

***Building Healthy Communities-
Awareness to Action***

April 8, 2008

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Building Healthy Communities; Awareness to Action

Introduction

On April 8th, 2008 River Valley Health, Regional Health Authority 3 hosted a workshop entitled: “*Building Healthy Communities - Awareness to Action*”. This event brought together over 120 participants representing stakeholders from various communities across the region and the province. Participants included government, private and non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as the Anglophone, Francophone and First Nations populations. The purpose of this workshop was to provide participants with a specific community mobilization framework, as well as specific better practices perspective that would be beneficial for engaging community members in planning and acting on plans to promote healthy lifestyle behaviours across the region.

All participants received a resource manual as they registered that included the following sections: the workshop program; a community mobilization framework; better practice stories; and various worksheets focusing on strategic action planning and commitment to action.

Session I: Setting the Stage for Community Engagement and Mobilization

The initial session involved a series of time-limited presentations to set the context for the workshop and to provide participants with a framework for planning community mobilization activities or initiatives. At the outset of the session, Anne Marie Atkinson (Health Promotion and Wellness Consultant at River Valley Health) provided a succinct overview of the River Valley Health’s Healthy Living Strategy. A central focus of this strategy is the critical role that local communities play in promoting the adoption and maintenance of health life style behaviours. In this presentation, the importance of participants being champions for the Healthy Living Strategy in schools, workplaces and the community were underscored. Following this presentation, Monique Allain (UNB Health and Education Research Group) provided an overview of the provincial school wellness surveillance report sponsored by the New Brunswick Department of Wellness, Culture and Sport. This report provided a concise overview of the reported health behaviours of over 40,000 middle and high school students across the province. Areas of noted concern included current rates of obesity, physical inactivity, exposure to second hand smoke, and youth susceptibility to tobacco and substance use. In this presentation, fostering positive mental health or mental fitness was viewed as crucial for creating readiness for positive life style change among adults and youth.

The final presentation was delivered by Dr. Bill Morrison (UNB Health and Education Research Group) who provided participants with a framework for engaging and mobilizing communities to

take action in promoting healthy lifestyle behaviours. The framework was adapted from the *Community Readiness Model* and included four key phases:

- ✚ **Phase I: Identifying Priorities:** Mobilizing community members in the development of strategic plans to address identified health concerns or needs.
- ✚ **Phase II: Exploring Strengths:** Assisting community members in using their existing strengths and working relationships to develop key actions.
- ✚ **Phase III: Taking Action:** Establishing community working groups who will assist in defining and guiding the implementation of potential actions.
- ✚ **Phase IV: Gathering Feedback:** Identifying lessons learned from this community-based initiative that may be helpful to other communities.

In conjunction with this framework, the importance of developing a sense community relatedness and cohesion, and building on existing community capacity were emphasized. In addition, ensuring the choice and participation of community members was identified as critical for successfully planning and implementing community mobilization strategies.

Session II: Community Mobilization Promising Practices in Actions

During the second part of the morning session, participants were invited to become familiar with a range of community-based mobilization initiatives and activities that have been implemented within the Health Region 3, as well as within other regions across the province. Thirteen key presenters shared lessons learned from their experiences in engaging community capacity and the promotion of healthy life style behaviours. Each presenter spoke briefly of their accomplishments. Following these presentations, participants were provided with time to speak directly with the various presenters at their respective display booths. Thirteen different display booths were involved in this session including:

“Capacity building places the emphasis on existing strengths and abilities, rather than being overwhelmed by problems or feeling of powerlessness.”

