

National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy

Multiple Case Study of Community Initiatives



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June 2010



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Executive Summary

This is a report of a collaborative research project involving members associated with NAYSPS-funded community projects.. Four sites were selected on the basis of the extent to which they might be expected to have individual and community-level impact and variation in geographical region. The sites were located in Alberta (Hobbema), Saskatchewan (Battlefords Tribal Council Indian Health Service), Québec (Uashat mak Mani-utenam) and Labrador (Nunatsiavut).

The case studies were participatory; each project recruited the services of a local research mentor who worked in conjunction with members of the NAYSPS-funded program community to produce the research. Research questions varied across the four identified case sites according to the needs of the particular sites, although all studies were guided by the NAYSPS evaluation framework (Cousins & Chouinard, 2007).

The study designs were all quite similar with each study relying on multiple sources of information and evidence. Given that most sites had not been collecting evaluation or project monitoring information over time, the designs were limited to retrospective cross-sectional explorations of processes and impacts. While the studies used fairly traditional approaches to gathering data (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, focus groups) they were well informed by cultural wisdom and local knowledge. A two-day central workshop was held in order to collaboratively plan and set expectations for the studies.

Two over-arching objectives for the multiple case study were identified:

1. understanding the impact of NAYSPS-funded projects on community, youth, etc.
2. understanding project implementation strengths/weaknesses and possibilities for improvement

These objectives were sufficiently broad as to encompass the specific research questions generated at the local case level.

Findings

Several of the themes that emerged were associated with intended outcomes that align with NAYSPS-funded project objectives. In addition to intended outcomes, some of the studies identified unintended consequences of the projects, both positive and negative. The identified themes that surfaced for discussion are:

- Relationship building and support networks
- Optimism / hope / confidence building
- Protective factor augmentation
- Risk factor reduction
- Cultural connections
- Openness/willingness to talk about suicide
- Community support and engagement

In addition to the evidence emerging about project consequences and impacts at individual and community levels, a variety of themes were associated with project processes. In general, such themes were associated with design and delivery or implementation issues, revealing what aspects or features of projects appear to be working or not, suggested improvements and learnings, and the like. The identified process themes were:

- Multidimensionality of programs and program contexts
- Intervention design features
- Cultural adaptations
- Cross boundary cooperation
- Evaluation and inquiry activities
- Resourcing
- Gender issues

Issues for Consideration

The cross-case analysis has yielded a range of interesting findings that support the generation of a variety of issues for consideration. Such issues were broadly categorized as implications for knowledge development and implications for program practice and policy.

Implications for knowledge development

Knowledge development is a fundamental stream of inquiry and goal of NAYSPS. What can we learn from such initiatives and what are the implications for the way forward? How can such knowledge development be fostered? Here are the issues for consideration that we identified.

- *Ongoing inquiry*: The case studies, while limited in the extent to which they can show impact, clearly demonstrated benefits to youth and community. To complete this emerging picture and to provide new evidence or experience on what works to prevent youth suicide ongoing inquiry is essential. Specifically, a commitment to local-level evaluation and action research and to more rigorous

forms of evaluation further along the results stream will help to identify and clarify effective approaches to suicide prevention.

- *Early impact:* The real value of the case studies has been the demonstration to decision makers and stakeholders at various levels what the early effects of NAYSPS are, and how communities and youth are involved. Some of the learnings arising from the case studies are:
 - Youth engagement is essential and beneficial. Whether helping to inform the development of projects, being involved in project delivery or being recipients of activities and project experiences, it is essential to focus on youth and to foster engagement. Youth relate to and feed off of one another and benefit from activities and processes in different ways. First, engagement can lead to enhanced feelings of self-worth, relationship building, leadership, safety and skill development, and so on. But it can also reveal to youth the complexities and sensitivities of experience with suicide, loss, grief and related emotions and coping mechanisms that may be available.
 - Community support and relationship building as elements of effective practice. Initiatives that build on community support and relationship development with youth and among other community members are likely to be effective in raising awareness about suicide and strategies that can be effective in its prevention.
 - Community leadership plays a key role. Effective approaches to suicide prevention are necessarily community-based and, in particular, grounded in cultural traditions and norms. There is a clear role for community leadership to ensure that relevant projects fit within communities and resonate with the perspectives and expectations of community members.
 - Suicide prevention requires broad contextual understanding. Holistic approaches that consider at broad levels the forces and influences at play within communities are important to suicide prevention. Decisions about how to balance a focus on protective or risk-reduction factors ought to take the larger environmental context into account. Such considerations might include grief, addictions, housing issues, racism, poverty, unemployment, and the like. With limited resources communities may need to choose between investing in protective factor augmentation or risk-reduction, and such priority setting should be done on the basis of wider environmental considerations. Further, a given suicide prevention project represents a single intervention for youth who may face many risks for suicide outside the factors that are being targeted by the project. This

underlines the importance of awareness of the broader context and forces at play.

Implications for program practice and policy

The studies also generated food for thought about program practice and policy. Four salient considerations emerged:

- *Resourcing and sustainability:* Despite the Government of Canada's obligation and commitment to ongoing support to First Nations and Inuit suicide prevention, it is important to consider the sustainability of NAYSPS-funded initiatives in the face of limits on ongoing NAYSPS financial support. Consistent with the objectives of NAYSPS, consideration needs to be given to partnership development and cross-boundary connections that can lead to long-term sustainability. The resource question implicates not only financial requirements but also human resources. The ongoing development of volunteer bases and the integration of suicide prevention projects with community development projects are possible routes to sustainability. Comparatively speaking, partnership development and cross-boundary cooperation are the most likely sources of sustained program activity (i.e., suicide prevention is everyone's business). Volunteer networks may be helpful but may represent a relatively unsteady basis upon which to build sustainable suicide prevention projects, given that volunteers can burn out, particularly when working in this context.
- *Inquiry capacity development:* An important objective of the multiple case study was research and evaluation capacity building. Systematic inquiry about planned programs and suicide prevention projects has strong potential to foster sustainability. Evidence can be used for local project development through the identification of strengths and weaknesses, do's and don'ts. But it can also serve as leverage for partnership development, funding support and other approaches to developing sustainable initiatives.
- *Direct training:* Training and skill building among youth and others was overtly or implicitly part of the NAYSPS-funded initiatives examined in this study. The benefits of such training, at individual and community levels, were well documented. High among them was awareness building beyond the specific training event. It is interesting to note that training in the projects was not restricted to suicide awareness, response and intervention. In some cases it focused on more general knowledge and skill development (e.g., cadets, kayaking) and provided a means for gaining self confidence, self-value, mastery, and therefore enhanced protective factors. Strategies to adapt training to community, cultural and even linguistic norms are likely to be most effective.

- *Broad based training:* Most of the direct training initiatives studied were targeted toward youth or community workers who have direct contact with youth. Given the foregoing comments about situating projects within more broad-based environmental contexts and the importance of youth relationship building, it makes sense to consider expanding training opportunities to involve others. Parents, family members, friends and volunteers stand to benefit from focus on a variety of topics ranging from coping strategies to parenting skills in order to support network development



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Table of Contents	vi
1. Background and Overview.....	1
2. NAYSPS: Program Description.....	1
2.1 Guiding Principles.....	2
2.2 NAYSPS Logic Model.....	3
3. Purposes of and Rationale for the Multiple Case Study.....	3
3.1 Overarching objectives for the Multiple Case Study.....	6
3.2 Selection of Cases.....	6
3.3 Structure and Governance of the Multiple Case Study.....	7
3.3.1 Basic Structure and Governance.....	7
3.3.2 Reporting.....	8
4. Case Study Descriptions.....	8
4.1 Saskatchewan: The ‘Journey to Wellness’ (J2W) project of the Battlefords Tribal Council Indian Health Service (BTC IHS).....	8
4.2 Québec: ‘ <i>Projet Pairs-aidants</i> ’ in the Uashat mak Mani-utenam Community.....	10
4.3 Labrador: ‘Kayaking and Youth Support’ Group programs of the Nunatsiavut in communities of Hopedale and Nain.....	12
4.4 Alberta: The Hobbema Community Cadet Corps Program (HCCCP) in the Hobbema community.....	14
5. Cross-case analysis.....	16
5.1 Analytic approach.....	16
5.2 Cross-case variation	16
5.3 Project Impact-related themes	17
5.3.1 Relationship building and support networks.....	18
5.3.2 Optimism / hope / confidence building.....	19
5.3.3 Protective factor augmentation.....	20
5.3.4 Risk factor reduction.....	20
5.3.5 Cultural connections.....	21
5.3.6 Openness/willingness to talk about suicide.....	22
5.3.7 Community support and engagement.....	23
5.4 Project Process- and Implementation-related themes.....	23
5.4.1 Multidimensionality of programs and program contexts.....	24
5.4.2 Intervention design features.....	24
5.4.3 Cultural adaptations.....	25

5.4.4	Cross boundary cooperation.....	27
5.4.5	Evaluation and inquiry activities.....	28
5.4.6	Resourcing.....	29
	Gender issues.....	30
6.	Discussion.....	31
6.1	Summary of main findings and contribution.....	31
6.2	Limitations.....	32
6.3	Issues for consideration	33
6.3.1	Implications for knowledge development.....	33
6.3.2	Implications for program practice and policy.....	34
	References.....	36



1. Background and Overview

The National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (NAYSPS), a national initiative created in 2005 to address increasing rates of suicide and attempted suicide among Aboriginal youth, is now in its sixth year of operation. In 2007 an evaluation framework was developed in consultation with key stakeholders across Canada and in consideration of existing literature in the area (Cousins & Chouinard, 2007). That document identified a variety of evaluation questions associated with primary, secondary and tertiary prevention and knowledge creation objectives. Several strands of inquiry were proposed as possible NAYSPS evaluation activities. These included the development of an inventory of community initiatives funded under NAYSPS, a survey of baseline indicators, a multiple case study and a knowledge integration study.

Since its inception, the roll out of NAYSPS encountered delays due to a variety of factors and with direct implications for evaluation activities. Yet a significant number of community initiatives have been funded under the NAYSPS banner over the past number of years. To that end, an inventory of community initiatives has been developed (First Nations and Inuit Health Branch-FNIHB, 2007-8) and is currently being updated and expanded. Also, special study intended to contribute to identified information needs at national, regional and community levels recently has been completed (Chouinard, Moreau, Parris, & Cousins, 2010).

