

Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health

Final Report

Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health is an initiative of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, in partnership with Hike Ontario, Conservation Ontario, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CCMH) with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.



Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health

Final Report

The project provided training and support for postsecondary institutions and community agencies across Ontario to launch walking and hiking programs for students, staff and members over the summer, fall and winter of 2018. Mood Walks promoted both physical and mental health by reducing barriers and creating new opportunities for students to be physically active. Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health was built on the success of the Mood Walks project for Older Adults (2014) and Mood Walks for Youth in Transition (2016) that aimed to increase capacity within the community mental health system in Ontario to promote physical activity and healthy eating for people with serious mental illness.

Objectives



Deliver training and implementation support to participating postsecondary institutions

Promotes benefits from the healing effects of nature, participation in physical activity

Deliver Safe Hiker training to participants

Remove barriers and improve access to hiking trails, conservation areas and other community resources

Strengthen partnerships at the local and provincial levels



PROJECT BACKGROUND

Overview

Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health is an initiative of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, in partnership with Hike Ontario, Conservation Ontario, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CCMH) with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health builds capacity for postsecondary institutions across Ontario to plan, implement, and evaluate hiking, walking, and st/rolling groups for students. The program was designed to encourage and support the mental and physical health of students – including those at risk of, or experiencing mental health disabilities, and newcomer students who may be experiencing additional stress due to settlement challenges and social exclusion, – through exposure to benefits from the healing effects of nature, participation in physical activity, and engagement with their community.

Walking/Hiking is a fun and low-cost activity, and research evidence shows that being in nature has significant positive effects on both physical and mental health. Green exercise can alleviate primary symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as secondary symptoms such as low self-esteem and social withdrawal. Building life skills and developing a sense of self-efficacy are effective ways to foster positive mental health. Group activities such as hiking clubs can promote social interaction and provide opportunities for peer support. For students the benefits also extend to enhancement of academic performance.

Many colleges and universities in Ontario are committed to developing mental health promotion strategies. Mood Walks offered a significant opportunity for those institutions to enhance their mental health strategies with an evidence-based, low-barrier physical activity program as an alternative or adjunct to traditional mental health interventions. Our goal was to launch at least twenty new hiking programs across the province, including the North. The project also created new opportunities for schools to strengthen their connections with community-based organizations to better support the student population.

As part of Mood Walks, all participating Campuses had an opportunity to receive Safe Hiker Instructor training from Hike Ontario, and some received further advanced Hike Leader training from Hike Ontario. Participating campuses also received up to \$500 to support costs

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during the 2018 Mood Walks project period with the expectation this support would be matched by campus funds or in-kind contributions.

CMHA, Ontario developed and provided a number of resources to support participation in the project, including an updated program manual, evaluation tools, a website, webinar, newsletters, Mood Walks Retreat at the beginning of the project and Mood Walks Summit at the end of the project, additional resources, monthly check-in calls and support from a full-time project coordinator.

The project was implemented in four overlapping phases: planning(preparation), implementation, evaluation and knowledge exchange. The design of all four phases was built on best practices, direct feedback from postsecondary institutions and the lessons learned and resources developed during the first Mood Walks projects (2013-2017).

Project Beneficiaries

Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health was designed to to encourage, support and promote the mental and physical health of students – including those at risk of, or experiencing mental health disabilities, and newcomer students who may be experiencing additional stress due to settlement challenges and social exclusion. By building capacity within postsecondary institutions to deliver safe and inclusive hiking programs in collaboration with community partners, Mood Walks contributed to the development of additional mental health promotion strategies and upstream interventions on campuses.

Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health engaged all students, including newcomers, international students, mature students and those who are at risk of, or experiencing, mental health issues and introduced them to a fun and health-promoting physical activity. The benefits of hiking include improvements in strength, endurance, balance, and coordination. But the benefits of being more physically active in a natural environment go well beyond movement skills. The group format also allowed people to develop their communication skills and, for some, to acquire new skills as peer leaders. Further, regular experience in natural settings fosters a deepened sense of kinship with the natural world that can inspire a lifelong sense of place, belonging, stewardship, and, in turn, healthier ecosystems. Emerging evidence also highlights the academic impacts of both spending time together and moving in nature. Improving the ability to concentrate, enhancing creative thinking, and fostering belongingness, critical for



persistence, are just a few of the scholastic benefits students can experience with Mood Walks. For youth who have experienced mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, and depression, the program can improve their mood, self-confidence, coping skills and sense of social connection – important factors that contribute to recovery from mental illness. The group setting also allows them to develop their communication skills, and for some, to acquire new skills as peer leaders.