1. “Dinner’s On Us: Lets Discuss”- Members of the River Valley Health “Talk with Me” Early Language Service Team
2. Safe Communities Canada, “Dream, Dare, Do”
3. Building Blocks for Healthy Youth: Part 1: Assets Mobilizing Youth and Adults
4. Building Blocks for Healthy Youth- Part 2: School-Community Youth Action Team: Creating a Template for Change
5. FredKid- Healthy Families, Healthy Communities
6. Gagetown, Healthy Eating Initiative for Rural Communities
7. Leo Hayes High School - “Mobilizing Youth Wellness”- Lions for Wellness

8. Minto “Moving Forward”
9. The Restigouche Community Mobilization Initiative
10. Riverside Albert Walking Program
11. The Early Years-Improving the Odds
12. FUN Group (Families of Upper Nashwaak)
13. Cross Creek Gym for Women

Following this networking activity, participants shared the better practices they gleaned from this activity that could be adapted or be of interest to their respective communities. With respect to overarching themes that emerged from lessons learned, participants reinforced that “*there is a great deal of strength in our community*”, “*that community champions should be brought together to combine their ideas and capacity*” and “*that community mobilization should go forward in spite of changes in government programs or services.*”

Session III: Community Mobilization Planning Activity

During the afternoon session, participants were grouped at roundtables in their respective community groups. Using the *Community Readiness Planning Template*, participants explored specific planning priorities and activities that they might take action on following the workshop. After one hour of small group discussion, key champions from each community shared the outcomes of their planning efforts. Actions themes that emerged across communities included:

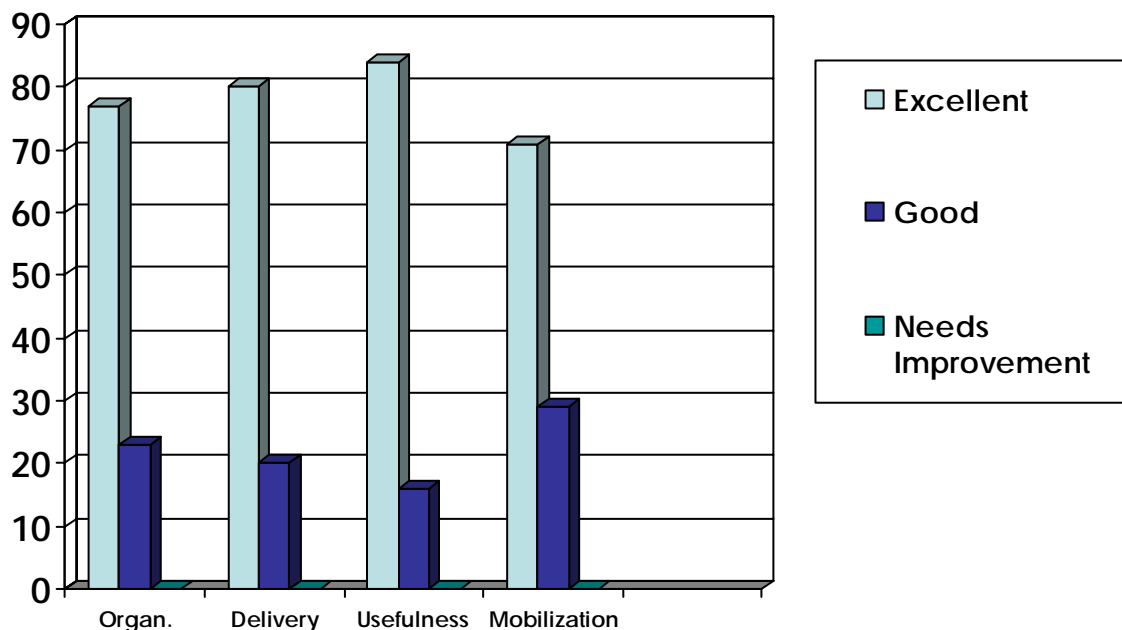
- ✚ **Use existing sources of data to identify planning priorities:** (.e.g. *River Valley Health Regional Community Profile Data, School Wellness Survey results, Developmental Assets survey outcomes, Canadian Community Health Survey results, locally gathered focus group and survey data*).
- ✚ **Recognize and take into account the priorities outlined in River Valley Health’s Healthy Living Strategy** (*e.g. healthy eating, physical activity, substance use prevention, injury prevention, mental health/mental fitness*).
- ✚ **Consult with community champions regarding ways to promote healthy living attitudes and behaviours in the community** (*e.g. invite the participation of seniors, encourage the participation of business and civic leaders*).
- ✚ **Carry out an inventory of existing community programs, services activities that promote healthy living routines** (*use strengths, avoid duplication, collaborate*).
- ✚ **Ensure that community organizations and services are coordinated and working together for a common vision of healthier living** (*e.g. schools, police, community health centres, youth-serving agencies*).

