

Evidence In Action

November 15, 2013

Profiling knowledge generation, exchange, & implementation activities



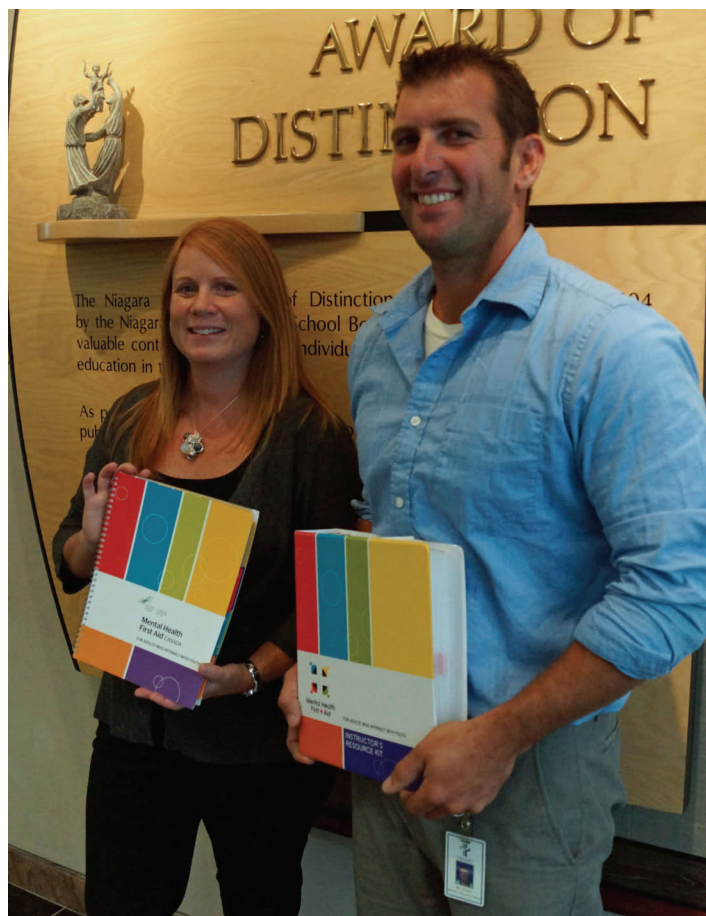
Mental Health First Aid: An MHCC Program

What is Mental Health First Aid?

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. It does not train people to become counselors or therapists. And just like with physical first aid, we need to ensure that there is someone close by who can intervene in the event of a crisis or identify an emerging health problem.

MHFA Canada, sponsored by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), is a 12-hour training course delivered in 4 modules, carried out over 2 days. Participants learn how to provide initial help to people who are showing signs of a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. This evidence-based program is being delivered in 21 countries across the world.

“The aim of the program is to provide the same overall purposes as traditional first aid – to ensure someone experiencing a health crisis has access to immediate and competent care,” says Sjors Reijers, Manager, National Program Promotions and Business Development for the MHFA Canada Program. Across Canada, 90,000 people have been trained in this program. In Ontario alone, 3,000 people have been trained since January of 2013, including several hundred in Niagara.



Rachel Clair and Ken Lococo, local MHFA trainers

Denise Waligora, Manager of Program Education for the MHFA program, described the program's goals as similar to those of traditional first aid. The MHFA's goals include:

- preserve life where a person may be a danger to themselves or others;
- provide help to prevent the mental health

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problem from developing into a more serious state;

- promote the recovery of good mental health; and
- provide comfort to a person experiencing a mental health problem.

Denise added that these goals are accomplished by providing training participants in this stigma-reducing program with:

- explanations of mental health, mental illness and mental health problems;
- signs and symptoms of common mental health problems and crisis situations;
- information about effective interventions and treatments; and
- ways to access professional help.

How did it start?

The MHFA program was originally developed in Australia and brought to Canada in 2006. The course was reviewed and updated for a Canadian context, incorporating Canadian statistics and cultural adaptations.

How did the program do?

The MHFA program was supported by the Student Support Leadership Initiative (SSLI) in Niagara. Provincially there were 29 SSLI clusters established to address the challenge of the increasing need for mental health support for children and youth. SSLI clusters are funded by

the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The Niagara SSLI consists of a group of 16 agencies working towards building and enhancing partnerships that will meet the mental health needs of students and their families. Ultimately, the SSLI aims to improve access to existing services and provide supports for students and families. This is accomplished by developing an improved understanding of each member agency's services, and to improve joint decision-making processes locally.

SSLI used some of the Niagara project money to send four agency staff from John Howard Society, District School Board of Niagara, and Niagara Catholic District School Board to the week long MHFA training certification in Mississauga. These MHFA certified trainers returned to Niagara and ran several MHFA trainings for Principals, Vice Principals, Physical Education Departments, and Chaplains at the Niagara Catholic District School Board and several other agencies.

What was learned

Rachel Clair, a MHFA trainer in Niagara, noted that "there is still a lot of work to be done to break down the stigma of mental illness. However, this program is a step in the right direction because it teaches people to speak openly about mental health. In addition participants are taught about ALGEE, which is an acronym for the 5 action steps to engage in a conversation with someone who is experiencing mental health problems: Assess risk, Listen non-judgmentally, Give reassurance/information, Encourage appropriate

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Rachel Clair and Denise Waligora

help and Encourage other supports. A key point is that this training gives participants the guidance they need to talk to people who need help through a mental health crisis. This often provides a powerful, personal journey for people attending the training.”

What the future holds

Although the Student Leadership Success Initiative is coming to a close, the MHFA trainers will remain in Niagara and represent a lasting legacy of this project. Rachel and other trainers from across Niagara will continue to offer this valuable training to agencies, school boards, and

individuals. As Rachel stated, “there is still a lot of work to be done to encourage people to speak openly about mental health, especially when someone is in crisis.”

Mental Health First Aid is listed on the Public Health Agency of Canada’s Canadian Best Practices Portal and can be found at <http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/interventions/mental-health-aid-canada/>

An evidence review of the MHFA program can be found at: <http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca/EN/about/Documents/MHFA%20Evidence%20Review%202012.pdf>

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