

Canadian High Arctic Research Station Annual Project Report Template and Guidelines

Project Title: Going Off, Growing Strong: Advancing the evaluation of mental health interventions for indigenous youth.

Project Leader(s):

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Project Team:

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Abstract:

Background:

In response to community health challenges in Northern Canada, a number of initiatives such as youth mentorship programs have shown some value in enhancing physical and emotional wellbeing. In this report, we reflect upon the evaluation of the first and second cohorts of the *Aullak, Sangilivallianguinnatuk (Going Off, Growing Strong)* program in Nain, Nunatsiavut. This program was designed to build the resilience of a group of Inuit youth facing widespread social, environmental, and cultural change. The overarching goals of this program are to: 1) enhance the mental, physical and spiritual health of a group of 'at-risk' youth; 2) build social connections between the youth and other community members; and 3) transmit environmental knowledge, skills and values from experienced harvesters to youth.

Methods: Evaluation is approached within a Participatory Action Research framework and uses a mixed-method design. Data are currently being collected for the second cohort of youth (started in January, 2014). Qualitative methods include semi-structured interviews with youth, caregivers and involved professionals and staff daily observation logs. Quantitative data are being collected via an online timeline of activities, psychometric tools being piloted in this setting and a chart review of participants' mental health and medical charts.

Results: Process results indicate that designing culturally, contextually relevant evaluation processes and methods, requires consideration of human resources training available, ongoing communication and feedback from program staff and the building, and prioritizing trust building between participants and program staff. Preliminary outcomes include dramatic suicide rate reduction of school-aged youth in the community of Nain, qualitative observations of youth increasing self-esteem, confidence, visibility and relationships with harvesters and elders in the community. Youth report feeling as though they belong in the community and that they have a sense of worth that did not exist prior to participating in the program.

Policy relevance:

Program evaluations that aim to measure the effectiveness of innovative programs in Northern contexts are important for policy as they:

1. Bridge the gap between two different paradigms of knowledge by piloting new methods that are culturally appropriate while are communicable to a broader research context.
2. In so doing, policymakers responsible for funding mental and physical health programs will be able to use research outputs to better allocate resources to address serious health issues in this context.

Key messages:

- Qualitative process findings include the importance of staff training in evaluation tools and methods, the adaptation of evaluation tools such that they facilitate and do not create barriers to trust-building with youth, regular communication about the interaction between programming and evaluation are crucial to feasible & sustainable program evaluation.
- Outcomes include a dramatic reduction of school-aged suicides in the community of Nain, Nunatsiavut (there have been no youth male suicides in Nain since the program began); increased help-seeking behaviour from at-risk youth participants when feeling suicidal; increased social connections with other youth, program staff, community harvesters, and intergenerational relationships with elders.
- Qualitative evaluation findings have shown community stakeholders see youth as more confident, outgoing, helpful and visible in the community since beginning the Going off, Growing strong program.

Objectives:

- To engage youth (especially young males considered highly at-risk for suicide) who are subject to intergenerational dislocation and disassociation from land and social networks and who are not learning the skills and gaining experience in their local environment that their parents and Elders did.
- To track any changes in overall youth resilience to various stressors including disconnection and climate change through tracking changes in self-reported mental

health of youth; changes in sense of connectedness of youth in community; changes in attitudes towards country foods; changes in coping skills.

- To increase 'hard skills' of youth on the land; to increase critical thinking and reflection skills of youth participants.

Introduction:

Aullak, sangilivallianguinnatuk" (Going off, Growing Strong) is a unique, culturally appropriate climate and health adaptation program being developed and being piloted in Nain, Nunatsiavut. The anticipated benefits for youth and the community are improved mental health and wellbeing, increased consumption of wild foods and associated nutritional benefits, increased sharing capacity for wild foods, a more sustainable community freezer program, improved knowledge and land-based skills transfer to youth, more broadly-based and effective adaptation strategies for changing climate and environment, and an adaptation tool that is implemented, documented, evaluated and transferable to youth and communities elsewhere in the Arctic.

