

Stories from Piloting the Well-being Toolkit

MCHB: Centering Stories in an Ecological Framework

October
feature



This month we feature Hannah Goa's experience of piloting the toolkit at the Multicultural Health Broker Cooperative (MCHB) in Edmonton. Hannah has been supporting the Intercultural FRN work for the past 4 years and is responsible for reporting to funders. She became interested in joining the toolkit pilot group to inspire her work on their Evaluation Framework that uniquely reflects the values and principles of cultural brokering.

How did you get started with using the ALIGN Well-being Toolkit?

Since starting with MCHB in 2020, I have participated in many large team meetings and I've supported specific brokers through complex case consultation in very specific families situations. However, I had not taken the opportunity to sit with brokers within the distinct ethnocultural communities we serve and really understand the context of each community and the breadth of what they do. In early intervention, we serve sixteen communities, each with unique cultural, linguistic, pre-migration, and post-migration contexts. In the first months of piloting the toolkit, I began meeting with each brokering team to further explore the pre- and post-

migration and cultural contexts of each community and how these shape family experiences and relationships here in Edmonton. Understanding these broader community experiences and immigration pathways grounds family stories. In these meetings, we are also reflecting on practice and collecting illustrative stories, which feeds into how we support brokers as they engage in the work and helps us to understand what it is that keeps them going. What are our guiding mantras, phrases, or ways of coming into spaces with clients? Keeping soft hearts and openness to the struggle? We're having lots of really good conversations.

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How does the ALIGN Well-being toolkit fit with what you are doing at MCHB?

The toolkit has reignited internal conversations on our evaluation framework, with a number of parallels between the toolkit and our internal evaluation approaches. One of our foundational values for our evaluation work in the Intercultural Family Resource Network is to ground in the Multiple Realities of Families. We have found that context-rich stories are the quickest and most reliable route to understanding these multiple realities, uncover complexities, and identify community cultural wealth.

Thinking about how well-being shows up in these multiple realities, the toolkit's **seven domains** articulate several important dimensions. We may use different words but all the domains are quite well represented in how we talk about our work and evaluation framework. It is affirming to see that all seven domains are part of what we do.

Grounding in the multiple realities of families through stories is at the core of our evaluation approach. However, we also recognize that well-being is impacted by contextual factors beyond family control.



The ecological model that MCHB uses. See page 4 for more details.

That's why we nest stories within an ecological framework, including pre- and post-migration and cultural contexts. Particularly relevant in the post-migration context in Canada is sensitization to the power differential between mainstream Canadian culture, racialized groups, and ethnocultural minorities, and how this inequity can shape family dynamics and well-being.

Connection to the Land with Newcomer families

Several brokers have community space at the Urban Farm in Edmonton. In many immigrant and refugee communities people were farmers back home so relying on supermarkets and food banks for food is a culturally foreign experience for these families. Growing their own food increases connection to this new land, restores a sense of food dignity, and can provide a sense of continuity in situations of significant discontinuity. Additionally, some of the traditional foods that they would have back home, grow in Alberta supporting their ability to cook culturally relevant foods. Having families involved in farming also supports intergenerational relationships. Parents and grandparents pass on meaningful knowledge to children and youth, as young as preschoolers.



What did you learn from the first couple months of this experience?

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outside of these worldviews to imagine what alternatives can be; the toolkit provides a bridging approach as we work to expand our understanding of ways of being. At MCHB, we are continually working to illuminate and share how cultural distance creates barriers and inequities for those with non-western ways of being. Cultural distance refers to the ways in which cultural worldviews can be quite different and hold different power. This results in different understandings, expectations, access to and responsiveness of social supports. In turn, when otherwise marginalized experiences and life realities are centered, there are opportunities to improve supports and services for everyone accessing supports.



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of Practice**

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about the Well-
Being Toolkit**

Access the toolkit and its resources, videos, and Well-being Impact Portal at www.alignab.ca/well-being

Story Coding Map

*"Maps are cognitive guides. They locate us, helping us to figure out where we are now in relations to where we've been, and to plan where we're going."*¹

Like the toolkit, maps are not linear but a guide for exploration. We use this coding map with a qualitative analysis software (NVivo) to organize stories based on mentions of organizational practices, strategies, community and cultural context, and family story type. But you could use a spreadsheet to learn from the stories you collect. We are in the process to map outcomes and progress markers for each of these nested context levels. The toolkit's indicators overlap with and complement our process.



¹ Earl, S., Carden, F., & Smutylo, T. (2001). Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre. p. vii