PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES: REVIEW FOR THE NORTH WELLINGTON COALITION FOR YOUTH RESILIENCY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


This summary presents key highlights from a larger literature review written to inform how the North Wellington Coalition for Youth Resiliency (NWCYR; northern Wellington County, Ontario) might be sustained when its funding for the paid coordinator position ends in 2017.

Addressing Sustainability Issues

Several key elements and characteristics are recommended for program/initiative sustainability efforts (Gaughen et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Lapelle et al. 2006; Office of Adolescent Health, 2014; Scheirer, 2005), including:

1. A clear articulation of the program/initiative’s vision.
2. A specific and well-developed written sustainability plan.
3. A focus on results, whereby progress is measured and the work is adjusted.
5. A leadership team that promotes program continuation.
6. A focus on strategic financing.
7. Adaptability to changing social, economic, and political trends in the community.
8. Broad-based community support.

As per the second key characteristic noted above, the Work Group for Community Health and Development (2015) recommends the following 6 steps in sustainability planning:

1. Decide whether the program/initiative needs to be sustained and for how long.
2. Clarify the goals and context for sustaining the program/initiative.
3. Create a business plan to identify the resources that will be needed.
4. Identify specific tactics to be used to sustain the program/initiative.
5. Develop a marketing plan to secure resources for the program/initiative.
6. Develop a specific action plan for each identified sustainability tactic.

**Engaging Youth in Sustainability Efforts**

Programs/initiatives that support youth engagement are uniquely positioned to involve youth in sustainability efforts (Gaughen et al., 2009). This can involve a number of activities including (Gaughen et al., 2009):

- Helping articulate the program/initiative’s vision and develop a sustainability plan.
- Participation in research and evaluation.
- Involvement in financial strategizing and attainment.
- Helping track and document changing conditions in the community and changing needs of youth.
- Garnering broad-based community support through communication technologies.

**Strategies and Practices for Program Sustainability**

The following are some strategies that can be used to help sustain a program/initiative:

1. **Make changes to the program/initiative:** Make changes to the program/initiative to minimize costs (Keller, 2010; Paine-Andrews et al., 2000).
2. **Share positions and resources:** Share tasks, staff positions, space, equipment, or other resources with organizations with similar goals (Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).
3. **Incorporate activities or services into another organization:** Find another organization that is willing to adopt the work of the program/initiative by either taking over the overall funding and management or by taking over some or all of the program/initiative’s services and activities (Lapelle et al., 2006; Paine-Andrews et al., 2000; Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).
4. **Implement program fees:** Develop a structure that requires clients who receive services to pay for them (Freeman, 2011; Paine-Andrews et al., 2000; Riggs, 2012).
5. **Become a line item in an existing budget**: Become an expense category in an existing organization’s long-term budget (Lapelle et al., 2006; Paine-Andrews et al., 2000; Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).

6. **Tap into available personnel resources**: Recruit people or positions that can carry out needed tasks without being hired (e.g., interns, staff from other organizations; Paine-Andrews et al., 2000; Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).

7. **Obtain corporate and private resources**: Seek resources (e.g., financial support, goods, services) from corporate or private sources (Anuszkiewicz et al., 2008; Canadian Active After School Partnership, n.d.; Dobbins-Harper & Bhat, 2007; Freeman, 2011; Hauser et al., 2008; Keller, 2010; Riggs, 2012; Slesnick et al., 2008).

8. **Obtain public funding**: Obtain funding from federal, provincial, or local agencies that allocate money for health, environmental, and human services, and community development (Canadian Active After School Partnership, n.d.; Freeman, 2011; Hauser et al., 2008; Riggs, 2012; Sherman et al., 2007; Silloway et al., 2009; Slesnick et al., 2008; Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).

9. **Solicit in-kind support**: Seek donations of non-monetary resources (goods, services, personnel) from other organizations, businesses, or individuals (Hauser et al., 2008; Silloway et al., 2009; Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).

10. **Develop and implement a fundraiser**: Offer products, services, or events to raise money for the program/initiative (Anuszkiewicz et al., 2008; Keller, 2010; Paine-Andrews et al., 2000; Riggs, 2012; Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).

11. **Pursue third party funding**: Solicit third parties not involved with the program/initiative, and not directly benefiting from it, to compensate (with resources or payment) for the services the program/initiative provides (Silloway et al., 2009; Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).

12. **Establish a donor or membership base**: Establish a membership program whereby members provide some form of contribution to the program/initiative in return for affiliation with that program/initiative, as well as certain privileges associated with it (Paine-Andrews et al., 2000; Riggs, 2012; Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2015).
Choosing Strategies

It has been recommended that programs/initiatives incorporate a variety of strategies into their sustainability efforts (Paine-Andrews et al., 2000) and/or that they have multiple, alternative plans and strategies for sustainability (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). The Work Group for Community Health and Development (2015) recommends the following steps in choosing which strategies to incorporate:

- Brainstorm possible strategies considering which will not work, which would need modification, and whether there are other alternatives unique to the program.
- Gather input from key stakeholders (e.g., funders, staff, volunteers, clients).
- Choose the strategies that make the most sense for the program/initiative.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our review of the benefits and challenges associated with each strategy, we believe that the following 7 strategies may be most feasible for the NWCYR:

- Strategy 1: Make changes to the program/initiative (including reducing certain efforts and redefining the scope).
- Strategy 2: Share positions and resources, for example, with other child, youth, and/or family programs and organizations.
- Strategy 3: Incorporate activities or services into another organization, such as a family health unit.
- Strategy 6: Tap into available personnel resources, such as staff shared with other similar organizations and youth/client volunteers.
- Strategy 7: Obtain corporate and private resources, and particularly grants from regional or national foundations.
- Strategy 8: Obtain public funding like grants and tax revenues.
- Strategy 10: Develop and implement a fundraiser, particularly with the help of youth/client volunteers.

We make these recommendations with caution, however, as strategies work differently in different contexts. Furthermore, a clear vision and commitment by project leadership to build healthy communities and sustain the program/initiative may be more important than any one strategy.