

Working Together to Achieve Healthier Weights in Yukon Communities

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Introduction & Background

- Working Together to Achieve Healthier Weights in Yukon Communities was one of two Yukon projects to receive funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada Innovation Strategy (Phase 1-2011).
- Project was coordinated by the Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research (AICBR) and developed and delivered in partnership with three Yukon First Nations' communities, Yukon Government's Department of Health & Social Services, and the Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon.
- We worked in partnership to create Yukon-wide community-based research partnerships devoted to identifying, planning, implementing, and evaluating short and long-term initiatives that focus on healthy lifestyles and healthy weights for Yukon families and communities.
- Achieving healthy weights is multi-faceted and complex; it is not just about how active people are or what they eat. It is also about the political environment, the built environment, and the social environment.
- There are multiple risk factors that contribute to childhood obesity: reduced sleep, increased sedentary time, increased consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, parental obesity, low parental education, reduced physical activity, and low-income levels ^{1,2,3}.
- Data has shown that rural and remote settings may also influence obesity rates, with a higher prevalence of obesity, and children and youth being less active ⁴.
- A Yukon-wide approach was chosen because we know that healthy children and youth are connected to healthy adults and healthy communities. We chose to not focus solely on obesity in children but to focus on healthy lifestyles and overall well-being.

Methods

This project was a community-based, participatory research project, coordinated by the Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research (AICBR) and delivered in partnership with three Yukon First Nation communities, Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon, and Yukon Government-Health & Social Services.

What is Community-Based Research?

- Grounded in collaborative, equitable partnerships, sharing responsibility, and building capacity from within; ^{5,6}
- End goal of change and positive action based on research outcomes; ^{6,7}
- Research is relevant, accessible, and accountable; ^{5,7}

Phase 1 (2011) included:

- Creating a steering committee that consisted of health practitioners, project team members, First Nation communities, non-profit organizations, policy makers, researchers, and government employees
- Developing and implementing community-based healthy weights related pilot projects in 2 rural Yukon First Nation communities;
- Evaluating existing obesity prevention/healthy lifestyle First Nation programs in one community to identify success factors and barriers to share with other communities;
- Conducting an environmental scan of existing Yukon policies and programs which support, achieve and/or maintain healthy weights in Yukon communities;
- Conducting a secondary analysis of the Yukon portion of the Health Behaviour of School-aged Children survey;
- Providing training in evaluation and knowledge translation for the project team and interested community members;
- Conducting a literature review to identify risk factors for overweight and obesity;
- Facilitating a Photovoice workshop and activity with youth to better understand their perceptions of health and;
- Process and outcome evaluation of pilot projects for subsequent expansion across the Territory to support our Phase 2 (2012-2015) application.

Objectives

With the overall goal to improve the health status of families, children and youth in the Yukon through multi-sectoral and multi-year attention to healthy weights, the intended outcome of Phase 1 (2011) was to inform and support program and partnership development, and promote healthy behaviours that will subsequently inform the integrated approach proposed in Phase 2 (2012-2015).

The objective for Phase 1 was to create Yukon-wide community-based research partnerships committed to planning, implementing, and evaluating long-term interventions that address individual and collective factors affecting child and youth healthy weights and obesity in the Yukon.

Key Results

Selkirk First Nation:

- Programming in Pelly Crossing focused on young parents with children aged seven years or younger
- Included activities that promoted culture, healthy diet, and land-based skills
- Weekly cooking classes (6 families per week)
- Formation of a Parents group (online forum)
- Weekly fitness work-out nights

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in:

- Initiated an extensive 20-week personal trainer program in Dawson City, involving 20 people (13 completed)
- Initiated a program to provide raised garden beds (30 interested families) to single parent families and Elders, and gardening classes to increase access and promote the growing of healthy food

Kwanlin Dün First Nation:

- Selected currently offered First Nation programs (8) offered in Whitehorse, which specifically target reducing obesity
- Created an evaluation framework, and did an in-depth evaluation of three initiatives (community garden, ski program, elders walking program) to identify success factors and barriers
- Purpose was to look at the ease of transferability and describe how other communities could adapt and implement
- Evaluation findings will inform proposed Phase 2 initiatives and will be of use to many others throughout the Territory

Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research:

- Initiated a Photovoice and art activity that involved a youth coordinator and 6 youth who were encouraged to express and photograph their perspectives of (un)healthy living in Whitehorse
- Photos were featured at the Whitehorse Arts Centre in September 2011
- Developed project evaluation and communication tools

Yukon Government-Health & Social Services:

- Conducted a secondary analysis of the Yukon portion of the Health Behaviour of School-aged Children survey with Queens University
- Held group discussions (12 youth) and a Knowledge Xchange Workshop (7 youth) with Yukon youth grades 6-10, to help understand the issue of self-confidence and focus on how it affects health; particularly in terms of weight management

Recreation & Parks Association of the Yukon:

- Conducted an environmental scan of existing Yukon policies and programs which support, achieve and/or maintain healthy weights in Yukon communities; and of Canadian promising/best practices to achieve or maintain healthy weights in rural, remote, and Northern communities
- Conducted a literature review to identify risk factors for overweight and obesity
- Although there are some Yukon strategies, frameworks or policies directed towards either healthy eating or physical activity, there do not appear to be any which specifically encourage healthy weights

Discussion

Outcomes from Phase 1 have proven to be successful interventions that can be replicated or adapted to other communities. Throughout Phase 1, we established partnerships to be able to expand this intervention in Phase 2 to include other communities in the Yukon, as well as interested communities and organizations across the North

For Phase 1 there were some unexpected outcomes.