The research activity undertaken in this study builds on the program evaluation developed for the first cohort of Going Off, Growing Strong youth participants that ended in fall 2013. This program evaluation is a mixed method study involving the second cohort of youth in the program without a comparator group. This cohort began the program in March 2014 and will finish the program in fall of this year (2015). Prospectively, program staff have gathered data on mood using daily observational sheets, and psychometric tools administered every 3-6 months by a clinical social worker. Prospective qualitative interviews also have taken place at the beginning (spring 2014), middle (winter 2015) and end of the cohort (fall 2015). Retrospective chart data will be collected to ascertain and triangulate information about change in frequency and severity of youths' presentation to the clinic/RCMP with suicidal ideation or attempt.

Participants include a total of seven youth- three female, four male aged 14-19 living in or frequently staying in homes with chronic traumatic stressors such as problematic alcohol use, physical/sexual violence, inadequate food/shelter. Youth may also be involved with the justice system, have high attrition rates from school and have problematic behavior within the community.

Qualitative interview data are being collected by program staff during movie nights (in a private setting) at the Nain Community Freezer (program office) at the beginning, middle and end of the cohort program cycle. Interviews are collected at the same intervals with youths' caregivers and any other related adults the youth deems appropriate. Daily observation logs of youth are being completed by program staff. Psychometric tools- Child Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale; GAIN Short Screener and CAGE-AID are completed at the beginning, middle and end of the program cycle. Retrospective chart reviews will take place upon completion of the program following protocols designed by the head Nain community clinic nurse.

The primary outcome of interest is resilience, including physical, mental and emotional. This is being measured using the above mentioned assessment tools, semi-structured interviews and daily observations of staff interacting with youth. Medical charts will provide data regarding presentation at the clinic for suicidal behavior.

Secondary outcomes include increased traditional Inuit skills and connectivity within the community-these will be measured through interviews with key adults connected with the youth as well as through youth's identification of which adults to interview over time.

Activities in 2014-2015:

When	What	Where	Who	How
January-March 2014	Youth recruitment & selection	Nain, Nunatsiavut	Program staff, GOGS steering committee, community referral agents.	Referrals were assessed against program recruitment criteria: 1. Youth presenting with at-risk behaviors from high-risk home environments; 2. little or no access to social supports; 3. little or no access to the ability to 'go off' on the land with family members.
March-May 2014	Qualitative interview guides administered; Psychometric tools administered.	Nain, Nunatsiavut	Qualitative: youth, family members/other key adults in youths' lives. Psychometric tools: youth.	At movie nights youth would gather and would individually complete qualitative interview guides and psychometric tools with program staff (D. Angnatok or S. Karpik for interviews & D. Baikie for psychometrics).
January-July 2014	Ongoing analysis & interpretation of cohort 1 data	Nain, Nunatsiavut	Rachel Hirsch & Christina Hackett	R. Hirsch & Christina Hackett analyzed quantitative and qualitative data & completed drafts of papers to be disseminated.
May to September 2014	Development of daily observation logs and attendance checklists	Nain, Nunatsiavut	Program staff & Christina Hackett	Developed a non-invasive means of capturing attendance and mood data about youth 'drop-ins' to the GOGS program office.
November to March 2015	Qualitative interview guides administered; Psychometric tools administered.	Nain, Nunatsiavut	Qualitative: youth, family members/other key adults in youths' lives. Psychometric tools: youth.	At movie nights youth would gather and would individually complete qualitative interview guides and psychometric tools with program staff (D. Angnatok or S. Karpik for interviews & D. Baikie for psychometrics).
January-April 2015	Junior leadership evaluation criteria developed	Nain, Nunatsiavut	Leadership criteria for cohort 1 youth hoping to be employed as junior leaders	Christina Hackett, Danielle Baikie and program staff met weekly to develop leadership qualities matrix, selection criteria and continuous

			developed for selection.	feedback and review process for cohort 1 youth.
April 2015	Program evaluation visit-data review and collection	Nain, Nunatsiavut	Christina Hackett visited Nain to gather overview of data collected, challenges and facilitators to evaluation tools. Program evaluation toolkit developed with staff.	Christina Hackett & program staff collaboratively met and developed materials based on feedback from youth and staff about evaluation processes.
April 2015	Chart audit and review developed and access granted for quantitative data collection through Labrador Grenfell Health Authority	Nain, Nunatsiavut; Goose Bay, Labrador.	Christina Hackett & program staff developed chart audit review template for submission to LGHA.	Submitted to LGHA for organizational consent to review and were granted access to medical charts and electronic mental health records.