The evaluation framework (Cousins & Chouinard, 2007) called for a variety of strands of inquiry to meet the information needs of a wide range of NAYSPS stakeholders. One such strand was a multiple case study to “provide in-depth knowledge about a small number of projects, particularly in terms of project development, implementation, and consequences for knowledge development and use.” (Cousins & Chouinard, 2007, p. 35). In this report we present the results of such a multiple case study.

We proceed with a brief description of NAYSPS and some background information. Next we elaborate on the rationale for and intended purpose of the multiple case study, followed by a specification of the structure and methods used for the study. We then provide a brief summary of each of the cases.. The bulk of the present report is devoted to the cross-case analysis of the findings from the four reports. We present the findings in thematic format corresponding to the overarching objectives of the multiple case inquiry. Finally we conclude by identifying limitations of the study and generating a list of issues for consideration.

2. NAYSPS: Program Description¹

The National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy is a \$65 million, evidence-based initiative created in partnership with Health Canada, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and the National Inuit Youth Council (NIYC), and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN).

¹ This section is adapted from Chouinard et al., (2010).

It is part of the Mental Health and Addictions (MHA) cluster within Health Canada and is aimed at improving health outcomes for First Nations and Inuit. The purpose of the strategy is to work in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments as well as Aboriginal organizations and communities to address high suicide rates among Aboriginal youth. To date, separate program and implementation guides have been created for First Nations living on reserve and for Inuit communities (FNIHB, 2007a; FNIHB, 2007b).

Suicide rates among First Nations people and Inuit are substantially higher than rates reported in the general population. While the overall suicide rate among First Nations communities is approximately twice that of the total Canadian population, the rate among Inuit communities is 6 to 11 times higher than the general population (Kirmayer, Fraser, Fauras, & Whitley, 2007). Although suicide has multiple causes and contributors, the literature links these high suicide rates to a number of factors including the erosion of conditions to promote security of identity, colonization and rapid cultural change, trans-generational grief associated with residential schooling, cultural oppression, marginalization, and inadequacies in the child welfare system (Kirmayer, Fraser, Fauras, & Whitley, 2009).

Recognizing these factors as well as the rising suicide rates in First Nations and Inuit communities over the last two decades (Kirmayer et al., 2007), the primary goal of NAYSPS is to reduce the risk factors associated with First Nations and Inuit youth suicide and promote the protective (preventive) factors against suicide. However, since each First Nations and Inuit community is affected differently by suicide (Kirmayer et al., 2009), all activities funded under NAYSPS focus on supporting community-based solutions that respect local cultures and traditions, as well as the unique strengths, needs, and ways of doing things in individual communities.

2.1 Guiding Principles

According to program documentation, NAYSPS initiatives are guided by a set of agreed upon principles. To summarize, funded strategies must:

- be evidence-based;
- support community-based approaches;
- be culturally appropriate;
- address all levels of prevention;
- involve youth;
- consider varying levels of community readiness;
- promote the prevention of suicide as the responsibility of everyone-communities, agencies, organizations and governments; and
- promote life and well-being (NAYSPS, 2006).

2.2 NAYSPS Logic Model

Figure 1 illustrates the logic model for NAYSPS developed in conjunction with the program framework (FNIHB, 2006). This logic model is essential to all ongoing planning and evaluation initiatives. It highlights the primary, secondary, tertiary prevention, and knowledge development components intended in the strategy.

3. Purposes of and Rationale for the Multiple Case Study

The multiple case study is designed to provide in-depth knowledge about a small number of projects, particularly in terms of project development, implementation, and consequences for knowledge development and use. The diverse contexts covered by the NAYSPS initiative provide a rich opportunity to examine interventions at the micro level in selected unique and varying contextual circumstances (Cousins & Chouinard, 2007).

Case studies of selected interventions would provide an ‘up-close’ look at NAYSPS-funded community initiatives and their early effects within the community context. Building on the initial set of individual case studies is a cross-case analysis which carries with it considerable potential to answer many questions laid out in the evaluation framework. Cross-case analysis enables the generation of knowledge about suicide prevention practices particularly in terms of challenges, responses to challenges and best practices at the community level. To that end, the present multiple case study has the potential to meet national accountability demands while at the same time fostering learning and understanding about what works and under which circumstances.

An important value of the multiple case study approach lies in its potential to foster capacity building at the community level, a goal that is part and parcel of the philosophy underlying NAYSPS (FNIHB, 2006). Specifically, the literature has demonstrated that the preferred mode of inquiry concerning interventions in aboriginal communities is participatory and collaborative approaches (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007). Participatory evaluation involves persons trained in social science or evaluation methods and practice *working in partnership* with members of the program community to plan, design and implement the inquiry from start to finish. Members of the partnership bring different contributions to the table. The trained evaluator(s) brings first and foremost knowledge expertise of evaluation logic and methods. On the other hand, members of the program community bring two important contributions: their intimate knowledge of the intervention under study and their knowledge of the context within which the intervention is being implemented (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998)

Together the trained evaluator and program community members work in partnership to create new knowledge at the local level through systematic inquiry. Within the context of aboriginal communities, participatory approaches are particularly powerful because they enable the knowledge being generated to be respectful of and consistent with indigenous ways of knowing (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007). The knowledge generated, then, is entirely meaningful to members of the local community and has great potential to

National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy Logic Model

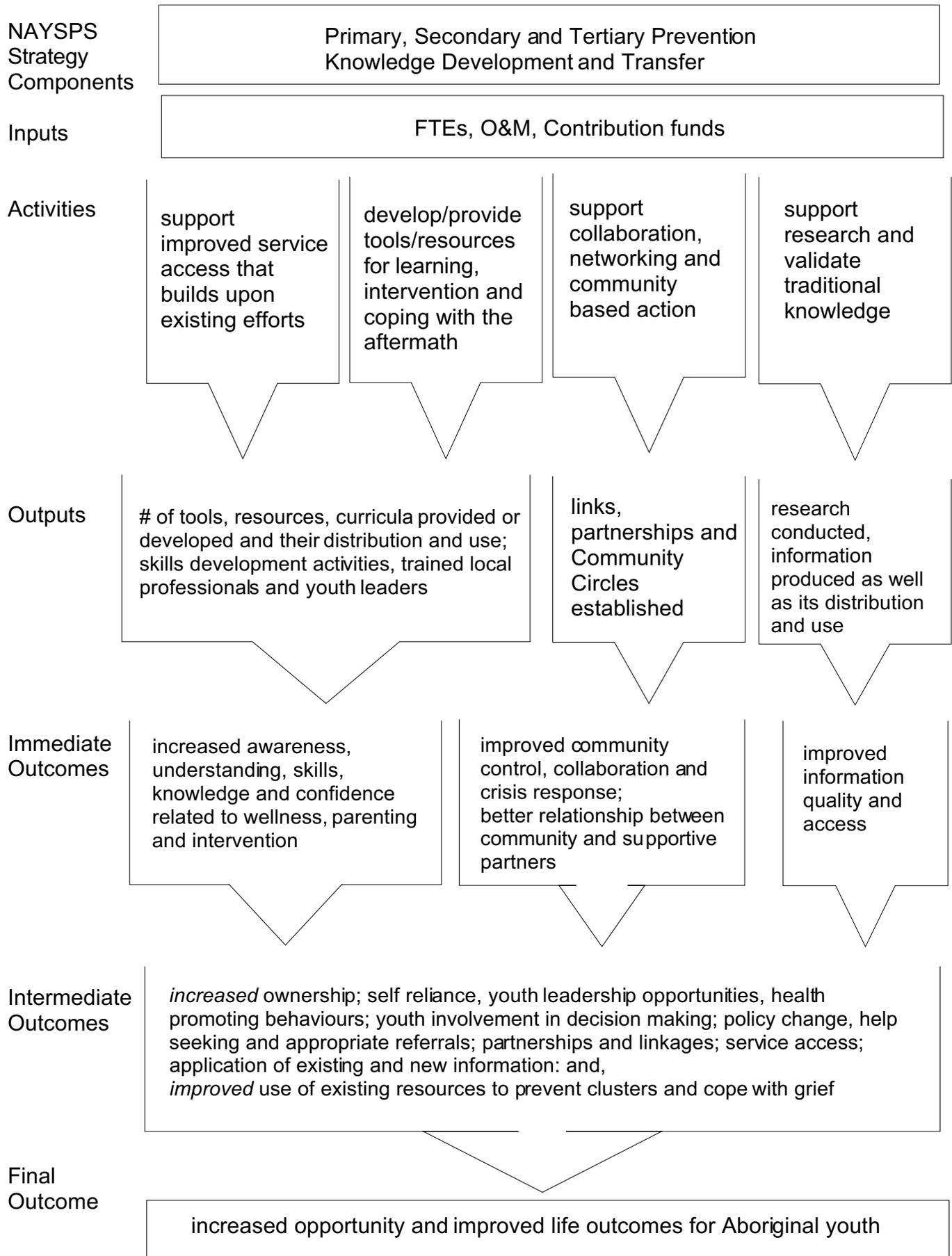
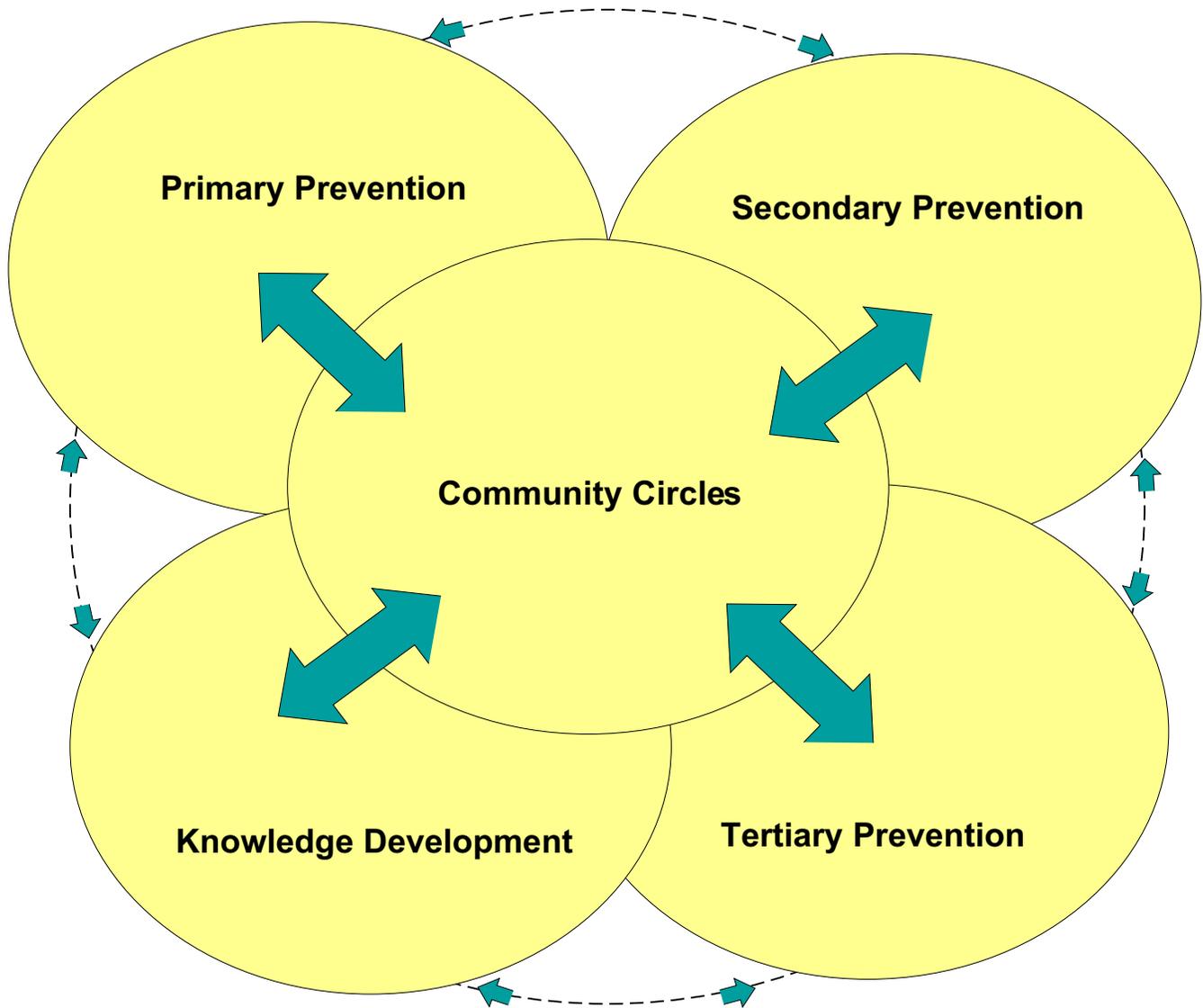


