



Mental Health
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Roots of Hope

A Community Suicide
Prevention Project



Roots of Hope Case Study

Comprehensive/Span the Continuum

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Comprehensive guiding principle: Use **multiple interventions geared toward a wide range of individuals across a variety of settings.**

Span the continuum guiding principle: **Address suicide across the entire spectrum, including prevention, intervention, and postvention services.**

INTRODUCTION

The **Comprehensive** and **Span the Continuum** guiding principles put the focus on how each community's uniqueness – including its needs, strengths, and strategic partners – reflects the way the Roots of Hope model is designed and implemented. These principles also ensure that the model is consistent, in spite of various adaptations each community makes.

Project leads identified two key themes in connection with these principles:

1. **Being comprehensive is paradoxical** – A certain tension can arise any time an initiative seeks to be comprehensive while being focused, targeted, and responsive to community needs.
2. **Think holistically about spanning the continuum** – Beyond what is needed for prevention, intervention, and postvention activities, consider the groups most affected by suicide and suicide attempts.

This case study offers examples of how local project leads applied these themes, along with the insights they gained and the recommendations they thought future Roots of Hope communities might adapt, according to their needs.

ABOUT THE CASE STUDIES

Roots of Hope is a Canadian community-led suicide prevention model. It draws on strengths and expertise within communities to design and implement tailored local initiatives. Using a collaborative approach across many sectors, it seeks to reduce the impact of suicide in each participating community.

We developed Roots of Hope with experts and communities from across Canada and around the world. Its five pillars and 13 guiding principles provide a framework that each community can adapt to their own needs.

The seven Roots of Hope case studies in this series reflect the wisdom and experience of project leaders from Early Adopter communities across the country, who represent diverse populations in a range of urban, rural, and remote settings. The series focuses on what project leads found to be effective in tailoring and implementing Roots of Hope in their communities. While each case study highlights up to three guiding principles, every project leader interviewed stressed the collective value of all 13.

The work to create and test something new is very different from implementing a proven program. We would therefore like to acknowledge Early Adopter project leads for their courage and willingness to pilot a new approach with us. We would also like to thank them for so generously sharing their wisdom and insights, which will make the work of future communities easier and more effective.



BEING COMPREHENSIVE IS PARADOXICAL

Insight #1 Develop both universal and targeted activities

Local project leads suggested that it's useful to consider universal initiatives as well as those targeted to specific sub-issues or groups. According to one interviewee, it is important to “emphasize how (and why) to build a whole-community approach” alongside the need for community awareness and education. Equally essential for ensuring maximum impact is having local project teams and strategic partners focus their resources and energy on clear priorities. While striking the right balance between these audiences and needs can be challenging, it's important to try. As one project lead said, “If we were to do it again, we'd focus on well-structured, longer-term initiatives. We implemented multiple initiatives at the same time, and some only had a short-term impact or had no followup work.”

When engaging partners and gathering community input, another project lead stressed “the importance of being clear with partners (from trust-building and mutual-respect perspectives) while realizing that the project won't necessarily be able to do everything the team wants. Use this as an opportunity to inform/learn about each other and build collective understanding about the issue.”

Below is a partial list of how project leads used both universal and targeted activities in their local projects:

- **Supporting an Indigenous partner to develop an Indigenous suicide prevention program.** After reviewing and providing funds for them to host train-the-trainer workshops, we are supporting its accreditation so it can be scaled up.
- **Providing professional development in schools on youth mental health.** This has led to developing national standards for suicide prevention for school boards.
- **Working with a 2SLGBTQ+ partner to create a crisis line targeted to the 2SLGBTQ+ community.** Initially, it is being delivered by our general helpline staff (with additional training). Over time it will be staffed by and for people in this community.
- **Developing a podcast to share stories from people who have lost someone to suicide.** To date, our four-part Stories of Hope initiative has attracted 800+ listeners. The podcast is available on many platforms and is being promoted (via PSA announcements) as part of a month-long resiliency campaign through five local radio stations, social media, and an editorial in the local paper. We're now working on a second four-part podcast, which will emphasize postvention and build community knowledge about how to support people who have been affected by a suicide or suicide attempt.



- **Creating infographics with pharmacists on medication intoxication.** These will be used as educational tools by being added to prescription bags in four pharmacies.
- **Providing information for nursing and medical schools.** Our hope is to influence their practice as doctors and nurses in the future.
- **Developing a value-added contribution with a focus on grief.** Unresolved grief and loss are important risk factors for suicide. So, while we serve the community, this work builds awareness and understanding on the impact of healing and grief, which other community partners don't have the bandwidth to address.