PLANNING PHASE

Activities included convening a project Steering Committee, hiring a full-time Project Coordinator, creating a detailed work plan, recruiting an advisory committee (with representation from campuses, hiking clubs, conservation areas, project partners, community agencies and community partners), developing an evaluation plan and knowledge exchange strategy. The website (www.moodwalks.ca) and program manual created in phase one were updated to support creating Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health.

Steering Committee

A Steering Committee (SC) was created and acted as the project's decision-making body. The SC consisted of the following project leads:

- Jim Harris - Director of Operations, CMHA, Ontario
- Tom Friesen - President, Hike Ontario
- Nekeisha Mohammed - Communications Officer, Conservation Ontario
- Marija Padjen – Director CICMH
- Sajadeh Zahraei – Senior Manager Professional Development and Training, OCASI

During the planning phases, SC members were asked to provide input regarding their organizational goals for the project, potential concerns and barriers to participation, and anticipated roles and supports required for participation. The SC met 5 times over the course of the project.

Advisory Committee

An advisory committee (AC) was formed consisting of a cross-section of individuals with a knowledge and understanding of health promotion and capacities at various campuses across the province, physical activity, hiking, conservation, and professional expertise in the mental health sector (Appendix A). The AC provided significant input to planning of the



project prior to its implementation and advised regarding process and deliverables of the project, communications and partnership development, and outcome measurement. The AC provided feedback on tools and resources created, such as the Mood Walks program manual, modified Safe Hiker training, and orientation strategy, information webinars, and also suggested the need to exercise more flexibility in the program deliverables and timelines given the unique target population and active and demanding student's timetable. The AC met 3 times during the planning phase of the project.

Revision of Program Manual

The manual was revised to include more general language so that it could be used in a wider variety of settings. Additional research and information were also added to include specific considerations for implementing Mood Walks with a student audience.

Evaluation Plan

Evaluation by emoji cards was implemented (originally developed by Ryerson's Mood Routes program) to assess pre and post Mood Walks feeling of the participants. It was based on the Brief Mood Introspection scale and was adopted because of the universality & accessibility of emojis, familiarity to students and also simplicity to complete. It proved increased engagement and willingness to give feedback. (Appendix B)

In addition to emoji cards the survey was created following Mood Walks Retreat in August 2018 to provide us a feedback on the project implementation and challenges along the way. (Appendix C)



IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

This phase began with an outreach strategy to engage campuses across the province, make them aware of the project and encourage their participation. Our goal was to launch at least 20 new hiking program across the province, including the North. Groups were to implement walking/hiking groups between June and December 2018, with some continuing in 2019.

Information webinar on May 29, 2018 and a full day information workshop (Mood Walks Retreat) on August 1, 2018 were provided to introduce participants and those interested in program about planning, implementation, evaluation of the project as well as the benefits of nature and regular exercise. Participants were also introduced to project partners and possibility of local partnerships.

