

Featured Mental Health Initiative

Peer Support Volunteers

Churchill Community High School (La Ronge, SK)

Background

The school has a population of 550 students in grades 7-12 and 90% of the school population are students of First Nations or Métis communities. Over the last four years, the school has experienced suicides of three students. The school has a social worker to support the students and after the suicides they were provided with another social worker.

Promising Practice

The Peer Support Volunteers program began when two high school students wanted to start a peer support group for their fellow students. Ten students were trained as peer support volunteers in the first year and



more will be trained in the years to come. The peer support volunteers are trained and certified by the Teen Talk program. They bridge the gap between the students and the community support that is available by reaching out to students to provide accurate information, resources, and links to services in their community.

The peer support volunteers also run activities at lunch and after school with the following themes: mental health, healthy relationships, substance use awareness, sexual

wellness, diversity, body image, and family problems. Other activities include gym blast, KaHOOT games, dances, welcome treats for new students, or providing food to students missing their lunch or breakfast. Peer support volunteers help to identify students at risk of being bullied and they provide a safe place for them to be at lunchtime while also offering a private consultation room for any student.

Impact

Almost half of the school population has participated in an activity implemented by the peer support volunteers. The peer support volunteers supported three suicide interventions that were taken over by the social workers with referrals to mental health supports.

Sustainability

Every year, the school applies for grants so that they may continue the program. The school also makes important community connections in order to support the programming.

Modifications

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

- For students who need more support, assign them their own personal peer support volunteer whom they feel comfortable receiving individualized support.
- Organize excursions for peer support volunteers and the students that they are working with to participate in activities within the community.

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