

The Focus 3 Story

Evaluation



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This tool was created by the Focus Three team: youth of Kugluktuk, Parma Court's Youth Vybes Crew, Kainai Youth Council and The Students Commission.





Evaluation Tools: How We Used Them

The Focus Three project team used a number of tools to help evaluate both the partnership the Centre had begun with the three communities and the actions that occurred as a result of the work we did with these communities.



Partnership Questionnaire

This questionnaire, completed by the Centre and the three community partners near the end of the project, helped all the partners evaluate each others performance – both strengths and weaknesses – to improve the way each group works with others.

Centre of Excellence’s Youth Engagement Survey Map:

The survey map was completed by participants to help us evaluate young people’s involvement in activities in the partner communities during the project. The map was filled out three times, once for the Individual level, once for the Social level and once for the Systems level.

The Centre of Excellence’s Engagement Landscape: A Snapshot of Your Activity Survey

This survey helped us learn more about the activity, rather than the individual’s experience with their involvement.

The Centre of Excellence’s Engagement Portrait Survey

This survey helped us better understand participant involvement in the project using a series of questions to reveal what each youth thinks and feels about an activity as well as what they might do as a result of their involvement in that activity.

Head, Heart, Feet and Spirit Sheets

This sheet is used to capture participants thoughts, in the moment, about their involvement in an activity. It explores the youth’s engagement in that activity from four angles: Head (what they think about it), Heart (what they feel about it), Feet (what they might do about it, and Spirit (how it gives them a sense of connectedness to other people and things). The more consistently this tool is used throughout a project, the more information it gathers, and the more clearly it describes how individuals are involved.

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It is our hope that these tools will assist you in capturing and sharing what you learn from the project initiatives you undertake.





Focus 3 Evaluation

Introduction

From the start, the goal of the Focus Three project was to foster relationships with youth and communities, and in turn, helping them build on the strengths they already had, so they could be better equipped to address a crisis they had identified as present in their community. Our work in each of the three communities of this project (Parma Court, Kainai, and Kugluktuk) was dynamic, fluid in nature, and responsive to the needs and concerns of the communities. Throughout the project, we documented the process, the conversations with members of the community, held events and activities together, reflected upon what went well together, and designed the next activities based on those reflections. For the final evaluation and development of tools, we hosted representatives from each community at our office for four days in early August of 2009.



During these four days, we share our successes, wrote and edited together and identified areas for improvement. This report is meant to be read as a complement to the narratives and documentation of the experiences in each of these three communities.

Background

In the early spring of 2009, as the Focus 3 project was winding down, we were wrestling with how to effectively evaluate our partnerships and the impact of this project on the people and communities involved. Understanding that the evaluative process would work best if we were given the opportunity to bring members of our partnerships together for an intense period of time, we applied for, and received an amendment to our contribution agreement extending the length of the project to the beginning of summer.

Plans began to move forward, and everything was in place when the H1N1 crisis hit one of our partner communities very hard. The Kitikmeot region of Nunavut was one of the hardest hit areas of this epidemic, with more cases of infection showing up in that region than any other in Canada. Kugluktuk is located in the heart of the Kitikmeot region, and many of the cases of H1N1 were connected to us by

less than 2 degrees. Not wanting to potentially jeopardize the health of others, and not wanting to pull vital community members from their community in times of need we once again applied for, and were granted an extension of time to this project.

In early August, two members of each community were brought to Toronto. At the last minute, representatives from Kainai were unable to attend in person, but participated through SKYPE conversations and follow-up calls. When choosing representatives, we worked with each of the three communities to make certain that the best representative possible was chosen, and that their ties with the project and our work in their community were solid. We also worked to include a representative that was involved in the project as a participant in some capacity. This meant that not only did we have voice from those who had worked alongside our staff in a leadership capacity, but also those who had received the benefits of the training and the project itself.

Four Students Commission staff that have been working on this project from the start and one summer placement student worked to facilitate the four-day intensive evaluation meeting.

Methodology

The methodology of this meeting was similar to much of the work that took place in the communities in that, the meeting, though short in duration, was intense in content. Because we were working with three very distinct communities, all dealing with various interconnected issues that were very sensitive in nature, it was critical for staff to include a strong component of team building and relationship development. Though organizationally we had been acquainted with these individuals for the bulk of this project, for participants, this was the first time any of them had met anyone else from the project outside of their own community. As such, a strong emphasis was placed on building a positive, respectful rapport with one another. With this foundation in place, we were then, as a group able to move towards a stronger, more honest conversation about this project.

