

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CONSORT RURAL MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

SEPTEMBER 2022 REPORT



thank you

We would like to thank all of the community members who took time out of their evening to join us for this community engagement. It was great to see such a cross-section of individuals engage in conversations about rural mental health. The insights gleaned from this discussion will play an integral part in our future planning focused on improving the mental health of all residents in Consort and the surrounding areas.

Introduction

The Rural Mental Health Project is a project of the Canadian Mental Health Association. The project strives to strengthen community capacity for better mental health in rural and remote communities across Alberta through ongoing training and network development.

The Rural Mental Health Project is built collaboratively with strategic and local partners. The principles that guide our work include being community-driven, building on existing strengths, and using holistic approaches, while considering the full lifespan of our communities.

Communities across Alberta have trained Animators, who are eligible to receive funding to carry-out mental health projects in their community. Natasha Bozek and Lacey Abt are trained Animators living in the Consort area. Following training, Natasha and Lacey were provided a small grant to being working with the community to build capacity around mental health. For this project, we wanted to take a strategic approach to understanding the mental health needs in Consort, build a plan for projects and initiatives moving forward and create an Action Team who will support current and future initiatives. To gain this understanding a Community Engagement was held in September 2022.



The Event

We held a Community Engagement event on September 12, 2022 at the GEM Centre in Consort, AB. The intent of the event was to gain a better understanding of our community's needs in relations to mental health. A variety of community members were in attendance including schools, healthcare, adult learning, business, government, community organizations and local residents.

Participants were separated into four groups with a cross-section of sectors represented at each table; participants switched tables for each discussion to allow for conversation with everyone in attendance throughout the event. Table groups selected a scribe and a presenter for each topic of discussion. The discussions were based on an abbreviated version of a SWOT Analysis, where we focused on the S (Strengths) of our community, the W (Weaknesses) we see in mental health services and supports and O (Opportunities) for what we can do to improve the mental health services and supports in Consort. We chose to leave out the T (Threats) so as not to get hung up on what would keep us from moving forward.

The discussion was guided by the following questions:

1. What strengths does our community have related to positive mental health?
2. What weaknesses does our community have that keeps community members from having positive mental health?
3. Based on the identified strengths and weaknesses, what opportunities does our community have to improve overall mental health over the next 3-5 years?

Groups were provided 10-20 minutes to discuss each question, then were asked to present an overview of their discussion to the group. Once the discussions were completed, the group engaged in a Dotmocracy, where they were each given five stickers to place beside the five opportunities from the group they felt were most important for the Consort Rural Mental Health Project to focus on over the next 3-5 years.



Strengths

Participants all agreed that our community has many organizations and programs that are and can be supporting community members in their pursuit for positive mental health. The organizations include but are not limited to FCSS, Adult Learning, Project REACH, churches, schools, daycare, play school, minor sports, health services, KAC, Victim Services, Food Bank, AA groups, McMan (Family Resource Network), library, RCMP, Fire Department and ambulance services. They also identified that the community has access to mental health and addictions therapists and healthcare providers, although they may not be available as often as needed. In addition, Consort has many recreational facilities, such as the local gym, swimming pool, spray park, arena, golf course, ball academy, and dance studio.

Weaknesses

Although Consort has many strengths, there are still areas for improvement. Participants indicated lack of privacy around obtaining mental health services, ongoing stigma surrounding mental health, limited health services, lack of awareness and education around mental health, and a lack of variety in programming for children, youth, adults and seniors. In addition, participants felt there are limited mental health and addiction supports and/or an inability to obtain those services due to barriers such as long waitlists and lack of transportation.



Opportunities

From the Dotmocracy several opportunities emerged as priorities for the group. The priority opportunities include:

- Awareness Campaign
- Mental health training for individuals working with youth (i.e. coaches, teachers, etc.).
- Availability of a Full-Time Therapist
- Accessible transportation
- Interest Groups (dog, car, Book Club, quilting, crafts, cards, crib, Weight Watchers, TOPS, walking group)
- Buddy System
- Community Socials (Street Dance, family-friendly and safe events)
- Rally with other Rural Mental Health Projects
- Create a safe place for people to talk

Next Steps

The next steps for this project will be to convene an Action Team of community members who indicated their interest in continuing to support the project. The Action Team will develop a strategic plan from the identified opportunities that will provide guidance for ongoing project activities and submissions.

If you are interested in being a member of the Action Team, please contact Natasha Bozek or Lacey Abt, Rural Mental Health Animators, at neutralhillslearning@gmail.com or 403-577-3011.

