

Red River College Charter

Healthy Minds Healthy College

Introduction:

Red River College is committed to enhancing opportunities that strengthen relationships and processes that foster a respectful and welcoming environment for the college community.¹ The development of a college-wide mental health strategy has been identified as a priority. Counselling and Accessibility Services has initiated an advisory committee to oversee this strategy development process. This Charter articulates the background, rationale, guiding principles, and the proposed goals and objectives.

Background

Red River College (RRC) is Manitoba's largest institute of applied learning with more than 30,000 enrolments, and more than 200 full-time and part-time programs. RRC is a unique institution, offering quality education at eight campuses in Manitoba. The College is mandated under the "Colleges and Consequential Amendments Act" to enhance the economic and social well-being of Manitoba through the provision of a broad range of educational opportunities (C.C.S.M., 2014). RRC is committed to offering a supportive learning environment by facilitating accessible post-secondary opportunities for all types of learners. RRC embraces and promotes diversity² and abilities and prides itself in being an inclusive and student-centered institution.

Red River College strives to support students participating in different streams of applied learning while understanding the importance of developing the skills needed for workforce readiness. RRC emphasizes *College Wide Learning Outcomes* that include leadership, effective communication, demonstration of career readiness, critical thinking and analytical skills, good citizenship and innovation.

RRC, like other Post-Secondary institutions across the country, has experienced an increase of students who have difficulty developing and maintaining good mental health³, who enter with pre-existing mental illnesses, or who experience their first episode of mental illness during their time as students. Students may be experiencing a range of stressors including, but not limited to: transition, isolation, relocation, cross-cultural challenges, loss, trauma, and the early onset of mental illness. There is a need for a comprehensive, proactive plan that encompasses promotion, prevention, early identification and early intervention of mental illness.

The College also employs more than 2000 people across the province, and is one of Manitoba's largest employers. The RRC People Plan⁴ was created to foster a culture in which all staff feel connected to and supported by the organization. RRC is committed to creating a dynamic, safe and respectful learning and working environment by honouring the worth of others and demonstrating fairness, courtesy and compassion.

RRC, like other employers across the country, recognizes that the stigma associated with mental illness is a significant problem in the Canadian workplace. Prejudices and fears surrounding mental illness contribute to low productivity, discrimination, absenteeism and low morale in Canadian workplaces. Furthermore, there are significant legal trends relating to workplace mental health.

Among these are issues relating to human rights legislation and accommodation, legislation surrounding mental health and psychological safety as part of a safe workplace and law of torts relating to liability for infliction of mental suffering in the work place.

The goal of the Healthy Minds Healthy College Initiative is to cultivate an environment of support that provides a sense of well-being, belonging, connectedness, and positive mental health for all students, faculty and staff to elevate their potential. In order to achieve this, the Red River College Executive recognizes the need to enhance the range of supports and services provided for students, faculty and staff. For students, this would be accomplished through various Student Services, in order to better address overall student health and well-being. For example, Counselling and Accessibility Services offers individual counselling, accessibility and disability⁵ management support, and strives to offer students, faculty, and staff opportunities to collaboratively address challenges that might affect student well-being and academic progress. Faculty and staff (through education and empowerment), Aboriginal Elders and Aboriginal Counsellors/Advisors, Health Services and alike also have significant roles to play. For staff, part of the role of Human Resource Services would be to continue to improve services and programs devoted to the overall faculty and staff health and well-being. As an example, the Employee and Family Assistance Plan offers individual and family counselling for various issues that may impact mental health and wellness.

Red River College has a commitment to develop internal and external partnerships. These partnerships necessitate clear communication pathways and collaboration with Student Services, Human Resources, faculty, staff and the Red River College Students' Association (RRCSA), the purpose of which are to enhance overall integration of services and create a positive learning and working environment. Better linkages with community resources and services - including industry - will also support the implementation and sustainability of this strategy. These partnerships will contribute to RRC's dedication to identifying individuals at risk, guiding students towards becoming contributing and responsible global citizens⁶, and fostering an environment for staff and faculty that is respectful and accommodating. RRC is committed to providing comprehensive programming and services within an inclusive setting, coupled with the desire to focus on capacity building⁷ through all aspects of the college, coordinating efforts to support students, faculty and staff.