After certain camaraderie had been established between the members of this meeting, we moved into reviewing the tools that had been created as a result of this project. Edits, and suggestions for improvement were made, but for the most part, participants were satisfied with the existing worksheets that had been developed by members of the project in each of the three communities. There were, however, a few tools they felt were missing, and as a group they set towards rectifying this by drafting the last documents for the toolkit during the meeting. As with all of the products from this project, these have since been taken from their draft form, edited and laid out graphically to fit into the overall toolkit, using the ideas of the creators as a foundation for their overall look and feel.

Part of the reason for pursuing this process of drafting tools was to reiterate and reinforce the process that we used throughout the project. This process of collaborative decision-making on all aspects of an activity (from design to completion) was used to illustrate on a micro-level how the project was run from our perspective. This set the stage for the evaluation component of the meeting to begin.

We used multiple methods of information gathering. To start, all of us told stories about our communities, the crisis as participants saw them, and the fallout these crises had on the community. Part cathartic, and part cultural and ethnographical in nature, these stories allowed us to dissect some of

the key themes that ran through all of the communities, despite the very different issues that they were facing. These were (as agreed by all participants of the meeting):

- Adults can be supportive to the cause, but need to be engaged somehow;
- Crisis can be overwhelming, and takes so much energy from so many that motivation to do anything about it is hard to find;
- People become complacent with crisis when it surrounds them, and almost becomes “comforting”. *“When nothing is happening, people invent drama so they have something to worry about....something to fight about.”*;
- Youth and young adults will be the ones to change things;
- There needs to be more positive activity that youth and children can be involved in to help them stay away from the things that put communities in crisis;
- Youth and young adults want to be recognized for doing something positive in their community;
- Communities need to work to heal themselves, but sometimes help from the outside is useful.
- When working with outside groups, more time, more often is needed on the ground, in the community. An outside organization can only really help if they are “present” in the community alongside its members.
- When working with an outside organization, respect and trust must first be earned, and then change can happen.

Beyond the discussions, a number of tools were also used to help us evaluate both the partnership and the actions that occurred as a result of our working with these communities. The first was a partnership questionnaire¹, which helped us evaluate our performance as partners. The second was the Centre of Excellence’s Engagement Youth Engagement Survey Map² that was completed three times, once for the individual level, once for the social level and once for the systems level . This tool helped us evaluate the activities of the project. The third tool that we used was the Centre of Excellence for Youth



¹ Partnership Questionnaire, Appendix 5

² Youth Engagement Survey Map, Appendix 9

Engagement's Engagement Landscape and Engagement Portrait surveys, to help us better understand the participant's own involvement in the project.³

The final day of the meeting was the Third Annual Bigga Blitz Block Inferno, held in memory of slain youth from the Parma Court community. Evaluation meeting participants all volunteered to participate in the Block party in Parma Court, and were out in force to face paint, flip burgers, stack chairs and clean up garbage for the morning and the early afternoon. This year's Block party was the most successful one yet, and was a great opportunity to end this project on a high note

Evaluation Outcomes

Partnership

Overall, partnership ratings were scored very high, with all categories doing well in all communities. Shared Vision and Communications were scored lowest, and follow-up discussions with participants shed some light on this. Those that scored us lower in these areas felt that communication from both players in the partnership was not always clear or timely. Further discussion uncovered that these participants wanted more "face" time with staff from our organization, and preferred in-person communication over telephone and email. They also felt that there was less room for misunderstanding when communications were delivered in person, because it *"wasn't just telling us something, it was actually supporting us to do whatever we were doing."* Another participant shared that they liked *"that [The Students Commission] didn't show up and say, 'K this is what's wrong with you. We're here to fix you.'" This approach to partnership, they felt, was something that allowed them to have agency over the project, and contributed to their feelings of being valued and respected.*

One area that scored very high on all points was the Membership category. Participants felt strongly that there were valued (32 out of 35), respected (34 out of 35) members of the partnership, and felt that their ideas were listened to (30 out of 35). After answering this question, one participant shared the following: *"I liked that you listened to me. Even when it didn't work, and we did it your way in the end, I still saw some [of] my ideas."* *"It's easy to feel valued when you ask my opinion...and you actually listened to it."* While another participant shared that it was *"...easy to feel valued when you ask my opinion...and you actually listened to it."*

