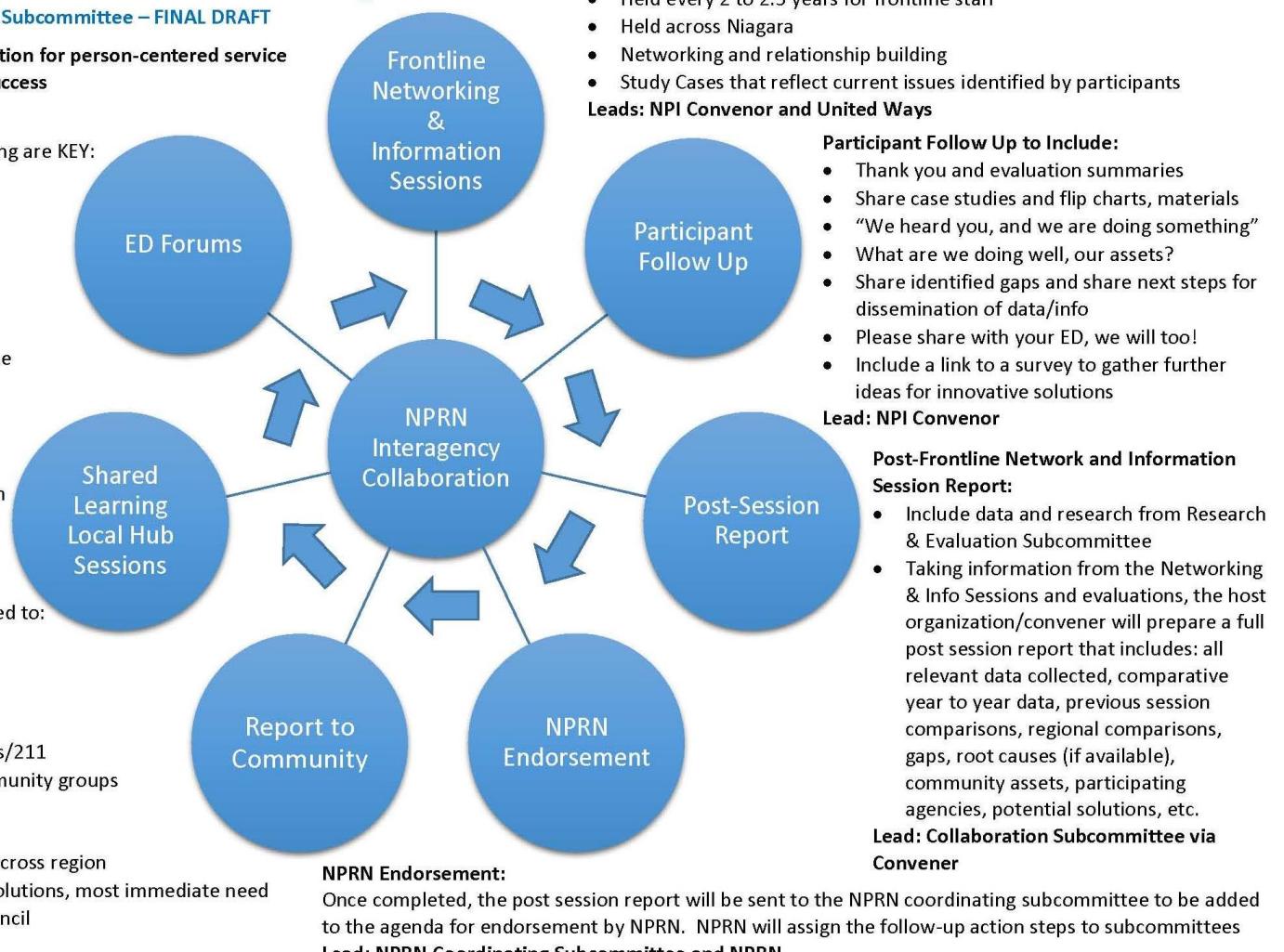
Frontline Networking & Information Sessions:
- Held every 2 to 2.5 years for frontline staff
- Held across Niagara
- Networking and relationship building
- Study Cases that reflect current issues identified by participants
Leads: NPI Convenor and United Ways