Results:

Data collection from the second cohort is ongoing. Below are preliminary findings from data collected thus far.

Qualitative findings: showed improvement in youth as self-reported and reported by teachers, program staff, family members and mental health clinicians across five domains: cultural connectedness, social connectedness, physical & emotional wellbeing, self-esteem and behavior.

Quantitative findings: increased youth-days out on the land and in program activities as compared with cohort 1; increased youth help-seeking behavior; increased engagement with both cohorts by the GOGS program staff seems associated with fewer justice-related incidents, suicide-related clinic visits and problematic drug and alcohol use.

Discussion and Conclusions:

As data collection is ongoing and analysis has not fully been completed, discussion and conclusions are forthcoming.

Performance indicators

CHARS is obligated to report on its performance on an annual basis, using the performance indicators listed below, as well as other measures. Please assist us by filling out the following table.

Themes	Indicators	Details
Outreach and capacity building	List the Northern leads and collaborators	Dorothy Angnatok, Sarah Karpik, Carla Pamak, Tom Sheldon, Joey Angnatok.
	Number of Northern participants in the funded project (Workshop, school visits, meetings, consultations, part of your project team, hires, other).	School teachers: 4 (3 times throughout year) Steering Committee Meetings: 9-10 (Bi-monthly throughout year) Program staff meetings: Bi-weekly throughout year
	Number of youth participants (under the age of 25) in the funded project (Workshop, school visits, meetings, consultations, part of your project team, hires, other).	16
Decision making and policy	How did the project include participation and input of end users?	Youth are in control of the evaluation process in that they are asked for feedback regarding evaluation tools as well as program activities. Tools and activities are adapted according to youth preferences.
	How will these research results be used by decision-makers?	This research will be used to showcase how inter-sectoral collaboration is vital to the prevention of suicide in Nain, Nunatsiavut. Incorporating traditional Inuit knowledge and a psycho-social intervention has generated positive health, mental health, school attainment, employment and food security outcomes.
	Will these results contribute to the development and implementation of regional, national, and international policies and regulation? If yes, how?	These results will be presented to advocate for the adoption of policy that is culturally relevant and effective in delivering services that achieves improved health outcomes, as well as cost-savings and reduced acute health service use for young people at risk for suicide.
Knowledge mobilization Please provide references (if available).	Number of peer-reviewed articles/book chapters (projected) from the funded project.	4 1 pending submission 3 forthcoming.
	Number of conference presentations (projected) from the funded project	5 1. Pain, I. SakKijanginnatuk Nunalik – The Nunatsiavut Government’s Sustainable Communities Initiative. Expo Labrador Trade and Conference Show, Goose Bay, NL, June 24, 2014. 2. Hackett, C., Angnatok, D., Baikie, D., Sheldon, T., Pamak, C., Hirsch, R., Furgal, C. Bell, T. Going off, Growing strong: Updates on suicide

		<p>prevention program evaluation in Nain, Nunatsiavut. Arctic Change Conference, Ottawa, ON, December 10, 2014.</p> <p>3. Hackett, C., Angnatok, D., Baikie, D., Karpik, S., Sheldon, T., Furgal, C. Going off, Growing strong: Advancing mental health evaluation for Indigenous youth. New Frontiers in Health Policy Graduate Student Conference, Hamilton, ON, March 9, 2015.</p> <p>4. Hackett, C., Karpik, S., Sheldon, T. Going Off, Growing Strong: A pilot mental health intervention for Inuit youth at risk. Grand Challenges Canada Mental Health Innovation Showcase, Toronto, ON, June 4, 2015.</p> <p>5. Hackett, C., Angnatok, D., Baikie, D., Karpik, S., Sheldon, T., Furgal, C. Going off, Growing strong: Advancing mental health evaluation for Indigenous youth. International Association for Suicide Prevention 2015, Montreal, QC June 16-20 (Accepted Oral presentation).</p>
	<p>Number of other reports (projected) from the funded.</p>	
	<p>Number of quoted data.</p>	