Figure 1) A More Culturally Appropriate View of NAYSPS Program Logic



enhance learning about their intervention and its impact on the social or community problem under consideration. Moreover, local community members develop their skills in planning and implementing systematic inquiry, skills that have strong potential to benefit them in the context of monitoring and evaluating other community initiatives (not to mention other community leadership activities).

3.1 Overarching objectives for the Multiple Case Study

Each case study team developed research objectives for the local case study. The teams were encouraged to draw from the NAYSPS evaluation framework (Cousins & Chouinard, 2007). Two overarching objectives for the multiple case study were identified:

1. understanding the impact of NAYSPS-funded projects on community, youth, etc.
2. understanding project implementation strengths/weaknesses and possibilities for improvement.

These objectives were sufficiently broad as to encompass the specific research questions generated at the local case level.

3.2 Selection of Cases

With the assistance of NAYSPS HQ and regional coordinators, four cases were selected for the present study. Each case included a NAYSPS-funded project that had reached a relatively mature state of implementation. The cases could be within a single community or could involve multiple communities that were involved with the same project. The idea was to identify communities where relatively intense and well established NAYSPS-funded activities are occurring and, perhaps even anecdotally, preliminary evidence of community impact or benefits accruing. Regional coordinators were best situated to assist with this determination.

In this way, the cases provided a good basis for examining issues associated with program development and implementation as well as preliminary outcomes at the individual and community level.

Given these considerations, the multiple case study would benefit from the inclusion of a diverse set of community sites that collectively vary according to such criteria as:

- regional representation (no more than one case site per region);
- linguistic representation (English and French);
- scope and reach (multi community vs. single community; small and focused vs. large and complex);
- regional considerations (e.g., North of 60 vs. South of 60), and Aboriginal context (First Nations, Inuit);
- link with other mental health initiatives (high vs. low).

The selected cases are:

- Saskatchewan: The ‘Journey to Wellness’ (J2W) project of the Battlefords Tribal Council Indian Health Service (BTC IHS), implemented within different communities within the Tribal Council; (BTC IHS, 2010)
- Québec: ‘*Projet Pairs-aidants*’ in the Uashat Mak Mani-utenam community (Wood, Descent & McKenzie, 2010);
- Alberta: The ‘Hobbema Community Cadet Corps Program’ (HCCCP) in the Hobbema community (Hutchinson & Sanderson, 2010);
- Labrador: ‘Kayaking’ and ‘Youth Support Group’ programs implemented in the communities of Hopedale and Nain. The programs follow Nunatsiavut’s adaptation of NAYSPS guidelines: ‘Innuqatsiarniq Strategy for Inuit Living in Inuit Communities’ (DHSD, 2010).

Initially, five cases were identified for study, the fifth being from the Northern Region. Ultimately, this case proved to be ill-suited to the parameters of the multiple case study and proponents decided to withdraw from the inquiry activity.

3.3 Structure and Governance of the Multiple Case Study

3.3.1 Basic Structure and Governance

The multiple case study consisted of four individual community cases, selected on the basis of criteria described above. Each individual case study adhered to the principles of participatory evaluation: a ‘mentor’ (or mentors) or trained evaluator (or someone with solid training and expertise in methods of social inquiry, and sensitivity to the aboriginal cultural context) was identified locally and worked in partnership with a team of community members to jointly plan, produce and report on a local study of the NAYSPS-funded projects with particular focus on program development and implementation and effects and community impacts. Studies were selected within regions and therefore the mentor(s) were local to the region, yet external to the community.

The multiple case study was centrally coordinated by the team leader (B. Cousins) in the capacity of principal investigator and consultant to the identified mentors on the basis of contractual obligations with FNIHB.

Representatives of each case project, including mentors for some cases, and NAYSPS regional coordinators and HQ personnel attended a two-day training session in Ottawa in October, 2009. The workshop was led by B. Cousins and focused on expectations and input for the multiple case study. On Day 1, representatives from each group presented an overview of their focal NAYSPS-funded project. On Day 2 of the workshop, case-specific groups worked on planning activities for their case study. A timeline was laid out including intended deliverables in the form of interim and final reports. Subsequent communications between B. Cousins and respective teams took place via email and teleconference.

3.3.2 Reporting

Reporting from the case studies was generally co-authored by the mentor and the community team members. An interim report was submitted by each group in January 2010, followed by teleconference meetings with B. Cousins to discuss case study progress, challenges and suggestions.

Draft final reports were required of case teams by March 2010. Initial intentions to provide feedback to teams and develop the cross-case analysis in March were delayed due to competing demands on the team leader. However, volunteers from each case project were identified. The draft case reports were circulated to this group and members were asked for input concerning the identification of implementation and outcome themes arising across the cases.

The team leader provided case specific feedback in May 2010 and circulated a draft report to the cross-case team. The initial draft was compiled by B. Cousins based on input from the cross-case team and a thorough analysis of the case reports. Revisions were made based on input from the cross-case team as well as NAYSPS HQ personnel.

4. Case Study Descriptions

To follow are brief descriptions of each case study. The complete versions of the case studies appear in Appendix B (1-4) of this report. The intention here is to highlight the nature of the focal NAYSPS-funded project, the questions guiding the inquiry and a brief summary of findings. To follow are findings emerging from the cross-case analysis.

4.1 Saskatchewan: The ‘Journey to Wellness’ (J2W) project of the Battlefords Tribal Council Indian Health Service (BTC IHS, 2010)

The Journey to Wellness (J2W) project is an eight week program that involves a facilitator working with youth aged 12-18 years of age. Participants receive a sequenced set of sessions that are framed positively toward healthy living styles while at the same time exploring risk factors, suicide prevention and other suicide related issues. The sessions are heavily activity-oriented and designed to engage youth. The sessions included: relationship building, problem solving, self-esteem building, facts and myths of suicide, networking within each community, life planning, emergency planning and finally, a celebratory event to close out the sessions. J2W has been delivered along gender and age group divisions to promote comfort and safety. Initially the focus was on girls since it was assumed that boys would be more difficult to reach. Boys, by the end of the first year, demanded to have their own programming, demonstrating success of the J2W strategy of delaying male specific programming until more was known about the boys’ needs and wishes.

The program was delivered and evaluated in six First Nations communities. The case study included data spanning a three-year period. Evaluation was built into the program

from the earliest implementation period. The initial plan to generate evaluation data session by session gave way to a more economical pre-test – post-test focus group design.

The objectives for the case study were a combination of questions from the J2W project logic model and from selected questions drawn from the national evaluation framework (Cousins & Chouinard, 2007).

Major Questions:

- Implementation Issues (from Cousins & Chouinard 2007)
 - Are resources adequate to the development of suitable projects at the community level?
 - What are the sustainability challenges to the project?
- Planning and Engagement Issues:
 - What helped or hindered the planning of J2W?
 - What helped or hindered the implementation of J2W in each of its time periods (Year 1, 2, 3)?
- Impacts for participants
 - Do Participants find J2W interesting, helpful?
 - Do Participants retain knowledge from J2W?
 - Do participants use skills in sessions? In other settings?
 - Does participation affect attitudes or beliefs about suicide?
 - Does participation contribute to self-concept changes?
- Knowledge Development Issues:
 - To what extent have evaluation of NAYSPS community projects been evaluated?
- Knowledge Development Outcomes:
 - To what extent has new knowledge been created or existing understandings been developed about increasing protective factors? Reducing risk factors?
 - To what extent have project coordinators used evaluation data to improve activities in the project?
 - What are lessons learned in planning, implementing, and evaluating J2W?

Several streams of data were collected including surveys, focus groups, program reporting and files, staff reflective journals, poster sessions and Facebook pages. Data were collected in pre-post, on-going and cross-sectional formats.

The study presents findings to the questions in an integrated way, drawing on the multiple sources of evidence in response to the guiding questions. Briefly, a variety of factors were found to assist in the planning of JW2, including organizational practices linked with empowerment and First Nations values, youth participation, management support, experience with other programs and the use of evaluation and pilot sites.

NAYSPS resources place significant limits on specific youth suicide prevention work, and so planning decisions around J2W took into account resource limitations. Based on the BTC IHS's experience, it would be necessary to locate additional resources if the program was to continue. The recent decision by the Canadian Government to extend NAYSPS for another two years is helpful in this regard.