Insight #2 Be aware of existing resources and initiatives

Many project leads saw being comprehensive as strongly linked to two of the other 13 guiding principles: collaboration/coordination and community centered. They recognized that comprehensiveness required them to know what else existed in the community (and who to ask), so that their work didn't inadvertently duplicate those things. They also understood that including local community members on project teams was important for ensuring that this didn't happen. According to one project lead, "It takes a village to do this work. I was born and raised in this community, with connections to enough people that I could reach out to." A second respondent noted that "staff that are 'of the communities' and are very effective because they can draw on important knowledge in thinking about how to best implement (our project) and/or who can do so."

Insight #3 Consider what is or is not within your 'sphere of influence'

Because the range of opportunities in a local initiative is so broad, project leads may be overwhelmed as they engage partners and the community to develop and confirm their action plan. In dealing with this possibility, many project leads found two criteria important: (1) consider the capacity of their project team, and (2) assess what is or is not within their project's sphere of influence. Using these criteria helped teams make sure their projects focused its energy on the activities it could control.



THINK HOLISTICALLY ABOUT SPANNING THE CONTINUUM

Insight #4 Consider the prevention, intervention, postvention continuum early

Giving early consideration to the full suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention services continuum is beneficial to a local project's design and implementation. As one project lead highlighted, from the outset its coordinators were all very creative in their approach to the entire continuum. "Readily sharing research and practices" between the coordinators also gave their project real strength. Another local project, whose initial planning did not incorporate this guiding principle, stressed its importance after realizing the negative impact it had. "I think we still would have spent a great deal of time on prevention and intervention. But in hindsight, I wish we'd spent more time on postvention supports." One reason for not giving these more attention was the loss of positions and resources, which affected the initiative's long-term sustainability. As their project lead shared, "I wish we had given more thought to what those types of supports might look like."

Outreach is also important when addressing needs along the continuum. As one respondent noted, it is often unrealistic to expect someone struggling with thoughts of suicide to address them. "For many people, they reach a point of helplessness. We need to think more about how we can reach out in an honouring and gentle way, especially with those who can't reach out themselves."

Insight #5 Connect the dots between suicide and other determinants of health

Several project leads found strong links between suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, on the one hand, and the adverse effects from certain determinants of health and the intergenerational effects of colonization, on the other. According to one interviewee, "As we learn more about the individual drivers that get someone thinking about suicide or acting on it, links between suicide and the social determinants of health are revealed." These links often relate to a sense of feeling trapped and/or a need to escape the impact of these social determinants in their lives.

In many ways, suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention address the adverse effects from certain determinants of health and the inter-generational effects of colonization.

Also important is the need to stay current and informed as knowledge on suicide and its prevention evolves (e.g., adopting a trauma-informed lens). The fact that new developments in the field often occur also highlights the value of collaborating with other sectors and community groups.



One project lead suggested that having someone dig into evidence-based literature and previous provincial and/or community reports could be of value, as it might shift perspectives and reduce the likelihood of overlooking past, well-documented, community input. As an example, she recalled how exasperated one group of youths was when their community was being framed negatively; whereas they wanted it, and them, to be seen for their strengths.



Insight #6 Identify opportunities to reach a range of people impacted by suicide

Many project leads stressed how important it was to support a broad range of people impacted by suicide. Opportunities to do so are helpful for both finding and leveraging community partners and for building strategies to reach these populations. For some, access to data was a great place to start. One project lead found that, in hindsight, the local coroner would have been a valuable source of timely information to identify key audiences. Another advised other teams to “Start with data and evidence-informed research to identify champions and collaborators already working in this field. As we found out, we’re not the only ones.”

“Make good friends with your coroner. They have access to timely information... that would have made things much more efficient and effective... Instead, we relied on word of mouth, which is not always as efficient or reliable”.

CONCLUSION

To be comprehensive and span the continuum of suicide services, Roots of Hope projects must have deep knowledge of the community, manage expectations on the full scope of its needs, and effectively engage with local partners. To build trust and mutual respect with partners and the community, it is important to ensure that a project builds on (but does not duplicate) existing supports while prioritizing opportunities to influence change and have the greatest impact. Team members who are part of the local community are especially valuable for having knowledge and connections that can help local projects apply these two guiding principles.



The partial list of examples provided by Early Adopter projects demonstrates tremendous creativity and highlights the many ways they have responded to local needs and contributed to community-wide efforts to educate, prevent, and support those whose lives have been touched by suicide.



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