



Update for Members

Project Update on *Understanding People, Place and Culture: A NunatuKavut Inuit Mental Wellness Initiative*

July 2020

Project Background

Mental health is the embodiment of social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. In 2018-2019, the NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) launched a one-year initiative to develop a multi-year project grant addressing mental wellness for NunatuKavut Inuit and our communities. It kicked off in December 2018, followed by meetings and sharing circles in several communities. These collective efforts resulted in the approval of a five-year Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) project grant of \$642,600 to carry out wellness activities in NunatuKavut.



Figure 1: NCC President Todd Russell and project team members gather for a group photo, September 2019.

This project, called *“Understanding People, Place, and Culture: A NunatuKavut Inuit Mental Wellness*

Initiative,” aims to strengthen mental wellness resources in our territory. Community members will be invited to share their experiences and expertise through community engagement, storytelling, and photovoice/theatre. The approach is rooted in local expertise from diverse people including patients, families, health care providers and community leaders.



Figure 2: NCC members and community champions share emotional experiences at a Mental Wellness Research Project Team Meeting, September 2019

Project Staff

Melita Paul is coordinating this mental wellness initiative over the next four years. She is well known within NunatuKavut communities. She has worked with NCC for 18 years

carrying out various health promotion and prevention programs.

Abigail Poole is a Community Wellness and Integration Trainee. She is in the process of completing her Psychology degree at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. She has plans to further her studies in Psychology, and to one day offer psychological services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. She is proud to be a part of NCC’s Mental Wellness Initiative and is optimistic for what is in store.



Figure 3: NCC project staff Abigail Poole and Melita Paul (l-r) enjoying the 21st Inuit Studies Conference in Montreal, October 2019.

Project Initiatives

Addressing mental health and wellness is a community affair. NCC has worked in partnership with NunatuKavut communities on initiatives that contribute to mental

wellness. Community and cultural gatherings, for example, are a great way to bring people together.

This has included the following:

- NunatuKavut Inuit and the Dog Team, March 2019
- Men Making Mitts course – Labrador West
- Development of a craft group in Black Tickle
- Sharing circles in various communities
- NunatuKavut Research Conference, March 2020
- Mental Wellness workshop at NCC's Annual General Assembly, January 2020

Conversations have been essential for identifying the next steps. Here is what we have heard so far as important project outcomes:

- De-stigmatize mental health
- Use education and awareness approaches on how to improve mental health
- Intergenerational engagement to promote sharing (youth/elder groups)
- Connections to culture and nature to find support outside western models
- Integrate prevention, life and social skills, and counselling programs in schools
- Implement NunatuKavut Inuit designed training, education, employment opportunities (e.g. train the community to respond at the community level)

In April, we worked with the NunatuKavut Youth Community Engagement Project to issue a photo challenge youth to submit photos

showing how staying home and physical distancing has had a positive impact on their lives. In May, we issued another challenge during



Figure 4: People gather for discussions at the NunatuKavut Research Conference, March 2020

Mental Health Week, asking for people to show us how they were caring for their mental health during COVID-19. Both challenges resulted in some amazing entries and the NYCEP are currently compiling those entries into a video for the Wellness Initiative.



Figure 5: NunatuKavut youth practice social distancing by having outdoor activities such as boil-ups.

Upcoming Activities

Future activities include newsletters, community activities, virtual meetings with community champions, collecting community photos and videos, providing lists of mental wellness resources, and

planning for a full research team meeting.



Figure 6: Melita Paul and Jennifer Shea discuss mental wellness with community members at the NCC AGA, January 2020

Positive Habits and Tips

It is *normal* and *okay* to experience feelings of anxiety, stress, uncertainty, and fear – especially during a global pandemic. Here are some ways to practice managing these feelings:

- Get enough sleep
- Carry a water bottle with you as often as possible
- Cook healthy foods and try new recipes
- Exercise
- Listen to music
- Read, allowing yourself relaxation time in a quiet headspace
- Craft something like seal skin mitts, beaded earrings, etc
- Get outside
- Journal as a means of expression
- Keep in touch; call your friends and family.
- Establish a routine so that you wake up each day with an agenda in mind
- Make future plans so that you have events to look forward to
- Set limits for yourself around COVID-19 conversations and news if the topic upsets you

Be patient with yourself! Health and growth looks different for everyone.

Mental Wellness Contest

We want to hear your thoughts on mental wellness. For example, what are your answers to the following questions?

What does mental wellness look like to you?

How do you take care of your mental wellbeing?

Has the current pandemic made it easier or more difficult for you to follow a routine?

Has your routine changed or stayed the same in the event of COVID-19?

What are some ways that you could improve your mental wellness?



Figure 8: Image from Altogether Care website

Here is what our project staff had to say about mental wellness:

“To me, mental wellness does not mean I am feeling happy, upbeat, and outgoing every single day. Mental wellness is feeling all the things (positive and negative) and figuring out healthy ways to manage them. I constantly have music playing, I read, exercise, and reach out to my family and close friends often. I also find that helping other people has a way of improving my mood!”

- Abigail Poole

“Mental Wellness to me embodies your whole being. In order to be mentally well you need to take care of all of you! The things that I like to do for my wellness is walking outside, where I can enjoy the beauty around us. I love listening to music and my most recent enjoyment is crafting. Working with seal skin has given me a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of satisfaction that I have actually made that myself!”

- Melita Paul

Email your responses to abby.poolen@gmail.com to enter to win an awesome prize draw!

Support Services

Mental Health Crisis Line

Telephone: (709) 737-4668 / 1-888-737-4668

CHANNAL Warm Line

Telephone: 1-855-753-2560 or in St. John's (709) 753-2560

Crisis Text Line

Powered by Kids Help Phone, anyone in need, regardless of age can text 'Talk' to 686868, to speak to a trained crisis responder.

Doorways Walk-in Clinics

Services are available in all communities from Labrador West to Mary's Harbour. For more information contact your community clinic.

Bridge the gApp

It is a provincial online resource designed to support mental wellness.

<https://www.bridgethegapp.ca>

Priority Health Counselling

Partnering with NCC to offer private and confidential mental health counselling services that are free to NunatuKavut members (8+) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Call or 709-699-3692 or email priorityhealthcounselling@gmail.com to set up an appointment.



NCC is the representative governing body for approximately 6,000 Inuit who reside primarily in south and central Labrador. NunatuKavut means “Our Ancient Land” in Inuttitut and is the traditional territory of the Inuit who belong to this territory.

Hard copies are being mailed for the first issue and will be primarily shared electronically moving forward.

Have a question or concern?

Please contact us!

T. 1 (877) 896-0592 (toll free) or
1(709) 896-0592 OR
communications@nunatukavut.ca

Learn more at www.nunatukavut.ca

Mental Health

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Advice	Anger	Anxiety	Bullying
Emotions	Family	Fear	Friendship
Help	Journeys	Mental Health	Mind
Relationships	School	Self esteem	Stress
Support	Talking	Vibes	Well being