A variety of factors fostered the implementation of the program over the three-year period. Some examples were: youth participation from initial planning onward, program design based on best practices, connecting with school activities, and health promotion orientation in J2W activities (e.g., focus on healthy socializing, protective factors, increasing problem solving skills).

Evidence about outcomes, specifically effects on youth, was mixed. The study reported several outputs including the number of youth that participated (358 of youth attending on reserve schools in Grades 5-12) with a retention rate of 95% of participants. Only five youth discontinued participation in J2W within the three years and ten youth were asked to leave because of disruptive behaviours. Outcome indicators suggested that satisfaction among youth with the program was quite high. There was extensive evidence to show that learning occurred during the program among nearly all participants, and also some indications of modest transfer of knowledge and skill beyond the program. For example, the first year participant results indicated 100% retention of key ideas from Sessions 2-7, within those sessions. Yet several of the outcome indicators from J2W were somewhat mixed and difficult to interpret.

Evidence of application outside sessions was the most challenging to capture, however, 40 participants from previous years volunteered in 2008-09 and 2009-10 to participate in a poster contest relating their retention of key J2W concepts. Qualitative analysis of poster themes show that all posters presented key ideas, including the importance of culture, steps in problem solving, emphasis on not choosing suicide, talking to others/reaching out, as well as the influence of drugs and alcohol on suicide risks.

The authors concluded by presenting a set of themes, several of which contained lessons learned. These were: the importance of youth engagement, relationship building between facilitators and participants and among participants, program development involving youth and best practices, organizational support and empowering management practices, community readiness and context, cultural identity, and the likely limitations in youth suicide risk reduction given the total amount of NAYSPS resources.

4.2 Québec: 'Project Pairs-Aidants' in the Uashat mak Mani-utenam community (Wood et al., 2010)

Projet pairs-aidants is part of a constellation of suicide prevention initiatives undertaken in the First Nations or Innu community of Uashat mak Mani-utenam in the north eastern region of Québec near Sept Iles. Within these communities there are several NAYSPS

sponsored initiatives that have been or are being implemented, including post-intervention protocol development, theatre animation with Innu youth, a youth community group formed to promote healthy living and sobriety, and a networking project to identify positive life factors and conditions and valuing of Innu heritage.

A distinct initiative known as *Projet pairs-aidants* is an adapted form of ‘Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training’ (ASIST) training by LivingWorks organization developed initially in English and subsequently translated into French language. The training is about suicide prevention knowledge and skill building and is designed both for youth wanting to engage in youth suicide prevention as well as community ‘*sentinels*’ (gatekeepers) or professionals/service providers working within communities. The project was selected for the multiple case study because of maturity (three years of implementation), access to available data (documents, participants, trainers), and measurability of outcomes. The objectives of the program consist of: training of peer helpers and community professionals; developing knowledge and skill to recognize and respond to calls for help; increasing confidence in providing care and applying intervention knowledge and skills; and identifying youth groups at risk.

Projet pairs-aidants is delivered in a two-day format and is led by an accredited trainer who originates from the community working under the supervision of an ASIST trainer from outside the community. The two-day training included the development of knowledge and awareness of those at risk of suicide and highly interactive, practical, practice-oriented intervention applications. Several elements of the usual program were adjusted to tailor the intervention to the Uashat mak Mani-utenam community. Included were the addition of a sharing day and a resource day (presented only once, March 2009) and the integration of the mother tongue of participants into the training where possible.

The scope of the evaluation study was defined by six sessions of ASIST delivered over a three year period (2007-2009) with the overarching question, To what extent did the ASIST training empower participants in suicide prevention? The specific questions guiding the evaluation were divided into seven themes:

- Characteristics of participants and respondents;
- General appreciation for the ASIST training program;
- Elements of the ASIST training program retained by participants;
- Use of the training program by participants;
- Program impacts on individuals and community;
- Effectiveness of local elements added to the ASIST training; and
- Supplementary issues.

The primary sources of data for the study were professional members of the community who participated in the program (e.g., emergency workers, police, nurse, N=9) and natural peer helpers (youth able to support known persons at risk of suicide, N=22) and the two trainers. The final sample of professionals and youth (31 of a possible 71)

completed a questionnaire survey² and the trainers were interviewed. Results across data sources were integrated and presented by theme by the evaluation team.

Briefly, the results of the study were quite favourable. The level of appreciation for the training was good with evidence of empowerment and augmentation of confidence to help someone in distress. The content of the training was accessible and the format engaging for participants. Opportunities to practice intervention were particularly effective.

Some improvements were suggested, including adjustments to cultural context, use of homogenous groups (youth, professionals) and attention to translation issues (English to French to Innu).

Aspects of the content most readily retained by participants were situation-based or practical examples and activities which helped participants develop knowledge and skill and to recognize signs of suicide. The evaluation team noted that some content was particularly sensitive and emotional as it related quite directly to personal experiences and relationships with suicidal persons and/or survivors (those whose loved-one has committed suicide).

Considerable evidence concerning transfer of training to the community context was noted as were outcomes such as change in professional practice, augmentation of referral rates, engagement with other community projects, and so forth. Generally the added elements were favourably received although data quality limited conclusions regarding sharing days and the resource day that was offered. Yet the integration of mother tongue into the training was found to be particularly beneficial in promoting understanding of complex concepts and skill development.

The report ended with a series of lessons learned directed toward trainers, community members, program developers and funders.

4.3 Labrador: ‘Kayaking and Youth Support’ Group programs of the Nunatsiavut in the communities of Hopedale and Nain. (DHSD, 2010)

Over the past number of years, several NAYSPS-funded initiatives have been taking place among the seven communities served by the Nunatsiavut Government (NG). These have ranged from youth forums, to strategy development, to consultations among youth, to the development of a mobile mental health multidisciplinary team. In the present case, the Labrador case study team decided to focus on two specific initiatives situated within the ongoing NAYSPS-funded activities. These initiatives were located in the communities of Nain and Hopedale, respectively.

²Slightly different versions of the questionnaire were given to youth and professionals. Data were ultimately collapsed since there were no appreciable differences in response patterns and the N at the group level was small.

Level I and II kayaking courses reintroduced the kayak in Nain and were welcomed by youth and community. The program is intended to reunite Elders and youth in a traditional activity that requires courage, endurance and perseverance. It allows participants to learn new skills and to connect with land and sea and build relationships. The initiative is framed as a suicide prevention intervention to the extent that it is intended to provide a means of motivation and encouragement for youth to live life to the fullest and to reconnect with Inuit culture and pride.

In Hopedale, the focal intervention was the Hopedale Youth Support Group which began in 2007. The group was formed in response to an identified need; community youth were found to be engaging in mischievous activities and unhealthy behaviours late at night on weekends probably due to parental alcohol abuse behaviours rendering the home an undesirable place to be. The youth group meets twice per week during weekdays and stays overnight on Saturdays in a community centre. They participate in sharing circles, educational sessions, land-based activities among several other engaging activities.

The objectives for the case study were drawn from the national evaluation framework (Cousins & Chouinard, 2007). Specifically, the following questions were addressed:

- Have youth been engaged in planning suicide prevention or in broader programs that are relevant?
- Have Aboriginal youth leadership opportunities been created?
- Are community members able to recognize suicide risk factors, warning signs and at risk behaviours?
- Have training, tools, resources that foster resiliency among Aboriginal youth been developed? Are they culturally relevant?
- To what extent has there been an increase in resiliency factors? Which factors have increased?
- To what degree have communities received training to develop skills?
- To what extent has community capacity been developed to respond to and stabilize crisis?

The study is essentially a retrospective survey of youth and professional community workers involved with the initiatives. Hopedale and Nain youth completed the same questionnaires but Hopedale participants filled out a paper and pencil version while Nain youth did the survey on-line. The questionnaires were very similar. A third questionnaire was developed for professional community workers (e.g., mental wellness staff, crisis response team members, community support workers) and was completed on-line. Responses were received from 32 youth (19 Hopedale, 13 Nain) and 13 professional workers.

While the design of the study does not permit strong attribution of outcomes to the actual identified initiatives it does provide the opportunity to gauge opinions and attitudes about

suicide prevention, resiliency factors and related outcomes. The questionnaires did provide an opportunity for participants to comment on their engagement with the initiatives and their assessment of them.

There was strong evidence from both Hopedale and Nain communities that youth are sensitive to and aware about suicidal tendencies and risk factors. They identified suitable sources of support for those at risk of suicide and recognized the importance of staying connected to family and culture. There were some differences between the two groups in terms of, for example, ability to be open and honest with support workers

The large majority of youth from both groups acknowledged that the interventions in which they participated had made a positive difference in their lives.

Almost all of the professional community workers responding had taken the Applied Suicide Intervention Skill Training (ASIST) program. Most believed that suicide can be prevented and that the best prevention options would be developing parenting skills, fostering self-esteem, and directly addressing the effects of suicide and self harm. Generally, the group were of the view that health professionals are available to assist during crisis and, to a lesser degree, that agencies within the community can work together on suicide related issues.

4.4 Alberta: The Hobbema Community Cadet Corps Program (HCCCP) in the Hobbema community (Hutchinson & Sanderson, 2010)

The Hobbema Community Cadet Corps Program (HCCCP) is not directly focused on suicide prevention but it does have a very strong focus on promoting positive life factors and reducing risk factors. Having such a strong compatibility of goals with NAYSPS the program has received funding from NAYSPS for several years.

The cadet program was developed and is implemented by two RCMP officers who modeled the program design on the developmental assets framework (DAF) of the Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN. The philosophy of appreciative leadership is integral to the program: the intention is to empower cadets' passion and strengths to do their best with opportunities, resources and role models available. Ideally, they become role models for their peers and the younger generation in their respective communities.

There are many components to the program such as meetings two nights per week, special activities and trips, participation in community events, public presentations, and so forth. According to the logic model for the HCCCP, the final outcome is "Increased opportunity and improved life outcomes for Aboriginal youth." The program began in 2005 but was incorporated in as a society in 2006.

The objectives for the evaluation were developed based on input at a national NAYSPS evaluation workshop and subsequently from community members. The questions guiding the study were as follows:

- What impact has the Cadet program provided to active cadets? What impact have the objectives of HCCCP had on active cadets?
- To what extent have Hobbema youth stopped attending Cadets? What are their reasons/concerns?
- How do we obtain more community support for the Cadet program from parents, Elders, Band representatives and others in the community?
- What are the unanticipated consequences of the Hobbema Community Cadet Corps program?