Participant Follow Up to Include:
- Thank you and evaluation summaries
- Share case studies and flip charts, materials
- "We heard you, and we are doing something"
- What are we doing well, our assets?
- Share identified gaps and share next steps for dissemination of data/info
- Please share with your ED, we will too!
- Include a link to a survey to gather further ideas for innovative solutions
Lead: NPI Convenor

**Post-Frontline Network and Information Session Report:**
- Include data and research from Research & Evaluation Subcommittee
- Taking information from the Networking & Info Sessions and evaluations, the host organization/convener will prepare a full post session report that includes: all relevant data collected, comparative year to year data, previous session comparisons, regional comparisons, gaps, root causes (if available), community assets, participating agencies, potential solutions, etc.
Lead: Collaboration Subcommittee via Convener

NPRN Endorsement:
Once completed, the post session report will be sent to the NPRN coordinating subcommittee to be added to the agenda for endorsement by NPRN. NPRN will assign the follow-up action steps to subcommittees
Lead: NPRN Coordinating Subcommittee and NPRN

Diagram circles: Frontline Networking & Information Sessions; ED Forums; Participant Follow Up; NPRN Interagency Collaboration; Shared Learning Local Hub Sessions; Post-Session Report; Report to Community; NPRN Endorsement

2015-02-19

Appendix lll

Inter-agency Collaboration in Niagara for Person-Centered Service Delivery Focused on Client Success

Shared Learning Local Hub Session Discussion Guide

Use these questions at the end of your Local Hub Session to:

Engage the group in discussion about their collaborative activities
Encourage the value of talking with each other
Collect information to understand how talking with each other makes a difference

How should the questions be used?

At the end of the meeting, lead a 10-minute discussion using the questions below.

Remind the group about the purpose of shared learning local hub sessions:
- Connect and learn together
- Strengthen inter-agency relationships
- Collaborate for a person-centered service delivery focused on client success

If applicable, remind the group about any SLLH updates across Niagara; and present any new information about themes emerging from 'burning issues' raised at SLLH sessions in other parts of Niagara.

Following the meeting, as the Local SLLH Lead, write bullet points about the meeting that just took place.

Scan and email the completed discussion guide (or type your session notes into the MS Word version of this form) so that this information can feed into an annual Niagara-wide summary of 'burning issues' raised at SLLH sessions. Please send to ed@niagaraconnects.ca.

1. Local Hub Shared Learning Session Location (check one):

_ Fort Erie   _ Niagara Falls   _ Port Colborne/Welland/Pelham   _ St. Catharines   _ West Niagara

2. Number of people attending: _____ Number of Agencies participating: _____

3. What topics were discussed during the meeting? (brief bullet points):

4. Please complete the table below (brief bullet points):

From the perspective of your:	**Pro** **List the benefits as a result** **of your collaboration activities**	**Con** **List any disadvantages as a result** **of your collaboration activities**
Organization		
First-line role		
Client		

5. Local Hub Lead thoughts (brief bullet points)

Appendix III

SUSTAINING THE INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION MODEL

Summary of responses to a brief written survey, from participants in a 90-minute working session on April 30, 2015

Session participants included leaders of Shared Learning Local Hub (SLLH) sessions from all 5 areas around Niagara: Fort Erie; Port Colborne/Welland/Pelham; West Niagara; St.Catharines; Niagara Falls; NPRN Collaboration Subcommittee Members; NPRN Coordinating Committee Members; and three Niagara Connects team members.

The group reviewed steps in establishing the Inter-Agency Collaboration model, and described essential elements for sustainability of the SLLH sessions. Their discussion helped to summarize ways in which work completed in the Rowing the Boat Together (RTBT) I and II projects (2012 to 2015) advanced the NPRN's Collaboration priority.