- ✚ **Organize outdoor activities and events that facilitate the involvement of groups or the whole community** (e.g. use of walking trails, planning walking clubs or outdoor exercise programs, community gardens).
- ✚ **Underscore and promote the role of parents as being active role models for their children in school-based and community wellness programs/activities** (e.g. focus on families, intervene early with children and their families).
- ✚ **Invite youth to have a voice and take leadership in promoting healthy life style behaviours** (e.g. follow-up contact with Leo Hayes High School, consult/collaborate with the New Brunswick Advisory Council for Youth).
- ✚ **Focus on immediate actions and small victories** (prioritize, act now, and use the strengths we have).

Conference Evaluation


Participant Ratings

At the close of the workshop participants were asked to complete an evaluation form to gauge their overall satisfaction with the workshop. Thirty-one conference attendees completed the evaluation activity. Participants rated the organization and delivery of the conference, as well as the usefulness of the workshop content and the information presented on community mobilization. Seventy to 80% of all participants rated all aspects of the conference as “excellent”, whereas the remaining rated the same areas as “good”. Overall, participants reported positive perceptions regarding the format and the quality of content of the workshop.




Most Useful Aspects

Participants were also asked to describe the most important or useful aspect of this workshop for them. Four major categories emerged:

 **Learning from the strengths and stories of other communities**


...Learning from other communities what their successes were.

 **Networking with others in the community and region**

...Networking opportunities for creating new partnerships.

 **Gaining new ideas about approaches for mobilization**

...Learning about initiatives that I can roll out in my community.

 **Getting enthused about promoting healthy living**

...Meeting so many other people passionate about changing their communities

Suggestions

With respect to the overall workshop schedule, a few participants indicated that time was limited and that content included in the workshop could have been presented over a two-day period. Others cited the importance of including a wider range of stakeholders from NGOs, business leaders and the First Nations Community.

“I would strongly urge follow-up on putting us in touch with other communities and facilitating sharing of community stories.”

Various participants mentioned that for some individuals, work and family schedules may have prevented their attendance at a daytime workshop. Several participants also underscored the benefits of providing follow up to this event and supporting the momentum that was evident at the workshop. Specific suggestions included holding an annual community mobilization event for the region, as well as organizing smaller exchanges between individual communities.

Commitment to Action

Intentions to Act

In addition to the workshop evaluation, participants were also encouraged to complete a Commitment to Action form, outlining their intentions to take specific action as a result of the workshop. Twenty four participants identified particular actions that they intended to implement in the next several weeks following the workshop. Many of the planned actions included sharing the outcomes of the workshop with other community stakeholders, or planning local forums to initiate and/or further enhance existing community mobilization activities focusing on promoting healthy lifestyle behaviours. Example actions included:

- ✚ Arranging meetings with other community stakeholders who were not present at the event to share lessons learned
- ✚ Organizing follow up meetings to engage new partnerships formed as a result of the workshop
- ✚ Carrying out social marketing and advertising activities to promote healthy living in the community
- ✚ Engaging youth in the community to provide leadership in planning healthy lifestyle promotional activities
- ✚ Contacting Safe Community Canada to provide resources for community mobilization plans
- ✚ Bringing together stakeholders to identify priorities for a community mobilization strategy
- ✚ Creating a list of volunteers and other stakeholder who could assist with the mobilization
- ✚ Increasing parent participation in community-based wellness activities
- ✚ Setting up an advisory committee to coordinate mobilization plans and actions

Next Steps

In late May and June 2008, the Workshop Planning Committee will be contacting key champions and leaders from each of the communities that were represented at the event. These contacts will assist in documenting the specific actions that have been implemented since the workshop and determine the types of supports and resources needed by communities to move healthy life style promotion across the region. If you would like to receive a follow up contact or initiate further dialogue with the workshop planning committee, please contact:

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