The design of the study was essentially a hybrid design using multiple sources of evidence such as questionnaire surveys of active cadets on 40 developmental assets ('then' and 'now' versions available from a small number), questionnaires from former cadets, discussions and interviews with a variety of community members (e.g., grandparents, Elders, parents, HCCCP board members), observations by the principal investigators and documents and records. The design, although predominantly a retrospective cross-sectional affair, also permitted some pre-post comparisons (then and now questionnaires) as well as comparison to norms of the developmental assets survey.

Briefly the study found that cadets who are active in the Cadet program experience an increase in the number of developmental assets, including an increase in friendships, confidence, hope, improved school attendance, and so forth. Persons tended to leave Cadets because their friends left, they could not access transportation, a lack of uniforms, circumstances in their lives or the program was not appealing to them.

During the course of the evaluation, the evaluation mentors wondered if the evaluation question should be changed from "How can we obtain more community support" to "How did we obtain more community support?" In short the actions of respected community leaders during the time frame of the evaluation demonstrated how more community support was obtained. This included increased opportunities to participate, augmented communications, and visible commitment from high-profile community members.

Finally several unanticipated consequences of HCCCP were identified such as: program effectiveness; national and international publicity; ebbs and flows of community support; some backlash in the community; friendships, international exchange opportunity and unanticipated external political support.

5 Cross-case analysis

5.1 Analytic approach

Each case report was thoroughly analyzed by the principal investigator for the multiple case study and the salient findings were summarized. Summaries were then read thematically under the two overarching objectives for the study: understanding impact and project implementation. A set of themes emerged from the analysis associated with each of the objectives. Each theme was then described and illustrated with evidence drawn directly from the case analysis.

The draft cross-case findings were then circulated among participating regional participants, the coauthors of this report. The participants were either community members with close association to respective NAYSPS-funded initiatives, or they served as research mentors on the respective case studies. Each member of the cross-case team also had a copy of the respective draft case study report.

These colleagues reviewed the draft findings against their own understanding of the community initiatives and the findings associated with each of the cases. The cross-case team members were tasked to read especially for errors and omissions. Were the citations of evidence and associated interpretations correct? Was the proposed set of themes comprehensive? Well reasoned? Clear? Were possible additional themes missing from the draft set? Cross-case team members were asked to add value to the findings as presented here.

5.2 Cross-case variation

As is evident in the foregoing case descriptions, there was considerable variability across-case studies.

First, the selected community initiatives were distinct and varied. Each of the cases had as part of its design a primary prevention orientation, consisting of activities focused on promoting mental health, increasing resiliency and reducing risk through public education/training and activity engagement. Some initiatives were only indirectly focused on suicide prevention, HCCCP in Hobbema and the Kayaking program at Nain, being good examples. These programs provided youth with structured activities focused on protective factors such as discipline, rigor, healthy choices, and connections with traditional cultural activities. J2W and *Projet pairs-aidants*, on the other hand, involved training that more directly focused on suicide prevention, providing youth and others with training for understanding suicide and potential prevention and crisis intervention skill building. Similarly, the Nunatsiavut Youth Support Group in Hopedale, provided youth with a forum for personal sharing and learning about the complexities of suicide and prevention.

Yet most of the community projects studied also involved at some level, members of the wider community and were at least partly collaborative. As such broader community effects were potentially observable.

Second, the unit of analysis varied across-cases. The focus for J2W was on youth and the study included data from six participating First Nation communities. Both the Nunatsiavut projects and *Projet pairs-aidants* of Uashat mak Mani-utenam were situated among a suite of NAYSPS-funded initiatives and were selected for study by virtue of their relative maturity and accessibility to data. They both focused on Inuit or First Nations youth as well as other community members and service providers such as health-care, social and justice workers.

Third, the quality of evidence varied across studies. Some of the projects had a history of engaging in evaluation-related activities since the inception of the initiative. The Hobbema cadet program, for example, had an association with the developmental assets framework of the Minneapolis-based Search Institute and therefore had access to the Developmental Assets Profile, a quantitative tool that had been developed and used elsewhere in the general population. Over the three year span of the J2W project, evaluation had always been built in. Initially, feedback was obtained from participants at the end of each of eight one-hour sessions although this procedure subsequently gave way to a more streamlined, less obtrusive approach. The case team members for the BTC IHS initiative, therefore, were in a position to build on existing evaluation data as part of the present case inquiry. Such a luxury was not available to the other sites and consequently questionnaires and interview protocols were developed for the specific purpose of the case study.

Despite these differences, in some ways the case studies were remarkably similar. Although there was some interest in looking at findings over time or, at some level, making before and after comparisons, generally, each study employed a retrospective cross-sectional design. The use of multiple methods (surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations) helped to augment to richness of the findings, but the basic design did not provide for strong evidence of attribution (i.e., observed effects being the direct result of the intervention under investigation). The cases did provide, however, fairly rich self-reported information on effects and aspects of project processes that were likely to have contributed.

With the general limitations of the case studies in mind, and we now turn to a review of the cross-case findings. We first look at impact-related themes that emerged and then at aspects of implementation and project processes

5.3 Project Impact-related themes

Several of the themes that emerged were associated with intended outcomes that align with NAYSPS-funded project objectives. In addition to intended outcomes, some of the

studies identified unintended consequences of the projects, both positive and negative. In any case, the identified themes that surfaced for discussion here are:

- Relationship building and support networks
- Optimism / hope / confidence building
- Protective factor augmentation
- Risk factor reduction
- Cultural connections
- Openness/willingness to talk about suicide
- Community support and engagement

We now turn to a discussion of each theme, drawing from the case level evidence base.

5.3.1 Relationship building and support networks

Perhaps most salient among emergent themes was the concept of relationship building, particularly with regard to youth development of networks of support. As the following excerpt illustrates, such networks served as both a resource within which youth could confide when and if needed as well as youth serving as a support for others.

...most respondents [indicated] that they have someone to talk to when they have a suicidal thought and that most youth felt they were able to help others when they confided in them about suicidal thoughts (Nunatsiavut, p. 14)

Indeed some of the interventions were specifically designed to promote the development of such outcomes with youth (e.g., J2W, *Projet pairs-aidants*) and these were observed to heighten confidence among youth to express feelings and emotions to others and to learn how others feel. Typically references to support networks referenced friends and family, but in some cases, others within the community with whom youth come in contact provided the support. At Hobbema, family context survey scores of the Developmental Assets Profile were found to improve the most, from a retrospective pre-post comparison. Also, anecdotal evidence from family implicated the cadet program as benefiting relationships. For example,

A father said that he is better able to communicate with his teenage son now that the son is in Cadets. (Hobbema, p. 28)

Of course, benefits of NAYSPS-funded initiatives were not limited to youth since in some cases professional and support workers were directly implicated in training (Uashat mak Mani-utenam) or in served as a source of data for the study (Uashat mak Mani-utenam, Nunatsiavut). In Nunatsiavut there was good evidence to show that youth are confident that support workers understand suicide (more evident in Hopedale than in Nain) and support workers themselves were confident in their knowledge and understanding and ability to help. Ninety percent of the respondents indicated that they

had completed ASIST training. Yet the authors provide an interesting take on the findings, suggesting that youth are more comfortable consulting family and friends.

It is interesting to note that while adults/professionals often look to solutions outside the community (professional resources, facilities, etc.) the youth are very realistic in their expectations. They most often look to family and friends for support versus counselors or professionals. (Nunatsiavut, p.17)

A similar observation was made by the authors of the Québec study.

Il est intéressant que les gens considèrent la famille comme une ressource. Il faudrait effectivement que les ressources professionnelles, notamment celles à l'extérieur de la communauté, développent des liens étroits avec les proches, afin de renforcer davantage le soutien à apporter aux personnes suicidaires. La famille et les amis sont certainement essentiels dans toute démarche de résolution positive et durable d'une crise suicidaire. Par ailleurs, si l'on considère les proches comme des ressources d'aide potentielles, il faut les soutenir dans cette responsabilité, les informer du soutien disponible, les aider à comprendre ce que vit la personne suicidaire. (Uashat mak Mani-utenam. p. 60)

Yet, despite the inclination to consider family and friends as resource persons, there was an observation that the number of referrals received by professionals has risen since the ASIST training had begun. It was also suggested that there was increasing cooperation among community professionals and that the training had led to the development of networks within the community with an interest in suicide prevention.

5.3.2 Optimism / hope / confidence building

Evidence from each of the studies emerged to suggest that NAYSPS-funded initiatives supported the development of self-esteem and self-concept among youth and a sense of hope and optimism concerning suicide prevention. Hobbema cadets were suggested to have developed positive outlooks, to improve in school performance, and to have augmented pride, discipline and confidence. In Uashat mak Mani-utenam, enhancing confidence to intervene was an explicit objective of the *Projet pairs-aidants* and the study revealed a sense that youth and professionals had heightened confidence to act or intervene in the face of crisis. While such evidence was self-reported from participants in the ASIST training, trainers corroborated the finding.

En effet, les formateurs ont remarqué chez les personnes qui ont suivi à la formation une augmentation significative de la confiance à pouvoir aider quelqu'un en détresse à mesure que la session de formation progressait (Uashat mak Mani-utenam, p. 54)

The Nunatsiavut study provided self-reported evidence from youth that a sense of optimism was developing in terms of youth making healthy choices and being able to make a difference in terms of suicide prevention.

One of the promising aspects of this difference of perception between the two groups is that projects and initiatives that foster opportunities for growth and resilience development within youth may change how youth view their options in life. (Nunatsiavut, p. 17)

Front line workers also remarked on the observed self-esteem among youth participating in Nunatsiavut interventions.

J2W in Saskatchewan was also very much intentionally focused on developing healthy life styles and choices and evidence of confidence in this respect emerged.

In the focus groups the major themes that the youth brought forward were the problem solving steps they learned, who and how to reach out and ask for help if they were thinking of suicide, the self-esteem activities and the importance of having good self-esteem, and finally the impact of drugs and alcohol in their lives through the life-line activity. (BTC IHS, p. 21)

5.3.3 Protective factor augmentation

Uniformly the NAYSPS-funded interventions studied included elements that were oriented toward protective factor augmentation. By definition the cadet program in Hobbema and the Kayaking intervention in Nain (Nunatsiavut) were all about engaging youth in challenging and positive experiential activities. The Hobbema study found that the HCCCP, based on the Developmental Assets Profile, led to the augmentation of more developmental assets than was initially imagined. This was framed by the study authors and an unexpected positive outcome.