1. What has worked well/is working well? (n=10)

Focused meetings and webinars
- The meeting time with directed facilitation – creates worthwhile discussion and focusses on issues that affect everyone – makes the meeting more valuable for all who attend
- Face to face interaction
- Establishing a regular schedule for hub meetings
- A consistent convenor to pull people together
- All the opportunities to gather
- Action-established/success (group ideas → knowledge exchange, solution-focused webinars)
- Focussed webinars
- Simple reporting

Opportunities for building and nurturing relationships
- The belonging to a larger group/connection to the big picture – feeling of inclusion is great plus knowing that there is support and that your voice is heard
- *Grassroots approach, open discussion* and networking has worked well and *including front-line staff*
- Welcoming any organization
- Commitment of agencies to participate
- Relationship building/collaboration
- Getting to know and develop a trusting relationship with service providers

Sharing information and networking
- Information sharing
- The opportunity to network with other agencies and learn what their organization does. When making referrals for clients there are so many agencies that offer services that I had previously not known about.
- Increased awareness around what's happening in the community
- Open conversation/dialogue
- Grassroots approach, open discussion and *networking* has worked well and including front-line staff
- Getting to know the "extras" or details about services/programs to better support our clients

Miscellaneous
- I have been with the NPRN for 1.5 years. I have seen in that time a group of people that truly want to do what works for Niagara. I have seen them being willing to patiently take the bull by the horns and determined to steer this thing in the right direction even if it means going back to the drawing board over and over again until we get it right.
- Let the group evolve
- Support for the project

2. What, if anything, would you do differently "if you were in charge, and had unlimited resources"? (n=7)

- Create a template to initiate involvement for the local hubs that could be "tweaked" for each area. This would create some consistency in information sent out for better understanding of the value and why we are asking for participation
- I think the "take away" component is very important. Knowing how the information will affect or benefit the agencies who attend. Also asking for topics that come out of group discussion. Proactive scenarios and having the agencies work together to think outside the box.
- Ensure that committees are heading the same direction as much as possible (this can be done by having those with a bird's eye view i.e., convenor of the network relaying what groups in each area of Niagara are doing for the purpose of "rowing the boat together" more effectively.
- Continuing to provide hands-on resources, working sessions, webinars, etc. to get the client-centred information across to those who deliver the service and are working front-line with clients
- "Make everyone attend" (ha ha)
- Don't want to have more meetings but issue is when quarterly, if you miss one, it's quite a long time to connect again
- Take/distribute minutes (I might offer)

3. In your opinion, what are the top three things that NPRN can do to sustain the work of the "Shared Learning Local Hubs"? (n=10)

Communication
- Ensure that all shared learning hubs and their members are aware of the connection to NPRN, are encouraged to attend/join NPRN and keeping the NPRN group aware of the hubs and their contributions - keeping linkages strong in both directions
- Asking how things are going at the hubs encourages their importance
- Remind people at the NPRN larger table that these groups exist
- Invite the SLLH's to approach the NPRN with their needs
- Synthesize the common threads and communicate those so that across the region we are "reunited", from the local hub to the big picture
- Advertise/post

Technical
- Offer a database of contacts for leads to connect for participation
- I would love to see a truly current, up to date and inclusive calendar of events across the region, and up-to-date committee list on Info Niagara or Niagara Connects.
- Post on the Niagara Connects (NKE) – conversation around collaboration and working together
- Ensuring there are follow-up steps

Expand membership
- Invite new agencies who are not on the list of standard agencies invited. Bring in new people with new ideas. This could provide new opportunities and knowledge.
- Spread the word about these opportunities and explain the benefits

Activities
- Lunch and learns (used to be done by Info Niagara) …. Various topics – could be directed by "burning issues" groups

Infrastructure – resources, supports and processes
- Keep the leaders networked and supportive of each other
- Keep succession planning in the forefront as leadership transition in the local hubs can/does happen
- Look at a form of commitment from agencies to participate – m.o.u.
- Support the development / attendance / participation in all areas of region
- Consistent convenor in each area
- Continue with support and coordination of the project
- Continued support for local hub leaders
- Ongoing and continuous resources when needed
- Ongoing collaboration and meetings to share information from all leaders
- Allow flexibility in each jurisdiction. I understand the desire to prescribe a model but too much rigidity can be unproductive