Directory of Innovative Practices in Health and Social Services in Official Language Minority Contexts

PRACTICE #24

Welcoming Community 2.0 (Ontario) and "Communities of practice: a collaborative approach to increasing French language services" Training

(See also Fact Sheet #25)

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ABOUT THE FACT SHEET

This fact sheet is part of the *Directory of Innovative Practices in Health and Social Services in Official Language Minority Contexts* (available at https://www.grefops.ca/directory_innovative_practices.html). The directory complements the *Organizational and Community Resources Self-Assessment Tool for Active Offer and Social and Health Services Continuity*, which was developed by the GReFoPS.[1] It presents local initiatives that respond to community needs and are considered innovative by the various actors involved in them. The practices were classified using an evaluation framework from the Health Council of Canada and definitions from the Public Health Agency of Canada. This enabled us to distinguish between emerging, promising and leading practices.

Some of these practices were suggested by Société Santé en français and the provincial, territorial and regional French-language health networks, or by other collaborators.

We refer the reader to the Introduction and Method document for information about the authors and collaborators, background on the project, a description of the methodology used to create the fact sheets, and definitions of the following concepts:

- Leading practice, promising practice, emerging practice
- Quality of evidence, impact, applicability, transferability
- Service coordination, service integration, liaison
- Active offer

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1 The tool is available in English and French and can be accessed at the following web address:
https://www.grefops.ca/selfassessment_tool.html (English version)
https://www.grefops.ca/outil_autoevaluation.html (French version)

Practice #24: Welcoming Community 2.0 (Ontario) and "Communities of practice: a collaborative approach to increasing French-language services" Training

This practice contributes to improving:

- Community resources: collaboration with key community players
- Organizational resources: hiring, retaining and training bilingual healthcare staff

The organization implementing this practice:

Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario

The information contained in this fact sheet comes mainly from four sources: (1) the web page of the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario; (2) an activity report on the Welcoming Community 2.0 project; (3) a webinar featuring some of the members and players in the Welcoming Community pilot project; and (4) the eQUITY Link training resource entitled "Communities of practice: a collaborative approach to increasing French-language services."

The documentation was completed by a telephone interview with Ms. Nancy Larivière, Project Coordinator for the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario, on June 7, 2021, and updated May 22, 2023, with the support of Geneviève Laferrière, Project Coordinator for the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario. In January 2025, Gabrielle Laurin, Project Coordinator for the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario contributed to a new information update. The Welcoming Community initiative has developed over time and currently continues in the form of a training on the eQUITY Link platform, which is presented in this directory (see Fact Sheet #25). Our research team decided to retain this fact sheet because of the relevance of the tools described in it. These tools were designed to help health managers and organizations to recruit and retain bilingual human resources who are capable of delivering healthcare services in French. This fact sheet therefore contains elements from the Welcoming Community 2.0 project as well as elements from the "Communities of practice" training available on the platform mentioned above.

Background

Recruiting, integrating and retaining healthcare workers with the language skills to offer services in French represent major challenges for many healthcare organizations. The purpose of Société Santé en français' 2013–2018 national strategy was to support community-based initiatives as a means of building collaborative and supportive processes to ensure better integration and retention of health and social services professionals in Francophone communities. In 2014–2018, Welcoming Community was part of a pilot project to promote the recruitment and retention of bilingual human resources in the health and social services field. One finding from the project was that community involvement can generate opportunities for networking, community engagement and internships. The positive results of the pilot project encouraged Health Canada to extend this project to more communities for the 2018–2021 period. As a result, the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario worked with five communities of practice: (1) Windsor and London, (2) Waterloo, Wellington and Guelph, (3) Niagara, (4) Mississauga Halton and (5) North Simcoe Muskoka. In 2023, to disseminate the lessons learned from this project, the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario produced a learning resource for users of the eQUITY Link platform and for health-care partners interested in improving access to French-language health services in francophone minority communities.

Société Santé en français and the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario define community of practice as follows: "Communities of practice are groups of people who come together to share and learn from each other, either face-to-face or virtually. They are linked by their common interest in a field of expertise and are driven by a desire and need to share problems, experiences, models, tools and winning practices. Members of the community of practice deepen their knowledge by interacting on an ongoing, long-term basis to develop innovative practices together" (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002).[2] As part of the 2018–2023 project, the communities or clusters named above were targeted because of five keys to success: their multidisciplinary and inclusive perspective, their shared vision, the commitment of champions, their strategy adapted to the community, and their sustainable hosting strategy.

