Scaling
Campus Mental Health
Interventions

December 2019

Re·Code   Up↑Social Innovation and Scaling

THE CONTEXT

We know that post-secondary institutions play an important role in driving wellbeing in Canadian society and communities. Examples abound of Canadian universities and colleges applying innovative approaches to help solve social, environmental, and economic challenges.

Yet, many innovations remain niche and face barriers to scaling.

Out of this paradox, Re-Code and UpSocial launched a project in 2018 to investigate how post-secondary institutions could hurdle these barriers and more effectively contribute to positive social change, focusing on three areas:

Institutional Structure
Human Resources
Holistic support services   *full process outlined here*

After a global scan, we surfaced 90 innovative programs addressing change in the three areas.

Four that focused on mental health were selected for deeper exploration, based on their potential for adaptation to the Canadian context, and for helping hurdle some of the barriers described above.

1. For Credit Wellness Courses
2. The Support Network
3. Big White Wall
4. Mental Health First Aid

Following the process of analyzing the Canadian post-secondary system for opportunities to adapt and implement these four innovations, UpSocial and Re-Code worked together to host a workshop focused on scaling these into Canadian campuses. This document reports on that event and its outcomes.

Recognizing this, RECODE and UpSocial undertook a global scan to search for innovative responses to these challenges. The aim was to surface examples from organizations that had transformed their internal practices, and in so doing, created enabling conditions for increasing social impact.

SECTION 1: Innovations

Guided by a variety of on-campus stakeholders, as well as third-party organizations who bring innovative programming onto campuses, our team explored the current state of mental health programs and services within Canadian post-secondary. It was clear that there was demand and readiness for the four mental health innovations surfaced through this research.

Mental Health First Aid
Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training provides a person with no clinical training the knowledge and skills to assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis who might be a danger to themselves or others until appropriate professional help is received or the crisis resolves. Originally from Australia, MHFA has been adopted by more than 20 countries and over 2 million people worldwide have been trained.   [Read more](#)

Promoting Well-Being
The For-Credit Wellness Course is a non-mandatory course designed and implemented at the University of Illinois Chicago, to improve wellbeing and focus on the day-to-day self-management required to function positively as a student. This specific course combines mental health and wellness practices, takes one semester and is taught in 2-hour weekly sessions.   [Read more](#)

The Support Network
The Support Network helps to address and promote student mental health and well-being through the implementation, development and collaboration of peer support initiatives in high schools and colleges. It empowers college students across the country to create an inclusive community and support each other's identity, mental well-being, and day-to-day lives through peer-facilitated groups and bi-weekly community events.   [Read more](#)

Big White Wall
Big White Wall is an award-winning, clinically moderated (24/7) peer-to-peer mental health support service. It offers personalized support and recovery pathways through a clinically-supported, professionally-facilitated, safe and secure digital platform which is anonymous and available 24/7. It combines social networking principles with a choice of clinically informed interventions to improve mental wellbeing. It includes peer support, creative expression, self-management tools and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) -based courses which cover topics such as anxiety, sleep, stress, depression and many more.   [Read more](#)

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SECTION 2: Scaling Workshop

The workshop, taking place December 17th, 2019 in Toronto, Ontario, was open to anyone who identified as working on issues of campus mental health. This included students; post-secondary staff and senior administrators; and third-party organizations, such as funders or those doing service delivery.

It was designed as a unique opportunity for program brokering, knowledge exchange, and network cultivation.

Program Brokering: The four programs described above were spotlighted in the design of the workshop, because they had proven success, and because there was an identified demand to learn about them (demonstrated through the process).
The workshop, therefore, was designed to equip participants with a fulsome understanding of the program(s) of most interest/relevance, to then guide them in identifying ways to adapt and apply these innovations (or pieces of them) within their own context.

Knowledge Exchange: It was understood that having stakeholders from various places who share a similar focus (campus mental health) provides a rich opportunity for peer learning. Each participant had different experiences, challenges, and successes, so there was as much learned from one another as from guest innovators invited to present on the four highlighted programs.
Following similar reasoning, participants were encouraged to attend in pairs or small groups. Having different stakeholders from the same institution allowed for different perspectives on challenges, opportunities, and therefore a greater likelihood of the next-steps being realistic and actionable.