The College's Presidents Council has endorsed the collaboration with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) Mental Health Promotion team to further strengthen the response to mental health needs, and to promote the mental wellness of the entire college community (students, faculty, and staff). This goal will be accomplished through an initiative utilizing a comprehensive systematic approach that is college-wide and reflective of the evidence-informed College Population Health (YAWG, 2009) and Healthy Universities models (UK, 2013).

Purpose

The purpose of the initiative is to become a "Health Promoting College" and to create opportunities for the entire college community to be engaged in fostering a welcoming, safe, and responsive environment, supporting the mental health and well-being of students, faculty, and staff.

The primary responsibility and focus of this initiative is all-encompassing. The strategy will include a plan to inclusively meet the needs and demands of students, faculty, and staff with mental health concerns. Another integral part of the strategy is to promote wellness, recovery, and resilience⁸. The deliverables may require some adaptation or customization for regional campuses. Given the uniqueness of multiple locations, creative planning regarding engagement and communication needs will be considered.

Vision

Healthy Minds Healthy College will incorporate a systematic framework to offer evidence-informed options to responding to the mental, social, psychological and spiritual needs of students, faculty, and staff.

Within RRC there is recognition that we need the following:

- Proactive whole-person approach for engaging and supporting students, faculty, and staff.
- Relationship-based leadership to enable the college environment to respond to the mental health needs of students, staff and faculty and recognizes well-being as an integral part of the plan.
- Support and strengthen existing wellness initiatives for the entire college community.
- Increased campaigns that promote life balance, managing wellness and health while meeting the demands of post-secondary education and work.
- Building of internal capacity and a clear process or protocol to address mental health problems and emotional distress within the college community, including coordination with Counselling and Accessibility Services, Health Services and other necessary supports and services.
- Collaboration with student-led mental health clubs and initiatives at RRC.

The Advisory Committee represents the College's commitment to establishing and sustaining a systematic, adaptive, and human-centered response through the development of a comprehensive mental health strategy. This strategy will require initiative priorities to be established in defined phases.

Guiding Principles

General principles to consider when developing RRC's mental health strategy include:

- Promotion and leveraging of the creativity and student leadership of the college community.
- Acknowledgment of underlying determinants of mental health (emotional, psychological, social, physical, cultural, spiritual, and economical) upholding social justice, equity and personal autonomy.
- Inclusion of multiple perspectives and methods including evaluation, research and social inquiry.
- Involvement of students, faculty, and staff, including community members with lived mental health experiences.
- Support of cross- college collaboration and partnerships.
- Integration into RRC institutional culture, daily school and work activities and course curriculum where possible.
- Support of holistic, interdisciplinary, interdepartmental, inter-sectoral and international approaches to health promotion.
- Building on existing partnerships and identifies new partnerships to meet the needs of the college community.
- On-going, sustainable strategy that will be reviewed and evolve based on emerging needs of the college community.

Goals and Objectives

Goal #1 - To be a healthy college community

- 1.1 Align with Red River College's overall vision and mission and integrate supporting initiatives internal and external to the College.
- 1.2 Complete a comprehensive literature review related to evidence-informed systematic frameworks and other international post-secondary mental health strategies.
- 1.3 Integrate the determinants of mental health and wellness into the plan.
- 1.4 Institutionally model a health promoting culture and a sustainable working, living, and learning environment.
- 1.5 Enable and support the college community to enhance wellness through campaigns, activities, and enhancing existing mental health initiatives
- 1.6 Engage and actively involve the alumni in promoting health and wellness in the college experience.

Goal #2 - To better meet the mental health needs of the college community

- 2.1 Determine mental health needs by conducting an environmental scan of current mental health activities, resources and service provision.
- 2.2 Enhance existing mental health activities, such as: Mind it!, partnerships with recreation and Industry, WRHA Enjoy Life More.
- 2.3 Provide tools that support and encourage students, faculty, and staff to accept responsibility for their own health and well-being.
- 2.4 Reduce stigma and create a welcoming, safe, and responsive learning and work environment.
- 2.5 Communicate clear pathways and protocols to strengthen internal and external partnerships for responding to mental health distress on campuses.
- 2.6 Identify a program to address mental health issues in the workplace, such as: Mental Health Works, Guarding Minds @ Work.
- 2.7 Review current policies and practices on mental health and identify opportunities to embed a mental health promotion lens into policy development.