Among the most encouraging results of this evaluation research is the marked increase in developmental assets between the “now” and “then” survey results... the patterns are strong and consistent, and also tend to parallel the qualitative evidence from comments of the cadets themselves, and the observations of adults such as parents, leaders and volunteers. (Hobbema, p.22)

In Nunatsiavut, youth benefited from a safe supportive environment (YSG, Hopedale), developed a sense of faith in community leaders (YSG, Hopedale; Kayaking, Nain), and an appreciation of the need to stay connected with culture and language (Kayaking, Nain)

The BTC IHS initiative was more directly targeted toward augmenting protective factors among youth. One element of the training was a poster contest where the ‘STOP, Options, Decide, Act’ (S.O.D.A.) problem solving model was a major theme. The study provided evidence to show that the problem solving model stuck with the participants.

In all the focus groups the youth that participated mentioned not only learning the steps to S.O.D.A. but also were able to explain these steps. (BTC IHS, p.21)

5.3.4 Risk factor reduction

While the focus for most interventions in the study was on protective factors, identifying and addressing risk factors was also very much part of community initiatives. ASIST training in Uashat mak Mani-utenam and also in Nunatsiavut are very much targeted at such challenges. The Youth Support Group in Hopedale (Nunatsiavut) actually found its

origins in risk reduction in the sense that youth were found to be wandering the community late on weekend nights, many because of alcohol and substance abuse in home environment. Youth and frontline workers in Nunatsiavut both readily identified “drinking and drugs” as being linked to suicidal ideation. Such was also the case in the BTC IHS study as illustrated by the following reference to an innovative ‘life-line’ activity which is part of J2W.

In an on-line survey, a theme that was evident was the impact of drugs and alcohol on their life decisions. Although not a lot of time is spent on discussing drugs and alcohol J2W participants create their life line from today’s date to the age of 30 and place all things they would like to accomplish in life by then. Then participants discuss how these events can affect their lifeline. This activity appears to make an impression on their lives as does discussing the effects of alcohol as a depressant. Of all the sessions that were given, excluding the final celebration, the youth chose the lifeline session as the one they learned the most in. (BTC IHS, p. 21)

In Uashat mak Mani-utenam, one of the observed impacts of the training was change in professional practice, particularly with regard to recognizing people at risk of suicide, listening and understanding their perspective and concerns and overcoming feelings of powerlessness or developing the confidence to act.

Les professionnels interrogés ont affirmé être plus ouverts, plus à l’écoute envers les personnes suicidaires, en plus d’avoir plus d’assurance lors de leurs interventions. (Uashat mak Mani-utenam, p. 59)

5.3.5 Cultural connections

Almost 90% of the Nunatsiavut youth responding to the survey felt connected to their cultural heritage. In Hopedale 94% of youth ranked ‘Pride in Inuit culture’ as their greatest strength. While it is not possible to claim that NAYSPS-funded initiatives fostered such identity formation, the claim seems plausible given the nature of the interventions. Cultural connections can be seen as protective factors in the context of suicide prevention as has been observed by Kirmayer and associates (2009).

In Hobbema some distinct and varied manifestations of cultural connectedness emerged in association with the HCCCP. First, several older cadets are beginning to assume leadership roles and some have expressed clear goals and educational expectations and the intention to return to “...Hobbema to seek a leadership role in the community”. Another aspect of cultural connectedness was rather serendipitous. Due to space limitations and logistical constraints youth from all four Bands congregated in a common meeting space. This led to the development of friendships with youth from other bands, something that might not have happened in the absence of the cadet program. The developing appreciation of cultural activities was another noteworthy aspect. For example,

Several people commented that often young people do not want to attend round dances or various other cultural events. Now some of the Cadets use Facebook to encourage each other to attend.

The peer support from Cadets is making it “cool” to attend. (The day of that conversation, a few Facebook postings from Cadets talked about going to a round dance that night.) (Hobbema, p. 29)

In Hobbema, it was also observed that Elders wished to be involved in the program on a voluntary basis.

5.3.6 Openness/willingness to talk about suicide

Chouinard et al. (2010) observed from interviews with regional and community members across the country that there exists a community-level hesitancy to talk about the problem of suicide. Findings emerged among the case studies to suggest that some headway may be being made in this regard. In Uashat mak Mani-utenam, for example, the ASIST training was becoming an important catalyst to community mobilization, with observations that community members are more willing to discuss the problem.

Plusieurs membres de la population ont décidé de prendre en charge le mieux-être des membres de la communauté, de briser les tabous entourant le suicide en l'abordant de façon ouverte.
(Uashat mak Mani-utenam, p. 60)

The authors noted, however, that some content in the training was difficult to cover because it evokes emotional responses and impinges on certain sensitivities among youth and others who have experienced suicidal loss.

In Nunatsiavut, there was some variation over communities, with almost all Hopedale youth participating in the YSG indicating that “they can be open about their problems and feelings and are comfortable talking with support workers”. In contrast only about half of the Nain youth indicated such.

The J2W training in Saskatchewan directly encourages discussions about suicide. An interesting comment was provided by a male youth who engaged in a video project; he provides an interesting perspective on the community understanding of the problem and willingness to be open.

I chose to make this video because I wanted to see what people in the community think about suicide. We drove around the community interviewing people, on what they think about it and how to prevent it. Many people had a bunch to say and what could be the alternative. Seems to be that everyone is affected by suicide but don't really talk about it. (BTC IHS, p.)

Results from a focus group further illustrate community hesitancy but show promise in terms of youth attitudes and willingness to discuss.

Most of the youth in the focus groups felt community views on suicide were split between those who are suicide concerned and those who express no concern at all. There seems to be a split decision on this. Focus group youth all felt strongly though that their communities were not open to talking about suicide. Some even mentioned that youth are open to talk about suicide, but the adults and Elders are not. (BTC IHS, p. 25)

5.3.7 Community support and engagement

As mentioned above, some definite gains in community support and engagement were becoming evident to the author of the Uashat mak Mani-utenam and that the training was leading to network development within the community. Another aspect of connection with community relates to the support of and engagement with the NAYSPS-funded intervention by members of the community. The HCCCP provides an excellent example of such engagement. The authors show how this outcome developed over time, as it was certainly not always the case from the outset of the cadet program. While in the early going, the program was met with some measure of indifference, in recent months there is considerable enthusiasm growing among community members. The following excerpts attest to this observation

...all but one Board member (who had notified in advance that she would not be able to attend) attended an all-day-Saturday meeting to review evaluation findings and add Board members' comments. They also discussed potential improvements to the Cadet program and how they could use evaluation findings and methods in the future. (Hobbema, p. 38)

...it appears that, after the invalid November annual general meeting, a few strong and respected community leaders decided to "take the program back." Besides continuing to devote many hours to development of the NCPC funding proposal, these community leaders made a concerted effort to inform and involve others in the community. (Hobbema, p. 39)

We can see from this last excerpt the authors' hypotheses as to why such community support and engagement may have been developing. The importance of champions of the program was underscored.

5.4 Project Process- and Implementation-related themes

In addition to the evidence emerging about project consequences and impacts at individual and community levels, a variety of themes were associated with project processes. In general, such themes were associated with design and delivery or implementation issues, revealing what aspects or features of projects appear to be working or not, suggested improvements and learnings, and the like. The identified process themes were:

- Multidimensionality of programs and program contexts
- Intervention design features
- Cultural adaptations
- Cross boundary cooperation
- Evaluation and inquiry activities
- Resourcing
- Gender issues

We now situate our discussion of each theme within the findings arising from the respective cases.

5.4.1 Multidimensionality of programs and program contexts

Kirmayer and associates (2009) concluded that salient among best practices for suicide initiatives within Aboriginal communities is comprehensive multi-dimensional approaches “involving indicated, selective and universal targeting, a spectrum of interventions, a range of settings and sectors, and multiple levels of action (individual, family, community)” (p. 99). Of the four community-based initiatives in the current study, two focused on interventions that were situated among a suite of activities, many receiving NAYSPS support and funding. Specifically, in Nunatsiavut, the Kayaking and Youth Support Group programs were implemented alongside such activities as youth video production, land based walk, ASIST training and development, suicide prevention walk, and the youth council in Nain.

Similarly, in Uashat mak Mani-utenam, the *Project pairs-aidant* was run among a variety of NAYSPS-sponsored programs and activities including suicide intervention protocol development, healing sessions for youth affected by suicide, a theatre workshop program for young Innu, development of a life promotion network focusing on protective factors, a walk toward the future involving youth from nine additional communities, and a back to the land project focusing on traditional values and culture. In both instances, these collections of activities are multifaceted and involve a spectrum of community members including youth family and others.

5.4.2 Intervention design features

All of the studies provided some evidence about features or aspects of interventions that had potential to facilitate intended outcomes among youth and community. Some of these aspects were associated with cultural adaptations and are discussed below. In most cases interventions were designed either to provide a safe environment for youth (e.g., Hopedale Youth Support Group) or to provide instruction about positive mental health and positive identity (e.g., BTC IHS training). The J2W training was also provided to youth structured along gender and age group lines in order to enhance safety and to augment the potential for learning.

At some level, all of the interventions included a significant focus on learning, whether directly through the provision on training sessions (e.g., J2W, *Project pairs-aidant*) or indirectly/implicitly by embedding learning into structured activities (e.g., HCCCP, Kayaking). In training initiatives, intended learning was embedded into the curriculum or program plan or objectives for instruction. The J2W study provides an explicit eight-session layout of content and intended objectives, for example. The *Projet pairs-aidant* program was also highly structured. In both cases, it was evident that content was

designed and adapted to be both accessible and engaging. Yet, as expressed by trainers with the *Projet pairs-aidants* there would be room for improvement along these lines.

Innover en adaptant le contenu de la formation ainsi que le matériel pédagogique afin de le rendre encore plus accessible aux membres de la communauté (Uashat mak Mani-utenam, p. 65)

In J2W, content was adapted on the basis of youth input, an important element that was observed elsewhere as well. For example, in Hopedale (Nunatsiavut),

Approximately two thirds of the youth feel that they have a say in how the group is run and that their decisions are valued and acted upon. This is an area that can certainly be worked on [and] improvements made in youth engagement and empowerment (Nunatsiavut, p. 15).

As the quotation implies, the authors of the case study identify this element as being an important focus for ongoing development.