Request for Proposal

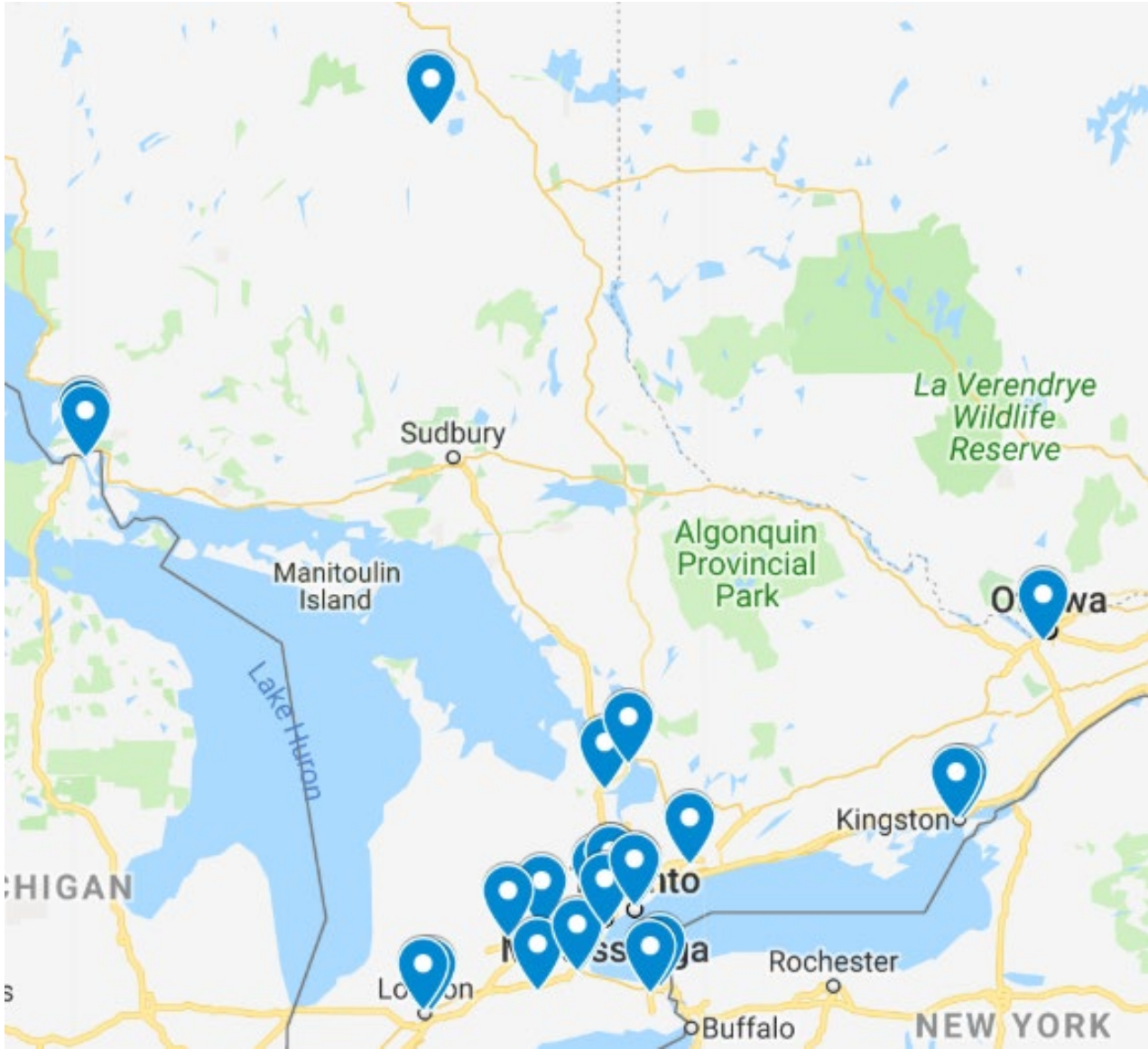
In order to communicate the opportunity to participate in the project Mood Walks information webinar were provided and campuses across the province were contacted directly through our partnership with CICMH. Interested sites were required to submit a completed Request for Proposal (see Appendix D).

It was anticipated that 20 host sites would be chosen based on Campus readiness and resources. In total, 24 Request for Proposal were received, and all proposals were accepted.

Participating Sites

Twenty-four Campuses across the province signed up for the project, with some not fully executing it. Their locations are shown on the following map:

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HOST CAMPUSES

Algoma University

Algonquin College

Brock University

George Brown College

Georgian College

Fanshawe College

Lakehead - Orillia University

McMaster University

Mohawk College

Niagara College

Northern College

OCASI

Queen's University

Ryerson University

Sault College

Sheridan College

St. Lawrence College – Kingston Campus

University of Guelph

University of Guelph/Humber

University of Ontario Institute of Technology

University of Toronto Mississauga

Western University

Wilfrid Laurier University

Wilfrid-Laurier University -Brantford



Engagement Strategies

Information's were shared through the Advisory Committee and their networks.