The training, which is based on a cross-sector, multidisciplinary approach, encourages the sharing of resources and mutual support between these communities. In fact, each of these communities has created and developed initiatives, activities and practices (relevant to the regional context) to engage bilingual students and professionals (see Appendix 1 of this fact sheet). In this respect, the need that motivated this project is linked to the challenge of recruiting and integrating future health and social services professionals. In other words, these communities need to find innovative strategies for recruiting and retaining bilingual employees in French-speaking minority communities.

Objectives

The purpose of the Welcoming Community 2.0 initiative was to welcome, recruit and retain future bilingual health and social service professionals in Francophone minority communities in Southern Ontario.

Since 2023, the goal of the training on the eQUITY Link platform has been to support the collaborative work being done by communities of practice to design strategies to increase the number of services available to Francophone minority communities. The training is primarily geared toward health and social service managers, their various partners, professionals who work in health and social services, and anyone interested in developing expertise related to the active offer of French-language services.

In turn, the communities of practice can include (as in the case of Southern Ontario) professionals from health and social services, bilingual students enrolled in nursing, social work, medicine, psychology, speech-language pathology and other identified programs in the regions, English- and French-language colleges and universities that offer such programs across Ontario, as well as bilingual health and social services professionals interested in being informed about community resources and career opportunities in these regions.

The five communities of practice that participated in the Welcoming Community 2.0 pilot project implemented their own strategies and activities based on the needs of their region. They share the following objectives: (1) to support the identification of future professionals enrolled in health and social services programs; (2) to implement and promote community welcoming strategies and activities to foster the recruitment, integration and retention of professionals in the communities; and (3) to promote strategies to increase the placement and recruitment of bilingual professionals among health and social services providers.

The Welcoming Community 2.0 project resulted in the creation of a system for sharing resources, expertise, knowledge and innovative practices between regions, as well as sharing resources between levels. Information from Société Santé en français or Health Canada, for example, could easily be distributed between regions.

2 Société Santé en français and Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario. (2023). *Communities of practice: a collaborative approach to increasing French language services*. eQUITY Link platform, https://equity-link.ca/en/courses/communities-of-practice-a-collaborative-approach-to-increasing-french-language-services/laborative-pour-accroitre-loffre-de-services-en-francais/.

Features of the practice

The five regions involved in the original Welcoming Community 2.0 project used different models of communities of practice. North Simcoe and Mississauga Halton used the inter-agency model; Waterloo, Wellington, Guelph and Niagara used the inter-sectoral agency model; and Windsor and London used the individual and community model. The activities implemented by the communities of practices included the creation of information sharing resources (websites, monthly meetings), the implementation of a scholarship and placement program for Francophone students, various collaborations and the dissemination of placement and recruitment opportunities (see Appendix 1).

The communities of practice and some of their strategies and activities are presented in the training on the eQUITY Link platform (see Fact Sheet #25). The online training is four modules long and is designed to encourage collaboration within communities of practice as a way to increase the offer of French-language services in minority language communities.

Challenges

Community collaboration can certainly create some challenges, as several organizations and service providers work together in each community to achieve project goals. That said, according to one of the presenters of a webinar on the communities of practice approach,[3] the challenges of community collaboration include: succession, the time required to move projects forward, long-term commitment, the involvement of English-speaking employers, the demands of decision-making, the rotation of participants (employees) and the lack of ongoing funding and administrative support.

Also, the COVID-19 pandemic was an obstacle to holding events that brought together large numbers of people, such as fairs. Communities of practice had to show flexibility in modifying their activities to comply with health regulations, such as organizing virtual fairs or meetings. With respect to the training on communities of practice, it is still too early for the challenges to be identified.

Analysis

Why is this practice considered innovative?

The purpose of the Welcoming Community 2.0 project is to improve French-language services by finding strategies to recruit, integrate and retain bilingual human resources.

Community collaboration and the approaches prioritized in this project help promote and enhance discourse and the quality of services offered to Francophones in minority contexts. It enhances their visibility and, by extension, fosters a certain cultural sensitivity regarding the French-speaking community.

3 Paul Levac, Annie Boucher, Tina Christman & Nancy Larivière. L'approche des communautés de pratique, un outil pertinent pour le travail collaboratif. Webinar from Société Santé en français, December 9, 2020, available at: https://www.santefrancais.ca/lapproche-des-communautes-de-pratique-un-outil-pertinent-pour-le-travail-collaboratif/.

