

VCC-HM|HC Mental Health & Well-being Framework Collaboration

review of the experience for HM|HC

What has this experience of partnership been/looked like for HM|HC?

It's been great on numerous counts for HM|HC. We value the opportunity to contribute to an initiative like this that is so germane to our work of promoting mental well-being on BC campuses. VCC made the task a pleasurable one in many ways. This began before the start of the project: priming the pump with the 2020 VCC Day workshop session with Jonny Morris on a systemic approach for mental wellness. VCC laid a strong foundation with the strategic formation of the multisectoral Mental Health & Well-being Steering Committee and the careful articulation in the proposal and contract of what was envisioned for the framework as an overall thematic scaffold and campus plan identifying principles, pillars and priorities to guide VCC's efforts around promotion and protection of mental health of the VCC community for the next five years.

Besides giving strong appreciative leadership to the Steering Committee (eliciting insightful perspective and helpful engagement from its members), the project team personnel from VCC have been very receptive, encouraging, supportive, focused, disciplined, patient, persistent, obliging and accommodating in their interaction with us, relating in a very congenial and collegial manner that puts key principles of health promotion and the spirit of dialogue into practice. The initiating chairperson's vision and direction along with the manner in which he has consistently engaged in consultation across a wide range of VCC stakeholders has been inspiring. Besides positively challenging us, he has been a great partner in various contexts of sharing the framework (e.g., with the Leadership Team, Senior Team, VCC Board, Education Council, and at VCC Day). The project manager's earnest efforts have helped keep aspects of the work on schedule and have compensated for some of our shortcomings in marking progress in and completion of tasks. She did critical liaison work in lining up campus stakeholder contacts and making arrangements for key aspects of the consultation through the focus groups and dialogue sessions. She also provided for us to have access to non-public VCC websites so that we might do a modest audit of them. The structural proposals she and the initiating chairperson made for the scan report substantially improved its utility for the Steering Committee, ourselves and those who may consult its findings in the future. The project manager also mediated work with internal research around the survey and with marketing around visual pieces and much more concise and clearer wording for the framework document itself. She carried the ball on the Pop-up effort to elicit further feedback on the framework. Similarly, the co-chair has shown real passion for this endeavour and has contributed at various points and in various ways to how this initiative is viewed and understood at VCC. She has complemented her VCC colleagues well and has been very constructive in her interaction with us. She made sure that the framework initiative had a high profile on VCC Day in the plenary morning segment and in the afternoon workshop sessions. The Steering Committee members have been likewise terrific in offering their observations, reflections, questions, suggestions, affirmation and confirmation. VCC is blessed with some real champions, in and beyond the committee, for the cause of mental health and well-being at its institution. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to relate to them on this initiative.

Specific concerns, if any

There are no major concerns on our part with VCC in this collaboration. We think VCC has been very open in communication, flexible in scheduling when we have not been able to get certain things done well enough on time, consistent in seeking to make sure deliverables are kept in view, and adaptable on various expectations and arrangements. We are grateful for the way in which VCC responded to changes in our personnel during the project, recognizing diverse skills, allowing for orientation and encouraging collective input. While we underestimated the time required for the contribution needed, we appreciate VCC readily adjusting in the interest of getting things done as well as could be. While we don't think we came through as fully in some aspects/respects (equipping events) as others (e.g., consultation and engagement process, elaboration of framework thrust), we think we have facilitated constructive conversations at VCC and have helped lay the groundwork there for further dialogic efforts in enhancing literacy (knowledge and skills) in mental health promotion.

Takeaways

While we would prefer that we had possessed the know-how at the outset that we believe we have acquired through the project, we relish the learning experience it has provided. We recognize all the more that this kind of work is such that no formulas can simply be imposed on it in advance to dictate an agenda. A process must be worked out collaboratively and through pragmatic reasoning which involves experimental efforts that do not fit objectivist or positivist paradigms on testing hypotheses by strict criteria. Such efforts do apply principles and bring insight and guidance from informal hunches that gain clarity and obtain value as they are tried with fellow participants and found helpful. While an endeavour of this sort cannot be forced or rushed, it can be pushed along in a way that is both gentle and firm, mutually supportive and reciprocally demanding, and VCC has demonstrated this.

Moving forward

We have advised an approach to implementation and evaluation of the framework that puts a premium on collaborative internal dialogic engagement in pursuing those efforts (and views evaluation as a routine exercise accompanying activation and part of the implementation process). In an informal uncontracted relationship, HM|HC's Support Team would want to be available to VCC to offer the same kind of occasional consultative support we seek to provide to other campuses around aspects of and issues in mental health promotion. This could involve periodically facilitating social learning events with an emphasis on equipping VC personnel to better understand and/or more confidently apply the principles of the framework to areas where commitments have been made or may yet be declared. In particular, for example, we can offer perspective on and seek to increase reflection and intentionality around healthier relationships with substances. But we want to be responsive to any campus's sense of specific need, while acknowledging that our approach will be from the perspective on health promotion we have adopted.

We will remain keenly interested in the outworking of the framework for VCC and welcome both periodic updates on progress and occasional queries and requests that may be sent our way.