Mood Walks was marketed to campuses and partner groups across the province via the project website, CMHA Ontario eNewsletter, direct email contact and phone calls via partner mailing lists, including CICMH network. Call for participation and information sharing was opened to anyone who expressed an interested which resulted in some interesting and new partnership through out the country.

Communications

Mood Walks had a Social Media presence during the project with Twitter (304Followers), Facebook (152 Followers), Instagram (130 Followers). During the implementation phase of the project all Mood Walks newsletter were shared on Social Media, as well on the project website as well as distributed to all who expressed and interest and/or signed up through project website.

Training & Support

Information Webinar

An information webinar was held in May 2018 for all campuses that wanted to learn more about the project, including requirements and time lines. The Webinar was co-hosted with Ryerson University who at the time already had significant experience in running the walk groups at their campus. Ryerson had initiated their walk after attending the Mood Walks Youth in Transition Summit.

Mood Walks Retreats

The Mood Walks Retreat on August 1, 2018 introduced participants and those interested in the program about planning, implementation, evaluation of the project as well as the benefits of nature and regular exercise. Participants were also introduced to project partners and the possibility of local partnerships. Details about Safe Hiker Instructor and Certified Hike Leader training were presented by Hike Ontario during the Retreat, as well as the partnership opportunities through their local Conservation Area. An important part of the Retreat day was promoting "Why Nature Matters: Mood Walks as a Holistic Program". We had some truly inspiring presentations from Exercise is Medicine (EIM), Dr. Nathan J. Cooper, Dr. Deena Kara Shaffer and Bill Kilburn. At the end of the day participants were able to hear directly from student participants of the Mood Walks, learn of their experience and the benefits of participating in the same. (post Retreat survey Appendix D),(full agenda Appendix E)

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Hike Ontario Training

Training was offered through Hike Ontario, and all participating sites had an opportunity to receive a Certified Hike Leader training or Safe Hiker training. This training provided participants with an important safety skills. Trainings were offered by Hike Ontario staff directly at the participants site. Almost 80 participants received a training (Appendix F)

Check-in Teleconferences

Throughout the implementation phase, four “check-in” calls took place. This was an opportunity to share the outcomes, challenges and learn what others are doing. Some very creative ideas were shared during the calls, as well as some challenges that certain campuses were facing (Appendix G).

Project Coordinator

Ongoing support by the Project Coordinator was available throughout the duration of the project. While not required, many campuses accessed the Project Coordinator regularly via email or telephone with implementation questions or local challenges.

Resources

Newsletters

During the project, 3 newsletters were created and distributed to participants, program leaders and partners. They included project updates as well as local profiles of Mood Walks groups and community partners to foster a community of practice and share experiences of groups with stakeholders and other interested individuals. (Appendix H1, H2, H3).

Website

The website was used to update participating campuses, connect with each other and link to additional resources. The section was only accessible to participating campuses via a private sign-in.



Evaluation

Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health was evaluated using a final survey completed by representative from each campus (n=21). The report examined the implementation process, challenges and successes (Appendix I). We learned that we were able to engage over 1,000 students, postsecondary education staff, and community agency members to take part in Mood Walks. The average group walked once a week for a period of 12 weeks. 90% of participating locations had staff and faculty members joining the Mood Walks. Surveys also showed that over 70% (16 locations) will continue to grow the Mood Walks Project at their Campuses.

All participating agencies were provided emoji cards to evaluate participants feedback at their sites. 10 participating locations provided their emoji cards enabling us to review pre and post walks mood for 386 participants. Results showed a significant improvement in their mood post walk as well as improvement in overall happiness. Low Mood Spectrum (LMS – sick, gloomy, grouchy, stressed, sad, tired, annoyed) was entered 405 times before the walk and went down to 74 after the walk. 95 entries were marked as neutral as pre walk mood and went down to 24 after the walk. 234 entries of High Mood Spectrum (HMS – content, calm, energetic, happy) at the pre-walk survey went up to 588 as a post walk entry. (Appendix J). During the Retreat it was stressed that any of these tools may be adapted to best suit each participant. As the project was developing, we learned that with this focus group we will need to exercise more flexibility as each campus operated differently and schedules of participants was varied significantly.