Of key importance, though scoring lowest in this category, was that members understood their role in the partnership. Upon further discussion, several participants, and even some staff felt that they were not always clear on what their role was, or how it connected to the greater partnership. One participant went so far as to say, *"it was hard to understand what you wanted from us."* One suggestion for future projects of this scope was to have key players in each community come together early on in the partnership so everyone would understand the bigger perspective of the project. This opportunity to come together allowed some members to *"finally get the whole point of the project"* something they felt could have *"really helped early on, because I could've had even more people to talk to...to get ideas from."*

Two other categories of the partnership evaluation that scored highly were the categories on Resources and Events. All participants agreed that the appropriate resources and training opportunities were

³ Engagement Landscape and Portrait Surveys, Appendix 6, 7

provided to the appropriate people, and that the partnership capitalized on individual resources and strengths very well. Meetings and events were also highly successful, with all participants rating these opportunities for face-to-face meetings and events very highly, scoring 30.5 out of a possible 35. Participants scored the partnership highly around joint decision-making and consensus around co-sponsored events. Follow-up discussion suggested that this was *“the best part of the project...when we looked at something and worked together on it...both of us got to learn from it.”*

Outcomes were a category that was scored highly, though there was quite a range within this category. Participants felt that the work of this project influenced their ability to work more effectively to address issues in their communities, and that the community was moderately strengthened because of the work of this project. Participants also felt that this project fostered a positive change in their community, though this was only rated at a 28 out of a possible 35 points.

Participants rated their ability to better engage in issues in their communities as a result of this project very highly, scoring it a 33 out of a possible 35. Further discussion about this category yielded some interesting points to take into consideration for future projects like this. Many members felt that they were unable to score outcomes higher, though they would like to, because they still felt the project was in its early stages, despite the three years of work that had gone into it. One participant shared that she felt more time was needed: *“We need more time. We’re just getting started. It takes a long time to change people’s minds and change the way they do stuff. The shit we’re facing...every day, the things we see happenin’ around us, took longer than this project to happen, so we can’t expect things to jus’ turn around overnight.”* Another insight as to why outcomes might have been scored lower than some participants would have liked was that they weren’t sure how they could really evaluate their own communities and see the impacts because they felt they were *“too close”* to the people and the issues. *“We know that this kind of.... project works, we’ve seen it in my community before. But in my community, people don’t walk around and talk about ‘oh, I’ve changed because of this project’ or ‘oh my behaviour is different because of this barbecue.’ So it can be hard to really know that what I’ve done has made a difference, but I know that I am because I talk to these little kids and they know about the things that we are doing as a group.”*

Some of the outcomes that were spoken about in this follow-up discussion were tangible only to the individual themselves, though the affect would be rippled through them to the entire community. A positive role model and leader in her community, one participant shared with us that she *“...got excited enough to stay in my community and go back and work with these kids even though it’s hard... because of what you guys brung me too...the conferences and stuff.”* Her decision to stay involved in her community meant that more youth and young adults would be able to be mentored positively by her.

Another participant shared with us that he felt that he *“...learned a lot about programming and how to create meaningful programs for youths.”* His increased capacity around programming meant that the groups he ran would receive more deliberate engagement-based programming, which would in turn, be more successful and more easily sustained.



In a follow-up interview with a member of the community, one woman made the observation that the people who had connected with this project had “*expanded their borders. They used to just stay in the neighbourhood, but have had some experiences that gave them the confidence to travel further out and see new things.*” This sentiment was echoed by another community member from another community who stated that she felt the youth involved had “*learned a lot about life from the trips they took and the conferences they went to...*” as part of this project. When speaking with one of the youth who attended several of the training and event opportunities provided by this project, he agreed stating that he never saw himself as a role model before, but now that he had participated in this project with us he felt “*more responsible for [his own] actions, because little guys, they watch and learn, so why not show them something positive...*”

Much of the success of this project relies on these small moments, and their transfer to others in the community. Project members, through the work of this project, and their own desire to sustain the motivation have become empowered to continue the positive actions they started in their community. Though much of the change they hope to see in their communities has not occurred yet, there is hope that this empowerment of key individuals will help sustain the project’s outcomes over the long-term, increasing the effectiveness of our work together over the last three years.

