



Building Capacity and Resource Solutions

DISABILITY INITIATIVE PROJECT SUMMARY, 2024- 2025

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Partners:

Meadow Lake Tribal Council

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Disability Initiative Project, 2024-2025

Context:

The purpose of the 2024-2025 Disability Initiative Project was to build on the findings from the 2023-2024 project that can be addressed with resource development and capacity building solutions. The scope of the research project was to engage in a partnership between Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) and the nine First Nations served by MLTC (MLFN). SFNFCI was guided by an Advisory Committee who provided suggestions, and vetted information regarding the project. The Advisory Committee was made up of MLTC staff in the Health, Education, and Child and Family Services department.

This study is significant because it builds on identified gaps and focuses on addressing barriers for individuals with disabilities by working with the service providers within First Nations Communities.

Research Goals:

The goals of this year's project were to:

- Learn from the Nations on some of the barriers they face in accessing services for people living with disabilities.
- Increase awareness of disability issues, programs, and support through resource development and knowledge sharing.

Methodology:

All research-related projects and activities completed by SFNFCI are guided by the Institute's Indigenous Research Paradigm. SFNFCI used a thematic approach, this technique utilized participants' words and viewpoints to shape the codes and later, themes.

Data collection:

All methods of Data Collection were discussed with the MLTC Advisory Committee for review and approval before information was collected. Our approach to the research project started with data collection where researchers engaged in discussions and surveys. SFNFCI researchers conducted a one-day survey. The goal of the survey was to identify gaps in services experienced by community members when receiving services both on and off reserve. The results of the survey helped questions for the group and individual discussions that were conducted later of the discussions was to identify areas for capacity building and resource sol

Key Finding

The findings that follow are the themes that were identified through the survey and discussions.

Relationship Building: Participants desire stronger connections with service providers off reserve. This lack of connection weakens the services currently being delivered as clients do not trust the workers. Establishing and nurturing these relationships is crucial for effective service delivery.

Accessibility of Services: Participants voiced concerns lack of control over their environment, impacting parents, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities. This lack of accessibility exacerbates stress due to prolonged wait times and insufficient support to meet community needs. Despite their efforts to assist the Nations, service providers face jurisdictional issues, related to policy and funding, that create service backlogs within the community.

Historical Mistrust: Service providers highlighted the high turnover rates within the Nations, which affects the availability of support. They also noted the challenges in filling vacant positions due to historical mistrust, particularly in reference to Child and Family Services.

Trust in the Sectors: Participants frequently mentioned that service workers are uncertain about sharing information between departments without breaching confidentiality. This uncertainty often prevents follow-up conversations among service providers, leading to less wrap around services.

Capacity Building:

Following data collection and analysis, SFNFCI provided two 6-week online learning series. The series provided awareness on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

The ASD sessions started on January 7, 2025 and occurred every Tuesday from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm until February 11, 2025. Each session built on the previous weeks' learning by increasing awareness of the themes. Over the course of six weeks, participants were guided through topics such as the awareness of what ASD is and some of the challenging behaviour individuals may portray. There was a focus on what this may look like in the classroom setting. The following week focused on early signs and indicators of children who may have ASD, with speakers from speech therapy, behaviour therapy, and occupational therapy service providers. The next week featured doctors and caregivers who discussed their personal

their lived experience with advocating for oneself and the barriers they faced in the process. Week five introduced other resources, such as equine, behavioral, and art therapy. The final week included representatives from Community Living Service Delivery and Pyramid Educational Consultants of Canada, focusing on building support and additional training and resources that individuals can access.

The FASD sessions started on January 9, 2025 and occurred every Thursday from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm until February 14, 2025. These sessions followed the same progression as the ASD series, with the exception of Week Two, which focused on ending the stigma and promoting more appropriate language changes.

Resource Solutions

SFNFCI prepared ASD and FASD resource guides which will be distributed to the MLTC health, education, and CFS departments, the First Nations who participated in the project, and those who registered for the eLearning sessions. These Guides will help service providers, support workers, and caregivers, as they provide information on common misconceptions. They also provide information on causes, early indicators, diagnosis and information on programs and services. The Guides were originally created in 2021 (FASD) and 2022 (ASD). However, they were updated to focus on the findings from the MLTC Disability project.

In addition, resource packages were prepared for distribution to MLTC and the MLFN. These packages contain various books and other resources that can help Education, Health and CFS workers in their daily activities.

Recommendations

To bridge the gap between service providers and clients and enhance access to services for people who have a disability, SFNFCI recommends the following:

Relationships: The Tribal Council and Nations have several unique, culturally-relevant, community driven programs and services that could serve to bridge gaps in access for participants working to build trusting relationships with the Tribal Council, member Nations, and off-reserve service providers. These programs can also help address language and communication barriers and improve access to services and programs.

Infrastructure: Building capacity involves partnering with various community-based organizations that are willing to come to the reserve to help develop resources for day

programs and facilities. Building infrastructure also helps caregivers and parents find support in groups as they can have a place to gather and find respite.

Conclusion

The 2024-2025 Disabilities project achieved these goals:

- **Learning from the communities how to address systemic obstacles to access services for people with disabilities:** Through ongoing discussions, Nations are developing formalized follow-up procedures among staff, adopting a holistic, wraparound model of care. Efforts include enhancing support for caregivers, exploring respite opportunities, and fostering culturally appropriate, trauma-informed partnerships with off-reserve providers to improve service accessibility.
- **Increasing awareness of disability issues, programs, and support through resource development and knowledge sharing:** SFNFCI hosted sessions to share research findings, emphasizing the need for more information on ASD and FASD. They facilitated relationships with off-reserve service workers, to provide additional support. The series and resource guide highlight various programs and services available throughout Saskatchewan.

In conclusion, the 2024-2025 Disability Initiative project found evidence of systemic obstacles and barriers that affect access to services that disrupt the flow of services from workers to Nation members. By addressing these barriers with capacity building and resource solutions SFNFCI hopes the information presented can guide further proposals and projects for the Meadow Lake Tribal Council.

This research shows that while some needs and wants may overlap, there is no 'one size fits all' as each Nations has their specific needs. Off-reserve service providers should encourage conversations with Nation members by establishing a relationship with each of the Nations to understand what they need. Clear and precise communication is essential when working with the Nations. Projects and services that respond to the needs and wants of each Nation, ensures that their voices are heard and respected.