

## Featured Mental Health Initiative

### Free Store

New Germany Rural High School/New Germany Elementary School (New Germany, NS)

#### Background

The school is a small rural, high school with a population of 330 students in grades 7-12. One in five students in the area lives in poverty and comes to school without proper nourishment or clothing. The impact of this on students' education is immeasurable and creates a cycle of health, mental health, and financial hardships in the community.

#### Promising Practice

Schools are quickly becoming the epicenter for students and their families. So many services are accessed through schools and the Free Store is one that helps to foster a healthy and happy school community. The Free Store was developed in response to the need in the community to access food, clothing, toiletries, and more. All products in the store are free and the store is open at a times when all families can access it.

Community members that require health, financial, or social assistance can access support programs in other towns and a larger city, but there are only few that exist locally and are not available daily. Reliable transportation, and the costs associated with travel, are regular barriers to receiving help, leaving many of the most vulnerable families unable to access what they need. The fundamental idea around the Free Store is to combat this problem and to respond to these problems in a timely fashion - often the same day. This means that students can take what they need home with them on the bus, or families can go to the school themselves to browse the racks and shelves.



## Impact

Families have come to rely on the clothing exchange especially winter clothing items such as snow suits and boots which can be quite costly. The school can now meet the immediate needs of their students and their families to help alleviate some of the stressors that might be felt at home. Families feel better connected to the school and to the community as a result of accessing the Free Store.

## Sustainability

The Free Store has secured local partners, private community donations, and corporate partners in order to achieve sustainability. These partners and donations provide food, clothing, and hygiene products to the store.

## Modifications

Here are suggestions to modify this approach for different learning environments.

- Engage seniors within the community to volunteer at the Free Store
- Offer special inventory around holidays and ensure there are items in the store for a variety of cultures.

A PHE Canada campaign



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