Projects

Though all of the various projects that were undertaken were not discussed in minute detail, the overall projects in each of the communities were discussed at length. As part of the evaluation process, participants were asked to complete the Centre of Excellence’s Youth Engagement Survey Map three separate times. Participants were asked to think about the engagement activity as the project that we worked on together throughout this partnership, and fill out the map first for themselves, then thinking about their peers, and finally thinking about the systems of their community. The map has three circles; one for *Initiating Factors*; one for *Sustaining Factors*; and one for *(Perceived) Impacts*. Participants completed each of these circles for each of the “layers” of engagement listed above (individual, peers (social) and community systems (systems) to help us better understand the bigger picture of engagement that was happening within the project. These results were then reviewed in conjunction with the results of the Engagement Portrait and Landscape surveys and followed up with a discussion.



Across the three communities, the engagement picture that was created from these inquiries was very similar. Participants joined the project because they wanted to make a difference, felt strongly about making positive change in their community, and recognized that there weren’t many positive options for their peers. Something tragic in each of the three communities was ongoing, and whether it was related to gun violence, alcohol and illicit drug use, or suicide, these chronic issues reached a crisis point for each of these three communities, propelling the participants of the Focus 3 project to action.

Participants also shared fairly similar reasons for the sustained involvement of themselves and their peers, though the systems layer of engagement framework was different for one of the three communities. In one of the communities the respondents felt that there was no sustained, systems-wide momentum of this engagement activity, and that it was only themselves and their peers that were involved in sustaining the project and its activities. Though the other two communities did not mark this as a response, in discussion afterwards they both felt that to some extent, the systems in their community were not making it easy to sustain the project's activities or momentum, however in two communities funding was in place for community workers to provide programming for young people that could include carrying on the projects of Focus 3. Participants spoke at length about their own personal reasons for sustaining their involvement, and the involvement of their peers, citing food, opportunities to learn new things, community service hours for school, something fun that they could be a part of, and the seeing the impact of both negative things and positive things (like the community projects) within their communities as reasons they continued the good work they were doing despite some of the setbacks they might have experienced.

In terms of project outcomes, members of all three communities agreed that there were results at all three levels of engagement (the self, the social and the systems layers.) Though they shared with us that it was easier to identify the less systemic, or less dramatic of the changes that were occurring in their communities because of their involvement in Focus 3, they reiterated that they were themselves feeling more confident, and better equipped to handle crisis within their communities, and they felt that their peers were as well. Systemically, all groups felt that little had changed, but were hopeful that their experience, and relationships fostered through their involvement in this project with The Students Commission could help leverage their positions within the community to move the systems to a more positive space.

To improve on some of these outcomes in the future, the team present at the evaluation meetings brainstormed a list of recommendations for future projects:

- Establish weekly communications early on, and be consistent even if there isn't anything to discuss.
- Establish a partnership contract early on, outlining both parties needs, wants and desired outcomes.
- Spend more time on the ground, and for longer, in the communities.
- Reach out to other partners in the community that the people you work with aren't connected to. You can help them bridge that gap when sometimes they can't.
- Help the community see the bigger picture; sometimes they don't know what impact they've already had, until they take a step back.
- Provide training for more than just a couple of key people in the community. If they leave the project sinks and we never had the chance.
- Connect the community with more than one key person in the organization.

Conclusion

This project was a journey rife with opportunities to grow for everyone involved. Though seen as an entity with “organizational expertise” the Students Commission learned much from all of the project’s varied participants, and will engage with community groups differently in the future as a result. At times, our capacity to really listen and understand the needs of the community, without implementing our own solutions was challenged, but in the end, our ability to foster respectful partnerships in each of the three communities is a testament to the process of this project. The local knowledge of our partners, combined with organizational expertise of our staff made for an excellent combination of skill sets and opportunities for positive growth, together. The projects of the three communities, though vastly different in scope, were fortified as a result of this project, and together, we were able to accomplish much more than we simply could have done had we been on our own.



This tool was created by the Focus Three team: youth of Kugluktuk, Parma Court’s Youth Vybes Crew, Kainai Youth Council and The Students Commission.