Network Cultivation: There is strong value in campus stakeholders having opportunities to gather face to face, wherever possible. Strong attendance at gatherings hosted by networks such as the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH) demonstrate how much demand there is for this kind of relationship building among those leading mental health programming on their campuses. It is important to make time for shared learning and relationship across campuses.

The structure of the day was broken into 3 components:
a) Presentations by representatives of the four programs about their model and its success factors
b) Decision-making by participants: which program would have the most applicability and generate the strongest impact if adapted and brought back to their campus
c) Deeper exploration in groups of mixed participants (representing various campuses and organizations)
d) Work in institutional teams to plan next steps: paying particular attention to local context, identifying specific leverage points, potential roadblocks, next-steps, and campus allies

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SECTION 3: Next Steps

Action from the post-secondary community

It was energizing to finish the gathering with a discussion about how institutions will move forward.

What follows is a list of commitments to moving forward made by participants, based on the inspiration from the four innovations:

On Credit-Based Wellbeing Courses:
More than one school left the workshop with intention to explore a well-being intensive, with one focusing their gaze on the feasibility of such a course for both undergraduates and graduate students.

Another stakeholder brought forth consideration on ways such a program could be introduced into secondary schools. This would constitute an even further "upstream" intervention toward improving mental health outcomes on post-secondary campuses.

One institution was already developing a course like this, so they used this workshop to take lessons from this successful model, as they consider questions of how it might be resourced, which department should house it (education, social work etc.), remuneration, hiring, faculty decisions and the need for teaching assistants.

On Peer-Support Programs:
One institution left the event with a full action plan, outlining the department staff and leadership who need to next be engaged, a design for a series of focus groups with students to inform the design, and an engagement plan for stakeholders outside of the institution who would be important to help.

Another institution began exploring potential designs for a peer-support program to serve faculty.

A third institution is developing a health promotion strategy that will include a peer focus, plus integration within the familiar stepped care[1] "inclusion" component.

On Big White Wall, or other models for anonymous online support fora:
Institutions that don't already offer such a program explored ways in which it could complement the suite of services on their campuses.
They offered suggestions to Big White Wall representatives about modifications that, if made to the platform, would make it a tighter fit for what is needed on their

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[1] In the past several years, universities and colleges across Canada have been moving towards the Stepped Care Model to enhance service delivery and support student well-being. Step 4 of the model involves peer support assistance and programming.

campuses. This knowledge brokering was incredibly important, according to the representatives, and indeed, to the potential future users.

On Mental Health First Aid
One third-party organization left considering opportunities to advocate at the government level for the mandatory training of MHFA for all front-line staff in PSE.

General
With respect to all programs, numerous participants spoke of the need to gather evidence that these programs improve retention of students, in order to garner support from senior leadership to work on implementing them on campus. 85% of respondents indicated that they planned to contact one or more of the presented innovations for further information.

Moving forward:

The UpSocial and ReCode teams have stewarded a two-year process to identify and evaluate innovations from across the globe that have the potential to help answer our central question, **"How can Canadian post-secondary institutions most actively contribute to positive social change in Canada?"**

This workshop serves as a transition in the work, from our grasp to the stakeholders'.

By facilitating a match between innovators and workshop participants, we attempted to increase the levels of knowledge and power held by the campus leaders –those who are doing this work every day. And indeed we heard[2] that for 85% of respondents, the most valuable part of the workshop was when they did a "dive deep" to learn intensively about a chosen program. The action steps and new contacts they left will serve to support their work toward healthier campuses and more well-supported students. When asked about "establishing new connections" through the workshop, 77% reflected that their experience was either "strong" or "very strong."

Third party organizations, being privy to these conversations, now have a richer understanding of the realities the campus stakeholders face as they try to affect the most positive change on their campuses. Service delivery organizations better understand the needs on campuses, and funders have a stronger grasp of where gaps exist in addressing campus mental health

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[2] Follow-up evaluation survey to all participants, conducted in late Deceember 2019

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