Goal #3 - To enhance mental health literacy⁹ within the college community

- 3.1 Deliver mental health awareness education within the college community, such as: Mental Health First Aid, SafeTALK and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills training.
- 3.2 Develop a mental health toolkit including on-line resources.
- 3.3 Enhance social media tools and usage to engage and support the college community in key messaging and actions that will increase the visibility of the strategy embedding mental health and wellness into the Red River College culture.
- 3.4 Coordinate mental health promotion¹⁰ activities such as: open dialogues, student-led events, and having visible and safe places on college to openly talk about mental health.
- 3.5 Prepare students to be citizens committed to promoting health in their organizations and communities.

Scope and Timelines

To be determined and developed with members and relevant stakeholders through consultation process and outlined in the work plan.

Appendix One – Emerging Glossary of Terms

¹**College Community** refers to the community in its entirety: students, faculty members, and staff at multiple RRC campus locations. The community is comprised of full and part-time students, continuing education students, young adults transitioning from High School, Mature students, International Students, Indigenous students, Immigrant students, LGBTTT students, students living with disabilities, students experiencing challenges Mature students et al. This diversity extends to the cultural makeup of the College workforce, which includes but not limited to, employees from Aboriginal, visible minority, religious, LGBTTT, and persons with disabilities communities.

²**Cultural Diversity** refers to cultural differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors learned and shared by groups of interacting people defines by nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, economic status, education, profession, religion, organizational affiliation and any other grouping that generate identifiable patterns (Dr. M J Bennett, 2004).

³**Mental Health** is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and person dignity.” (PHAC, 2006). Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness. It is the component of overall health and is shaped by individual, physical environment, social, cultural and socio-economic characteristics. Fostering the development of positive mental health by supporting individual resilience, creating supportive environments and addressing the influence of the broader determinants of mental health are key components of promoting mental health. (CIHI, 2009)

Mental health is fundamental to good health and quality of life. It is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses emotional, psychological and social aspects of our lives. In everyday terms, the components of mental health can be thought of as our:

- ability to enjoy life
- ability to deal with challenges and life events
- emotional and spiritual well-being
- positive and meaningful social connections

Being mentally healthy means feelings a sense of control over one’s life, feeling able to make decisions, coping with life’s challenges and participating in life in meaningful ways because there is balance in the social, physical, spiritual, economic, and mental aspects of life. When people of any cultural background are feeling mentally healthy, they can feel good about themselves most of the time. Traditionally, Aboriginal cultural view of mental health and well-being is a balance of the body, mind, emotions and spirit which is maintained through good relationship within oneself, with others, within the community and Creation. (WRHA, Culture of Well Being)

⁴**People Plan** refers to a comprehensive human resources strategy which positions RRC as an employer of choice through a variety of initiatives related to recruitment, retention, professional development, succession, total rewards, labour relations and organizational effectiveness. In recognition that Red River College’s most important asset is its people, the People Plan was created to foster a culture in which all staff feel connected to and supported by the organization.

⁵**Disability** refers to a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, and psychiatric or learning disability that impact on learning/achievement or on one’s job performance. Examples are but not limited to: a mobility disability, mental health diagnosis, learning disability, visual impairment, Deaf or Hard of hearing, chronic health condition, ADHD, or acquired brain injury.

⁶**Global Citizen** is aware of the interdependent nature of the world, understands how local and global issues affect people around the world, and commits to taking actions to create a more just and sustainable world.

⁷**Capacity building** is the process of integrating vision, leadership, resources and support into the existing system structure. The development of health promotion skills and resources and also problem solving capabilities at five levels: individual, within teams, within the organization, across the organization and within the community (Penny Hawe et al, 1998). Capacity is seen as "the capability of an organization to promote health, formed by both its will to act and infrastructure" (Singapore Declaration, 1998).

⁸**Resilience** is the process by which people adapt to changes or crises. Resilience is not a character trait - it can be learned by anyone, but learning it does require time and effort. (John A. Call, Ph.D., J.D., A.B.P.P., 2008)

⁹**Mental Health Literacy** refers to the skills that enable people to access, understand and use information for mental health (Alliance for Mental Health and Mental Illness, 2008).

¹⁰**Mental Health Promotion** is any action taken to enhance the capacity of individuals, families, organizations or communities to take control over their lives and improve their mental health and well being by using strategies to create and enhance supportive environments and individual resilience (Joubert and Raeburn, 1998).

Mental health promotion is a multi-disciplinary area of practice that is focused on enhancing the mental health of the population. Mental health is an integral part of overall health therefore mental health promotion seeks to promote positive emotional and mental well-being so that citizens may achieve high levels of health and quality of life (Barry and Jenkins, 2007).

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