



Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance (CAPRA)

Stakeholder Engagement Summary

January 2022



INTRODUCTION

On January 19, 2022, the Central Alberta Poverty Reduction Alliance Operations Team hosted a virtual meeting with a self-selected group of non-profit and governmental members. As Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and impacts forced most agencies to substantially amend their operations and serve newly vulnerable clients since 2020, this consultation provided an opportunity to identify emerging needs and test the relevancy of previously identified goals.

After a brainstorming session, ideas were grouped into several themes and voted on. Social connection, financial empowerment and community silos were chosen as areas for further analysis. These results are intended to inform CAPRA's priorities and activities as agencies are able to resume normal operations.

THEME A: Social Connection

What are you currently doing and or aware of in in the area of social connection?

- Let's Connect (Innisfail) originally for seniors and now open to all ages across Alberta. Matching volunteers make phone calls to individuals with social connection needs. For more info <https://wolfcreekpcn.com/resources/seniors-information-hub/innisfail/innisfail-connects/>
- Collaboration among various service groups to partner on programs and events, pulling resources together thereby removing silos. Strong interagency collaborative work.
- Being a part of CAPRA
- RD Polytechnic – collaborative research, connecting students to service providers for learnings, supporting students via free mental health initiatives and supports
- Community based coalitions that connect people via initiatives and events e.g. SPARC, Wellness Alliance
- Community-based services that support and connect people through programming e.g. RD PCN free courses like happiness, health basics, etc.
- C.A.R.E – intercultural awareness
- Being a part of RD Systems Navigators – sharing, solution finding and advocacy
- Virtual programs, in-person outdoors following Covid protocols, agency check-in phone calls
- Many free mental health supports, workshops etc. available
- Circles of care

What gaps do you see in social connections?

- Not enough overnight spaces for everyone in need
- Not everyone is ready, willing and able to participate due to various barriers and factors, equity, language, cultural, wellness, stigma, awareness, Covid
- Both consumers and organizations are not fully aware of everything that is available among different service providers
- Biases, assumptions, lack of communication or ineffective communications
- Still a need for paper communications

What opportunities do you see? Ideas?

- Start a Social Connection working group within CAPRA to address this issue through strategic partnership, collaboration, networking and creativity
- Education – to increase awareness – public at large and consumer focused
- Focus groups to learn more from consumers re what kind of communications would be best
- Potential for shared platforms to increase connectivity, problem solving, circles of care, working groups to better support children, youth, etc through interactive platforms like SLACK, CORE, etc through grant funding.

Summary and Next Steps

There is a lot of good work happening in our communities in relation to social connections with an increase in virtual services and programming. However, this is not equitable across the board. Not everyone has access and barriers still exist such as language, literacy, culture, knowledge, and awareness.

Recommendations from our discussion include:

- Create a Social Connection working group within CAPRA to focus on communications, education and collaboration
- Explore grant funding and platforms which would support collaborative work
- Connect with Eric Wiseman Red Deer Polytechnic to learn more about CARES (Creating Actionable and Responsible Early Support)
- Deeper dive into stigma and how this impacts social connections, etc.
- Utilize existing groups e.g. Red Deer Systems Navigators

THEME B: Financial Empowerment

What are you currently doing and or aware of in in the area of financial empowerment?

- Conduit between services and community members
- City wants to find out more about 'on the ground' needs (community inventory) to tailor work to specific neighbourhoods
- Provide immediate 'band-aid' relief (ex. Cash, bus passes)
- Financial education (group services)
- Income support access often via phone or virtual 'help desks'
- Agency line for helping clients to access income support
- Living wage activities (including 2021 report)
- Women's Outreach previously had a food co-op

What gaps do you see in financial empowerment?

- Trust and long-term relationships
- Hard to access in-person help with filling out complicated income support forms
- Huge reliance on non-profits where there is not enough capacity
- Transportation to jobs/interviews
- Help people escape the 'trap' long term
- Perpetual cycle of pawning
- Microloans at reasonable interest rates
- Improvements to legislation that limit pay day lending
- Clients burning relationships with banks (ex. Overdraft) but then unable to access basic banking
- Circular issue of needing bank account to access income support but unable to open account (insufficient ID as per federal legislation) to get money to get ID
- One-on-one financial coaching
- Coordination of financial education services mean services are being duplicated

What opportunities do you see? Ideas?

- Advocating and advertising for the implementation of a living wage among businesses, emphasizing 'what's in it for them'
- Advocacy letter templates for provincial engagement
- Food co-op connecting local farmers and butchers to share harvests/meat
- Facilitate multi-sector collaboration

Summary and Next Steps

Financial empowerment encompasses a variety of needs and activities, including food security, income support and benefits access, financial literacy education and policy advocacy. Some priority areas may need to be separated in order to be actioned effectively.

Recommendations from the discussion include:

- Engagement campaign with businesses to adopt the living wage
- Advocacy for re-opening in-person offices for income support and benefits
- Food co-op

THEME C: Community Silos

What are you currently doing and or aware of in in the area of community silos?

- Lots of talk of silos but there seems to be lots of collaboration. Is a clearer definition needed?
- Important for new organizations to connect individually with other groups to exchange information
- Programs and resources are available that are not being accessed, often because people don't realize they exist. Need for an interagency or database?
- HelpSeeker and 211 are available but encouragement/awareness needed for others to access them
- Information is gathered from clientele and organizations but may not be shared with community at large
- Several committees and collaborations exist that bring people together to support enhanced collaboration (ex. SPARC, CAPRA, Youth Strategy Collective, etc.)
- Innisfail has a strong interagency with a monthly Community Conversation around domestic violence, mental health, suicide, family challenges, housing and homelessness

What gaps do you see in breaking down community silos?

- Opportunity to connect all organizations in the city
- Various supports and services, transportation, technology, awareness, financial, etc. centralized in one location online and in person
- Language is often a barrier to accessing information
- Emerging needs to be addressed

- Gaps between recreation/sport world and social benefit/mental health world
- Linking business community with social initiatives, whether through sponsorships, participation, etc.
- Opportunity to react and respond more effectively to action by provincial and/or federal government
- Are organizations putting effort into information sharing and being real with each other?
- Challenges of the pandemic and the resulting changes in roles and responsibilities leaves little time for collaboration

What opportunities do you see? Ideas?

- Central directory/hub of agencies and what they do
- Coordinated approach to support people to navigate systems and supports smoothly and to address barriers faced
- An office of Community Navigators encompassing all stages of life available to the public
- Community education and some asset-based community development work between business and community
- A better way to communicate with each other

Summary and Next Steps

Despite initiatives like Red Deer Systems Navigator, discussions revealed a continuing perception that coordinated approaches and information about the programs and capabilities of social services need to be more robust and effective. This applies both to intra-agency awareness and public navigation of the patchwork of programs offering support in the central Alberta area.

Recommendations from the discussion include:

- An office of Community Navigators encompassing all stages of life and expertise available to the public
- An effective central directory of agencies and what they do
- Linking with the recreation/sport and business worlds
- Current pressures on agencies and exhaustion due to the pandemic indicate additional resources for collaboration may be needed