But in addition to direct instruction, learning was intended to be facilitated by sharing and interaction with peers and others (e.g., Hobbema). This was especially the case in the Uashat mak Mani-utenam peer helper program where, among other elements, a ‘sharing circle’ was integrated as part of the training program. Essentially the program provided youth with an opportunity to discuss sensitive thoughts and feelings and a forum for practicing under supervision newly acquired skills (*Projet pairs-aidants*). One participant in the J2W program identified peer sharing as her/his favourite aspect of the program.

The best part is when you get to talk and to feel how everybody is feeling and some students feel the same way as me (BTC IHS, p. 15)

Yet not everyone was of the same view, as the following comments about dislikes with the program reveal.

Sharing my feelings because I am shy.

When one person talks too much in a group. (BTC IHS, p. 16)

Despite best efforts to adapt input and to make it relevant, accessible and non-threatening, this was sometimes easier said than done. *Projet pairs-aidants* trainers commented on the sensitive nature of some of the content and its emotional affects. Overtly exploring possible reasons someone might have for wanting to take their own life would be an example of such content that was sensitive to those who have had recent experiences with suicide within their own context.

5.4.3 Cultural adaptations

Adapting programs and content to community and cultural contexts was a process that most initiatives embraced directly, a practice identified by Kirmayer et al. (2009) as being essential. Indeed in some instances (e.g., Kayaking) the intervention itself was grounded in traditional ways of knowing and cultural considerations with an explicit

focus on developing, instilling or otherwise improving protective factors. Kayaking “promotes Inuit culture where youth can take pride in themselves, their goals and aspirations.” (Nunatsiavut, p. 9)

The Hobbema study commented on the community and cultural complexities within which the cadet program is situated.

Nothing exists in a vacuum and nothing is isolated from anything else. Every comment, incident, event, and relationship within the Cadet Corps is perceived and interpreted in the context of a rich tapestry of culture, history, family and politics. The past is always present – for better and for worse. (Hobbema, p. 42)

The authors go on to describe a potential clash of cultures that defined the complexities involved. Specifically, the cadet program is founded on the basis of two cultures – Aboriginal culture and “police culture” – that have historically (distant and recent) experienced considerable tensions and difficulties. The authors put the program context into perspective indicating that they:

... saw tangible and visible evidence of personal relationships of mutual respect, trust and affection between individuals from the two cultures. However, it would be naïve to think the bigger picture of uneasy cross-cultural and cross-institutional relationships will not affect working relationships, especially as the Cadet Corps moves forward with new responsibilities (Hobbema, p. 42)

Cultural adaptations, it would seem, will provide ongoing challenges for the initiative.

The *Projet pair-aidants* and associated ASIST training were adapted up front in an attempt to facilitate ‘fit’ with Innu culture. Developed externally by LivingWorks, the Uashat mak Mani-utenam program implementers recognized the need to enhance relevance and accessibility to the local community. One of the trainers was from the local community working under the supervision of an external ASIST trainer and a good deal of the delivery (including adaptation of materials) was in the local indigenous language. Such practices undoubtedly helped facilitate engagement, learning and uptake.

L’utilisation de l’Innu-aimun a certainement été un des éléments déterminants de l’appropriation du contenu de la formation ASIST par les membres de la communauté. (Uashat mak Mani-utenam, p. 63)

Yet certain challenges emerged. For example, the original LivingWorks material was first translated into French and subsequently into Innu-aimun. The authors observed that this process may have obscured some of the principles integrated into the original LivingWorks content – that is to say, they ran the risk of losing something in the translation.

5.4.4 Cross boundary cooperation

A fundamental principle of NAYSPS is to promote the establishment and development of projects that would lead to long term sustainability through fostering connections across organizational, professional, sector, and disciplinary boundaries (FNHIB, 2004). Such principles are fully aligned with the view that holistic approaches to intervention are most likely to be effective (Kirmayer et al., 2009), and Chouinard et al. (2010) concluded that ongoing headway in this area would be important to ongoing program development and sustainability:

There is a need at the community level to break down cross-jurisdictional boundaries so that all of the resources would be brought to bear on what is needed. (p. 25)

Across the four cases we noted some variability with respect to the extent to which cross-boundary linkages had been established. Nunatsiavut and Hobbema are examples of cases where focal projects were immersed on contexts where such relationships had been formed.

In Nunatsiavut, questionnaire results indicated an awareness of partnerships on behalf of respondents:

Within the service provider respondent group 61.5% believe there are various agencies in the community that work together on initiatives related to suicide. All respondents from this group believe these agencies are the Schools and Nunatsiavut Government DHSD [Department of Health and Social Development]....75% of respondents felt the Nunatsiavut Government Youth Division/Rising Youth Council were also partners in addressing youth concerns. (Nunatsiavut, p. 16)

The cadet program at Hobbema, on the other hand, revealed cross-boundary connections that were directly tied to the NAYSPS-funded project. Here are some examples.

- Every week that evaluation mentors attended a Cadet night, parents/grandparents/ guardians and volunteers from the community were in attendance.
- One Band has made a facility available at minimal cost to the Cadet program. ...Other Bands have contributed and continue to contribute in other ways through steadfast verbal, financial and in-kind support.
- Thanks to the efforts of one individual, Lions International has made a commitment to provide financial and other support. Locally, the Lions Club has provided many forms of help such as providing Lions Park and hosting a barbecue; presenting the Hobbema Community Cadet Corps with a banner to take in parades, inviting Cadets to march with or behind them in parades, and donating money. The Lions Club has made a public commitment to support Cadets in Jamaica as well.
- A travel agency fronted the money for airfare and tickets until the Cadet Corps was able to get it to them.
- A local Health Unit came to the Cadets several times to help all the Cadets and their parents get appropriate shots before they left for Jamaica.
- Since the program began in 2005, K Division of RCMP has made available staff time of two officers, equivalent to more than one full time staff position. Considering salary, benefits and access to RCMP vehicles, that is a significant in-kind value. (Hobbema, p. 47)

It is noteworthy that Hobbema also negotiated a long term resource arrangement for the cadet program with the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC), representing a significant cross-boundary connection. More detail on this relationship is presented below under the ‘resourcing’ theme.

By contrast, the case report for the J2W program in Saskatchewan showed awareness of the importance of wider partnerships within the community but that development in this area remains an important goal for growth. The authors did note, however, the centrality of relationships with schools as an important element to J2W’s success.

Partnerships also need to be established “*with the school, with therapists*”, with community resources. “*All these together could help lessen suicide risk...this little program all on its own isn’t going to lessen youth suicide.* (J2W, p. 30)

Having good relationships at the school is vital, especially with principals. Well-organized principals were able to consistently “*make sure that you have a place, a set room, has always been an issue...*” There was repeated confusion with one school about space arrangements, resulting in the program staff being unable to provide J2W to students in that year. (BTC IHS, p. 29)

The authors noted that schools in various communities are in varying states of readiness due to such factors as high staff turnover. Such variation presents obvious challenges to partnership development.

In Québec, ASIST training was provided to service providers from a variety of organizations. That the authors of the case report recommended, in discussing implications of their study, consideration of making such training obligatory to professional roles having direct contact with youth, attests to the premium placed on local partnerships in the community.

Évaluer la possibilité de rendre cette formation obligatoire pour tout employé qui travaille directement auprès de personnes à risque (ex : personnel scolaire, intervenants qui travaillent dans les foyers de groupes, personnel de la santé et des services sociaux, policiers, etc.) (Uashat mak Mani-utenam, p. 65)

5.4.5 Evaluation and inquiry activities

An observation made by Chouinard et al. (2010) was that some development of research capacity was evident across the country. Yet, the authors recommend continued attention to capacity building in this domain based on interviews with regional and community participants. Kirmayer et al. (2009) underscore this direction, advocating participatory action research at community level intervention sites.

In the present study, of course, evaluation capacity building is an explicit objective of the exercise. Substantively, we found variation in the extent to which evaluation had been integrated into the NAYSPS-funded initiatives that were studied. J2W had integrated

evaluation into the intervention from its inception and had developed a comprehensive and systematic approach. Evaluative feedback was obtained from youth participants at the end of each of the eight modules and ongoing adjustments were made on this basis. Yet, J2W ultimately found this approach to be overly labour intensive and cumbersome and decided to scale back to pre-intervention / post-intervention surveys of youth and follow up focus groups. In addition to these data, ongoing attendance, project reports, facilitator observations and other data streams informed program development and delivery.

The evaluation of the project was a learning curve for the project and each year staff became better at collecting meaningful and relevant information beyond just numbers of those attending. (BTC IHS, p. 8)

Despite this learning curve, the authors identified the benefits of a relatively heavy investment in evaluation and monitoring.

- Having an evaluation coach available from the very beginning strengthened the project design, and helped ensure evaluation from the beginning.
- Having evaluation from the start helped identify when individual activities were not achieving desired results. Changes could be made right away. (BTC IHS , p. 25)

Whereas BTC IHS was progressive with regard to the integration of evaluation into ongoing program implementation and development, the other cases were comparatively limited in this respect. In Alberta, the cadet program was founded on theoretical principles associated with the developmental assets literature and therefore put the Hobbema in a fortuitous position regarding systematic inquiry.

... the evaluation mentors were pleased to learn that the Search Institute of Minnesota has developed a standard Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) survey used to measure developmental assets. On behalf of this evaluation project, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada purchased the right to use the surveys, and obtained electronic copies of the surveys, and a guidebook for compiling, analyzing and using survey data. (Hobbema, p. 16)

While the existence and use of a instrument for evaluation purposes is a definite asset to the project, the instrument was only acquired and used at the point of the current case study inquiry. Evidence that evaluation had been integrated into program development and implementation was not available in Hobbema or in either of the other the *Projet pairs-aidants* or Nunatsiavut projects.

5.4.6 Resourcing

In the context of ongoing considerations about program sustainability, two of the case studies yielded evidence about the essential nature of resource availability. The respective contributions to them by Saskatchewan and Alberta community projects were quite distinct. In the case of Hobbema, a fortuitous connection led to the development of a formal proposal and ongoing funding for the initiative from a national agency.

In January 2010 the Cadet program was notified it would be receiving significant funds for the next three years through the National Crime Prevention Centre. Increased funds will make it possible to provide uniforms for all Cadets and may also add more access to transportation.