Emerging, promising or leading: A promising practice

Quality of evidence: A 2021 report presents the findings and recommendations emerging from the summative evaluation of the Welcoming Community 2.0 project implemented from 2018 to 2021 by the Réseau franco-santé du sud de l'Ontario.[4] The qualitative approach was used to evaluate the data collected. Interviews with the leaders of the five communities of practice were conducted to better understand how the activities were implemented and what outcomes were achieved. Two online questionnaires were also distributed to project participants in the five regions. Nine people responded to the questionnaire addressed to students (six of whom completed it), while 15 people responded to the one addressed to organizations (eight of whom completed it). Given the nature of the methodological approach used, it was difficult to make generalizations or draw conclusive findings. Analysis of all documents produced as part of the project, as well as other relevant documents, was also carried out.

Impact: A few observations from the evaluation report highlight the fact that the activities implemented helped form ties and establish contact between students and health and social services organizations. This could result in improved retention of more bilingual staff and, by extension, improve certain issues associated with active offer.

Applicability: Welcoming Community 2.0 is currently operating in Southern Ontario, with a particular focus on the five target regions: Windsor and London, Waterloo, Wellington and Guelph, Niagara, Mississauga Halton and North Simcoe Muskoka.

Transferability: We are unaware of any such collaborations in other minority language communities, but evaluations and informal observations of the Welcoming Community 2.0 lead us to believe that the initiative could easily be adapted to other regions of Ontario and Canada.

The training resource was created with the very intention of facilitating the transferability of knowledge about the communities of practice. This training enables other healthcare partners to discover the benefits of this collaborative working method when it comes to planning, implementing and effectively managing strategic projects to support the active offer of French-language health services.

4 Lapierre, L. & Beaulieu, D. (2021). *Évaluation sommative : Communauté accueillante 2.0*, https://francosantesud.ca/wp-content/uploads/Rapport-final-Evaluation-CommAccueillante-2-0_-juin-2021-vc-1.pdf

Appendix 1: Examples of some activities implemented by communities of practice in Southern Ontario

Communauté de pratique pour professionnel·les bilingues de Windsor London (CPPB) (Windsor London Community of Practice for Bilingual Professionals) CPPBSUD-OUEST.CA	• Creation of an information website and access to a virtual community on HealthChat for professionals in the fields of health, addiction, social services and wellness; space to network, enhance the French-language community, exchange information, share news and resources, find internship and employment opportunities, and discuss challenges and solutions for offering quality services in French • Collaboration with a group of 25 students from Western University • Monthly CPPB meetings with bilingual professionals • Promotion and advertising in newspapers and social media
Waterloo, Wellington, Guelph Concertation Table (WWG) www.FrancophonesWWG.ca	• Group of 15 French-speaking agencies and service providers from a multitude of sectors • Production of website and testimonial video • *Café de Paris*-style session led by Wilfrid Laurier University francophone volunteers for students and employees • Dissemination of French resources to 15 McMaster University medical students • New collaboration with Conestoga College's School of Health and Life Sciences • Promotional videos • Scholarship program for students from the French-speaking community
Niagara Interagency Table https://www.cerfniagara.com/ressources-francophones/table-inter-agences	• Group of 35 French-speaking agencies and service providers from a multitude of sectors • Dissemination of internship and recruitment opportunities to organizations • Organization and contribution to job fairs with Brock University Career Zone • Collaboration with McMaster University's health faculties • Twinning for student internships • Guided tours for bilingual professionals • Production of video vignettes

Mississauga Halton LHIN Community of Practice www.rockonlearn.ca/-welcomingcommunity-fr/	• Group of 22 health service providers and agencies • Launch of promotional videos in English and French, to raise awareness among bilingual students and foreign-trained professionals of opportunities to get involved in the development of and access to French-language services in the region • Launch of the Welcoming Community web page in English and French, to promote collaborations and activities • Development of an online survey to identify the needs and interests of members of the Mississauga Halton Community of Practice • Development of a social media communications strategy to attract potential bilingual students/young professionals to join the Welcoming Community • Outreach to the University of Toronto, meeting with Francophone medical students, to explore opportunities for collaboration • Guided tours of service providers • Scholarships and student internship matches • Speed mentoring session in French
Simcoe Nord Muskoka LHIN Community of Practice www.lacle.ca/cfc	• Group of 11 health service providers and agencies • Creation of a web page and promotional material to showcase CoP members • Formation of a community partnership with La Clé d'la Baie to help promote recruitment and develop the French-language capacity of health and social service professionals in the region • Organization of a virtual fair to recruit bilingual students and professionals • Identification of 22 schools and 25 service providers and community organizations to participate in CoP activities