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Social Enterprise for Sustainable Communities: Ontario, Canada

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Rationale

A healthy and sustainable community promotes inclusion, accessibility of resources, and positive relationships between its citizens. The strong connection among its members involves an interdisciplinary approach and collaboration, which increase effective support systems for the group. In this project, we utilized multidisciplinary interventions among professionals while emphasizing a client-centered approach in mental health communities to provide vigorous support and to encourage the empowerment of individuals in living independently (Mary, 2008, p. 174). Along with a client-centered approach, we also incorporated horticultural therapy to encourage service users who have mental health challenges to build connections with Mother Earth through our horticultural therapy-based green space. This initiative allows people to spend time outdoors to either relax or plant organic vegetables and fruits, which is a form a long term source of nutrition and resiliency. This program promotes social, economic and environmental sustainability in mental health communities.

Defining Sustainability

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“Our environment is the base upon which all other institutions are built; thus, our polity, our economy, and our social systems must reflect the principles of sustainability” (Mary, 2008, p. 153).

Economic Sustainability – This may be understood as a transition to a socially just, collective economic model that prioritizes equality, human welfare and environmental sustainability over profit (Mary, 2008, p. 161). In the context of Albertan communities, a sustainable economy would be able to provide for, and fund, the well-being of Albertans, independent of the boom/bust cycle of our resource-reliant economy. As is observed in Blake (2009): “As soon as the money goes people do not have time to sustain the network” (p. 14).

Social Sustainability – In communities, social sustainability can mean building long-lasting, supportive relationships where the strengths and needs of members are respected and considered for the betterment and growth of the community. Mary (2008) highlights the need for partnership, open communication, trust, empathy and respect for nature in such a socially sustainable community (p. 14).

Environmental Sustainability – Mary (2008) considers this concept to mean developing healthy, reliant ways of honouring the Earth that are collaborative, respectful and practice stewardship: “Institutions (e.g., economy, polity, family) must develop in harmony with the earth, respecting its limits” (p. 14). Our initiative works to link mental healthcare and environmental stewardship in a community-centered initiative.



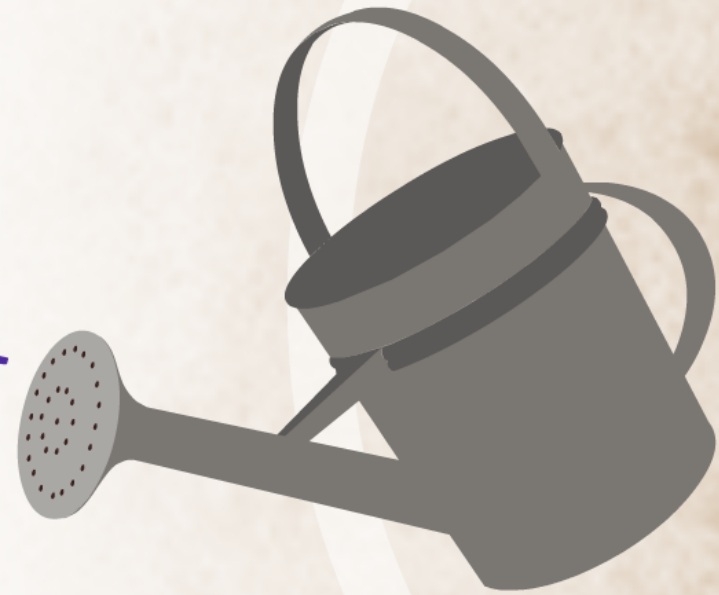
Horticultural Therapy

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Proposal *Vision*

Create a sustainable living environment for individuals with mental health impairments who are not capable of fully independent living and who may require additional health interventions; this community will work in relation to community-based healthcare, striving to suppress sole reliance on the medical model and address the social determinants of health; this community will aim to keep clients as active participants in society and maintain the best quality of life possible.

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Proposal

Community Goals:

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1. Help clients achieve the highest quality of life possible by supporting purposeful involvement and keeping them functioning as active participants of the community. Help clients maintain their independence and sense of worth.
2. Co-operatively address any individual health concerns clients may have; provide necessary harm reduction interventions, as required, to ensure individual and collective safety; ensure all the needs of clients are met with appropriate use of resources and referrals.
3. Strive towards collective equilibrium, in which the community is happy and healthy and everyone can feel satisfied; a place where everyone feels valued.
4. Strive towards the highest point of a self-sustaining community as possible; being a place where everyone works to the best of their ability to serve and support the collective; while acknowledging the value and worth of professional (i.e. psychiatrists) interventions and suggestions.
5. Work towards wider community projects and philanthropy.



Proposal

Levels Of Sustainable Community:

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Foundational Structures:

- a. There are basic human needs that must be addressed in conjunction with the Canadian social determinants of health for different types of clients.
- b. Examples of these include: guaranteed income supports and financial management, accessible community transportation, primary care networks and system navigation, medication management, meal preparation and adequate nutrition
- c. Some of the above may seem arbitrary, but when one of these structures falls out of place or does not align, the entirety of it all collapses on itself; which can be detrimental to the well-being of the client.
- d. When one or more of the above is not successful for clients, the facility cannot economically survive.

Secondary Structures:

- a. Beyond the basic needs, there are other factors that can influence the overall success and functioning of a community; these aim to support a client's purpose, self-worth, and community enjoyment.
- b. Examples of these include: job assignments within the community, planned recreational activities, learning and educational opportunities; excursions and designated trips throughout the broader community, volunteering and participating in city-wide events.
- c. These things are not necessary to the success of the community, but can drastically improve the lives of the residents and staff.

Proposal

The Importance of Green Space

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- Green spaces and incorporating the environment into the mental health of residents is crucial to maintaining psychosocial balance of individuals; green spaces help to promote a calm and serene atmosphere, while keeping individuals connected to the physical and metaphorical earth; environmental interaction is therapeutic, both formally (i.e. Horticultural Therapy) and informally.
- Green spaces serve as a multifaceted tool for a successfully sustainable community; aside from maintaining the balance of complex residents, environmental engagement can serve as a hobby or a variety of assigned facility 'jobs and/or responsibilities (e.g. weeding the garden, cutting the grass, raking leaves, etc.), agricultural efforts have the potential to provide the community with an assortment of fresh, organic foods, herbs, etc., and ensuring a balance of green spaces within and around the facility promotes a good aesthetic to the surrounding community and potential new residents.
- Atriums and greenhouses can ensure, also, that residents can experience environmental engagement year-round.