When the new funds arrive, the intent is to increase the number and variety of activities, extend contact into the schools, reach out more to parents and volunteers, and more systematically groom older Cadets to take on greater leadership roles within the Cadet Corps. As well, a cleaner and more appropriate facility may become available. (Hobbema, p. 37)

The opportunity came about as a result of a visit in 2009 of the federal Minister of Public Safety who, being summarily impressed by the program at Hobbema, encouraged the NCPC to pursue a funding relationship with the community. Several community members rallied to the challenge of formulating a proposal for funding and were ultimately successful in attaining the funds. As the foregoing quotations imply, this turn of events is likely to go a long way toward the sustainability and development of the program.

On the other hand, conclusions arising from the BTC IHS community suggest that J2W will not survive without additional ongoing funding, this despite considerable effort and energy to implement, develop, and grow the program.

The primary sustainability challenge is the ending of NAYSPS funding. Without continued funding from Health Canada, or another source, further work is not possible on this particular program. BTC and its member First Nations will continue, however, to do youth work they were doing before, including suicide prevention and mental health promotion in many other programs. (BTC IHS, p. 14)³

5.4.7 Gender issues

The final emergent theme regarding NAYSPS-funded processes is associated with gender. Specifically an interesting turn of events emerged within the BTC IHS community. The program was initially designed and delivered only to girls on the justification that exclusivity would promote safety and learning among the youth. Yet, once the program was up and running, the program developers came under pressure from male youth to develop program opportunities for them, which in turn facilitated access to this hard-to-reach group.

The J2W project deliberately chose to start its work with female youth, even though they are a somewhat less risk for suicide than boys. Boys were thought to be harder to engage, and project staff had more experience working with females. This proved to be a very sound strategy, as the

³ It should be note that Health Canada was in the process of renewal when the case studies were underway and was therefore seeking approval for the continuation of NAYSPS beyond its initial five-year funding commitment. A renewal decision on the Strategy was made in early March 2010, and that regions' funding processes were still ongoing at the time of the completion of the case studies.

boys - during the first “girls only” year – began demanding their own program. Finding boys to participate in focus groups to help develop the boys’ program was not difficult, and recruiting boys for their version of J2W proved very easy. (BTC IHS, p. 12)

Gender was also in issue in the Hobbema project. While the program was open for both male and female youth, instructors initially thought that the program would be more appealing to young males. At various times, the makeup of the cadet corps has been predominantly female, creating a need for strong female role models, which was not initially envisioned.

In each of the other communities male and female youth were integrated into the same project strands. No specific findings emerged with regard to gender from the other studies.

6 Discussion

We now turn to a discussion of the findings. In this section we first provide a brief summary of the findings and the limitations of the research and then move to issues for consideration. Specifically, we address implications for knowledge development and implications for program practice and policy.

6.1 Summary of main findings and contribution

Each of the four case sites pursued a different set of research questions depending on the information needs of the local community. Yet each addressed at some level questions about the impact of the NAYSPS-funded projects and the effectiveness of various aspects of the program components and processes. Impact and process were the two overarching themes that we explored in the present cross-case analysis.

Concerning impact, the seven themes that emerged across the cases were:

- Relationship building and support networks
- Optimism / hope / confidence building
- Protective factor augmentation
- Risk factor reduction
- Cultural connections
- Openness / willingness to talk about suicide; and
- Community support and engagement.

While these findings are somewhat tentative given the short time the projects have been implemented, they show a good deal of promise of impact at individual and community levels with regard to suicide prevention. Perhaps most salient among the findings were the surfacing of the issues for discussion and deliberation and the associated relationship building that occurred. Youth engagement and broader community-level engagement were evident across most of the sites.

We also explored several themes associated with program and project processes, most often related to practices that showed promise of effectiveness. The associated themes were:

- Multidimensionality of programs and program contexts;
- Intervention design features;
- Cultural adaptations;
- Cross boundary cooperation;
- Evaluation and inquiry activities;
- Resourcing; and
- Gender issues

The NAYSPS-funded projects included in this study were implemented in complex multidimensional contexts. Projects tended to be informed by local community contexts and adapted to cultural considerations. Often the projects involved a variety of stakeholders – especially including youth – within the local community either as delivery or support agents or as recipients of training or program activities. Yet there was considerable variation across case projects particularly with regard to ongoing evaluation and inquiry and sustainability considerations.

6.2 Limitations

The studies were equally resourced and guided by common principles of collaborative research. An initial central workshop assisted greatly in the development of the concept of the multiple case study and expectations for regional and cross-case comparisons.

The initial intention was to provide opportunities for cross-case sharing as the process unfolded. Efforts to structure and maintain an electronic platform for this purpose were thwarted by human resource constraints at the University of Ottawa. Project communications therefore tended to be centralized through the principal investigator through either email or telephone communications, which placed severe limits on cross-case communications.

In general, the production of case reports at the local level progressed as expected with some adjustments to timelines along the way. The study designs were all quite similar with each study relying on multiple sources of information and evidence. Given that most sites had not been collecting evaluation or program monitoring information over time, the designs were limited to retrospective cross-sectional explorations of program processes and impacts. While the studies used fairly traditional approaches to gathering data (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, focus groups) they were well informed by cultural wisdom and local knowledge.

The projects identified for study were still quite new and/or recent and are therefore limited in the extent to which they can provide solid evidence about the impact of NAYSPS funding and support. Although, this is a limitation of the present study, it should be noted that signs of very positive impact were available from each of the case contexts.

The cross-case analysis component was impeded by unanticipated delays and the piecemeal delivery of segments of the report to participating coauthors associated with the case projects. The delays were due to competing demands on the principal investigator, the result being limits on participants' opportunities to reflect on findings. Still feedback on a draft version was received and integrated into the final version of the report. The principal investigator provided each of the case report authors' feedback for their own consideration in the process of revising their documents. Consistent with agreements between Health Canada and the four case study projects, the revised case level reports are not included as an annex to this cross-case report.

6.3 Issues for consideration

The cross-case analysis has yielded a range of interesting findings that support the generation of a variety of issues for consideration. Such issues were broadly categorized as implications for knowledge development and implications for program practice and policy.

6.3.1 Implications for knowledge development

Knowledge development is a fundamental stream of inquiry and goal of NAYSPS. What can we learn from such initiatives and what are the implications for the way forward? How can such knowledge development be fostered? Here are the issues for consideration that we identified.

- *Ongoing inquiry:* The case studies, while limited in the extent to which they can show impact, clearly demonstrated benefits to youth and community. To complete this emerging picture and to provide new evidence or experience on what works to prevent youth suicide ongoing inquiry is essential. Specifically, a commitment to local-level evaluation and action research and to more rigorous forms of evaluation further along the results stream will help to identify and clarify effective approaches to suicide prevention.
- *Early impact:* The real value of the case studies has been the demonstration to decision makers and stakeholders at various levels what the early effects of NAYSPS are, and how communities and youth are involved. Some of the learnings arising from the case studies are:

- Youth engagement is essential and beneficial. Whether helping to inform the development of projects, being involved in project delivery or being recipients of activities and project experiences, it is essential to focus on youth and to foster engagement. Youth relate to and feed off of one another and benefit from activities and processes in different ways. First, engagement can lead to enhanced feelings of self-worth, relationship building, leadership, safety and skill development, and so on. But it can also reveal to youth the complexities and sensitivities of experience with suicide, loss, grief and related emotions and coping mechanisms that may be available.
- Community support and relationship building as elements of effective practice. Initiatives that build on community support and relationship development with youth and among other community members are likely to be effective in raising awareness about suicide and strategies that can be effective in its prevention.
- Community leadership plays a key role. Effective approaches to suicide prevention are necessarily community-based and, in particular, grounded in cultural traditions and norms. There is a clear role for community leadership to ensure that relevant projects fit within communities and resonate with the perspectives and expectations of community members.
- Suicide prevention requires broad contextual understanding. Holistic approaches that consider at broad levels the forces and influences at play within communities are important to suicide prevention. Decisions about how to balance a focus on protective or risk-reduction factors ought to take the larger environmental context into account. Such considerations might include grief, addictions, housing issues, racism, poverty, unemployment, and the like. With limited resources communities may need to choose between investing in protective factor augmentation or risk-reduction, and such priority setting should be done on the basis of wider environmental considerations. Further, a given suicide prevention project represents a single intervention for youth who may face many risks for suicide outside the factors that are being targeted by the project. This underlines the importance of awareness of the broader context and forces at play.

6.3.2 Implications for program practice and policy

The studies also generated food for thought about program practice and policy. Four salient considerations emerge:

- *Resourcing and sustainability:* Despite the Government of Canada’s obligation and commitment to ongoing support to First Nations and Inuit suicide prevention, it is important to consider the sustainability of NAYSPS-funded initiatives in the face of limits on ongoing NAYSPS financial support. Consistent with the objectives of NAYSPS, consideration needs to be given to partnership development and cross-boundary connections that can lead to long-term sustainability. The resource question implicates not only financial requirements but also human resources. The ongoing development of volunteer bases and the integration of suicide prevention projects with community development projects are possible routes to sustainability. Comparatively speaking, partnership development and cross-boundary cooperation are the most likely sources of sustained program activity (i.e., suicide is everyone’s business). Volunteer networks may be helpful but may represent a relatively unsteady basis upon which to build sustainable suicide prevention projects, given that volunteers can burn out, particularly when working in this context.
- *Inquiry capacity development:* An important objective of the multiple case study was research and evaluation capacity building. Systematic inquiry about planned programs and suicide prevention projects has strong potential to foster sustainability. Evidence can be used for local project development through the identification of strengths and weaknesses, do’s and don’ts. But it can also serve as leverage for partnership development, funding support and other approaches to developing sustainable initiatives.
- *Direct training:* Training and skill building among youth and others was overtly or implicitly part of the NAYSPS-funded initiatives examined in this study. The benefits of such training, at individual and community levels, were well documented. High among them was awareness building beyond the specific training event. It is interesting to note that training in the projects was not restricted to suicide awareness, response and intervention. In some cases it focused on more general knowledge and skill development (e.g., cadets, kayaking) and provided a means for gaining self confidence, self-value, mastery, and therefore enhanced protective factors. Strategies to adapt training to community, cultural and even linguistic norms are likely to be most effective.
- *Broad based training:* Most of the direct training initiatives studied were targeted toward youth or community workers who have direct contact with youth. Given the foregoing comments about situating projects within more broad-based environmental contexts and the importance of youth relationship building, it makes sense to consider expanding training opportunities to involve others. Parents, family members, friends and volunteers stand to benefit from focus on a variety of topics ranging from coping strategies to parenting skills in order to support network development

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