Knowledge Exchange

Summit

More than 45 people attended the Mood Walks Summit held on February 13, 2019 to discuss key outcomes from the project and explore new ideas around diversity and inclusion and campus mental health. The summit was held at the Chestnut Conference Centre, University of Toronto and enabled dialogue among program leaders, mental health professionals, volunteers and community members, as well as opportunities to map new partnership paths that support campus mental wellness through the “green lift” of nature-related programs. The summit was an opportunity to share stories, meet new people, and learn more about the connections between mental health, nature, and physical activity.

Participants were able to hear success stories from Campuses across the province, as well as to learn from inspiring guest speakers. Included was also presentation on the “forest therapy” as well as the presentation and participation in the short Nordic waking. (Appendix K).



Unexpected Outcomes

Donations & Partnerships

Coleman Canada

The project had many successes throughout the 18 months of delivery. Donations from Coleman allowed us to provide each participating group with a 35L Backpack and 5 in 1 Survival Whistle.

Urban Poling

Urban Poling provided a free introduction to Poling opportunity at the Mood Walks Summit. They also had a representative at our Advisory Committee and at the end of the project were able to provide a very significant discount that unbated some Mood Walks hosts to participate at the PowerUp Conference

Partnership

As a result of the Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health outreach and partnership we had several organizations across the country reaching out to us and inquiring about adopting the program. We were thrilled to share all the resources and as a result several of them have successfully implemented the program. Inquiry came from variety of sources – day care, high school, municipal and government offices (Appendix L)



LESSONS LEARNED

Outcomes

Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health encouraged and supported over 1,000 students, newcomers and postsecondary institution staff across the province to become active and enjoy the benefits of being in nature. The project removed barriers and created new opportunities for the target population to participate in physical activity.

Mood Walks facilitated new partnerships between postsecondary institutions, hiking clubs, conservation areas, CICMH and OCASI.

Mood Walks fostered knowledge exchange through our Mood Walks Retreat, Mood Walks Summit, Webinars, Advisory and Steering Committee meetings, project communications (email, newsletter, social media) and check in teleconference. The Mood Walks project website (www.moodwalks.ca) served as the central hub for information exchange and we leveraged the communications capacity and distribution networks of our partners.

Partnerships

The partnerships identified in the approved application were paramount to the success of this project. All partners dedicated time, in-kind resources and expertise that helped to support both managing the project as well as supporting capacity building at the group and participant levels.

Hike Ontario provided Certified Hike Leader and Safe Hiker training. They were integral part of the project, with much flexibility to serve variety of geographical areas and accommodating busy schedules of both students and staff. In addition to providing valuable input at the beginning of the project they also attended both the Mood Walk Retreat and Summit.

Conservation Ontario was a key partner from the planning phase. They offered key guidance on implementation of the program as well as using internal resources to promote the program. Conservation Ontario was present at both Summit and Retreat and 30% of participating hosts did use a Conservation Ontario area for their walks as a direct result of this partnership

CICMH participated in the planning process and Advisory and Steering Committee meetings as well as participated in the Mood Walks Retreat and Summit. CICMH was instrumental in



guiding us during the outreach phase and directing us to specific departments. They also used their own networks and social media to promote the Mood Walks.

OCASI provided guidance in connecting us to newcomer students and agencies working with newcomers. OCASI implemented Mood Walks at their office as well as a part of the partnership. They were integral part of the Advisory Committee and attended both Mood Walks Retreat and Summit.

Sustainability

For the participating sites, 16 of the 21 that completed the final report plan to continue the Mood Walks. We have outgoing interest and requests from wide variety of service providers on implementation of the Mood Walks, including requests from Campuses that did not participate in the original project.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Advisory Committee List

Appendix B: Emoji Evaluation Card

Appendix C: Retreat Survey

Appendix D: Request for Proposal

Appendix E: Mood Walks Retreat Agenda

Appendix F: Hike Ontario Training

Appendix G: Teleconferences

Appendix H: Newsletter

Appendix I: Final Survey

Appendix J: Emoji Evaluation Results

Appendix K: Summit Agenda

Appendix L: Partnerships