Selkirk First Nation:

- There was greater demand for the cooking and nutrition classes and so additional funding was sought to make them weekly instead of bi-weekly classes.

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in:

- There was a much greater demand for the fitness trainer program, so the original 12 week program was extended to 20 weeks and financial support was sought to maintain the program so others may also participate after the pilot finished.
- Found that a community garden is not ideal for some people and so strategized to provide individual raised garden beds to Elders and mothers with young children. The demand is so great, there is a waiting list for these beds.

Kwanlin Dün Community Garden:

- Distance is a major factor for people to be able to access and use the community garden.
- A lack of a designated, paid garden manager or formal programming through the health department, as well as lack of resident expertise also compromises its success.

Recommendations

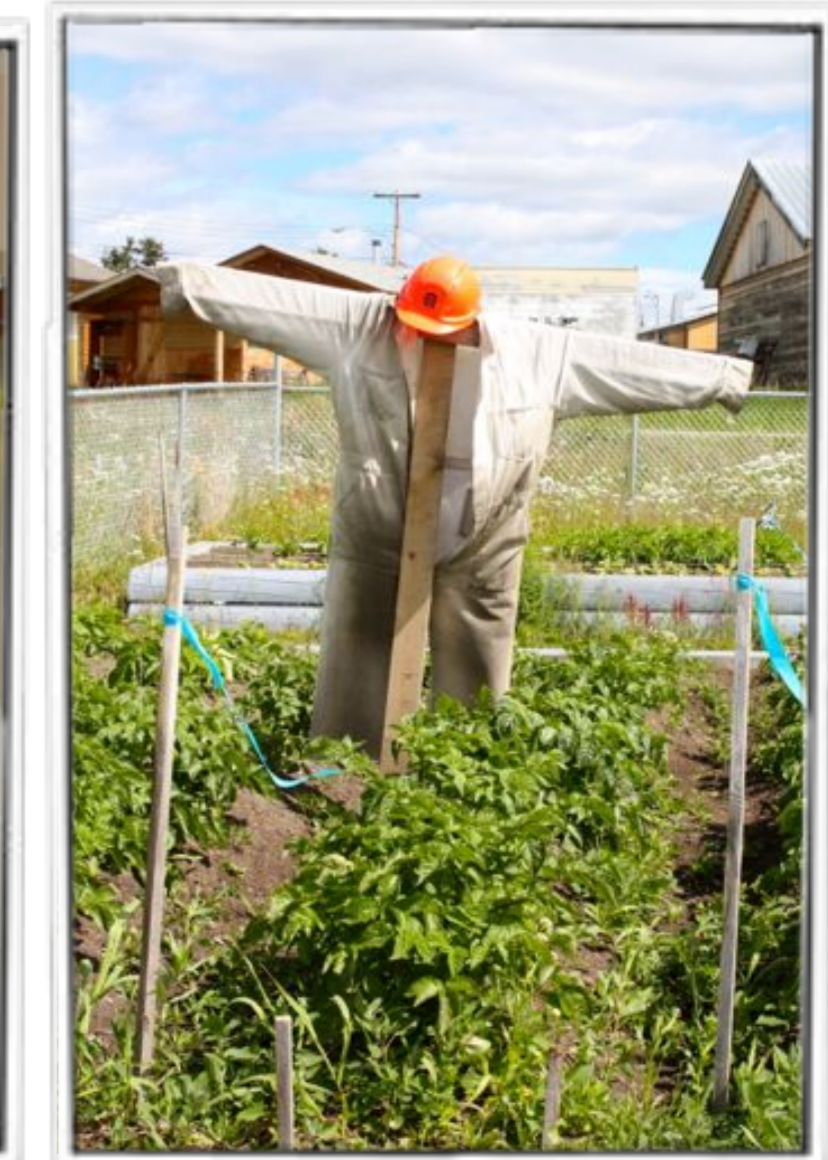
- There is limited information about overweight/obesity in the territory. The issue needs to be better understood so that we can then determine what the preferred future (healthy citizens – healthy weight) looks like.
- Motivated leaders, sustainability, co-operation and partnership are all critical components for successful interventions. Successful interventions build on what already exists, start small and build slowly over time.

Conclusions

Our team is a network of organizations and individuals working together and committed to achieve healthy weight and healthy lifestyles in the North. Building on the individual partner innovations developed during Phase 1 of this research, we plan to facilitate uniquely northern interventions across the Yukon and other northern regions with partners from rural communities, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners if successful with Phase 2 funding. As we prepare for the next stages of the project, we invite others who are interested to become involved in this great initiative.

While the Yukon is a distinct part of Canada, innovative interventions currently in use and implemented for Phase 1 may become important models of success that can be applied throughout the country, particularly within First Nations communities.

A holistic approach, which does not focus solely on weight is more appropriate. It is about healthy people, families, and communities; and is about balance between our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual selves.



Map adapted from: 2000. Her Majesty the Queen Right of Canada, Natural Resources Canada.
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