



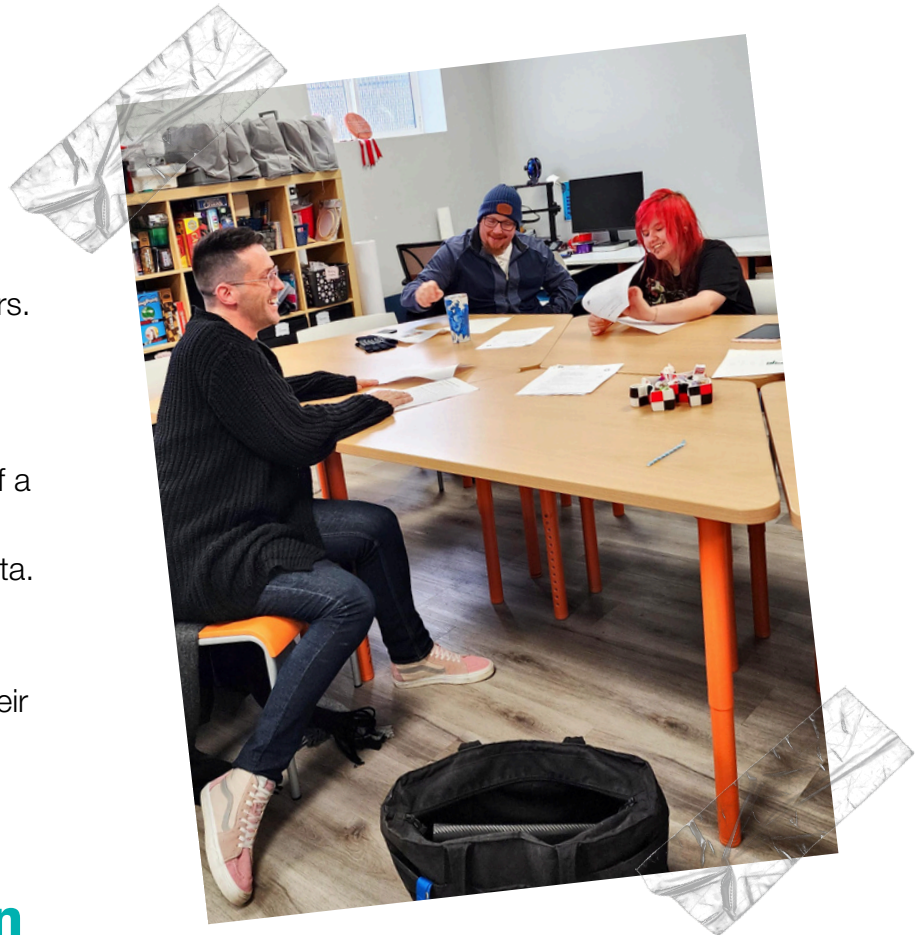
Canadian Mental
Health Association
Mental health for all

Rural Micro-Grant in Action: Expanded Recovery College

With support from West Fraser, CMHA Alberta Northwest Region expanded its Recovery College into Peace River, Alberta. The expansion provided much-needed services to a rural community, while helping course participants improve their resiliency and their ability to seek help, and feel more hopeful about the future.

The need

CMHA Alberta Northwest has operated an educational learning centre, known as a Recovery College, for approximately five years. The Recovery College offers free, drop-in, and hybrid courses delivered in conjunction with peer supporters with lived experience of a mental illness or substance use health issue in Grand Prairie, Alberta. It empowers individuals in their mental health or substance use recovery journeys and supports their loved ones.



The grant in action

The micro-grant allowed the Recovery College to expand its services to communities beyond Grand Prairie, specifically focusing on the Peace River area. This expansion included the introduction of two new peer supporters, localized courses, and new community partnerships.

The impact

The expansion into Peace River was transformative, significantly boosting capacity and extending crucial programming into a rural area where services were much needed.

The program achieved significant success; in fact, with only two peer supporters, it quickly reached full capacity, demonstrating both the program's effectiveness and the need to expand into other communities where these services were also in high demand.

The introduction of the Recovery College had positive impacts for participants in Peace River and surrounding communities, as shown in the evaluation.

1. Increased community engagement and trust

The peer supporters noted that the program helped build trust and active engagement for course participants. Peer supporters noted that as they delivered more courses in the community, participants increased eye contact with the peer supporters and each other initiated more conversations. This was also apparent in the online environment.



2. Improved resiliency skills

Participation in the Recovery College courses significantly boosted participants' resiliency skills.

According to survey data:

- 91% of participants felt better equipped to address issues before they escalated into a crisis.
- 89% were more capable of managing their stress.
- 90% felt better able to handle the impacts of their mental health concerns.

"And the really cool thing is, at the beginning, when [the participants] first started coming, their camera was off, they wouldn't say anything. They wouldn't be involved. And now cameras are on, they're answering the questions, they're staying engaged. So you can just tell the progress that they're making as well is really cool."

– Lead Peer Supporter

3. Proactive help-seeking behaviours

The survey assessed the course's impact on participants' ability to proactively seek help and revealed stronger skills in navigating services and asking for assistance:

- 94% agreed that they are better equipped to communicate their needs.
- 91% felt that they are more aware of the services offered.
- 88% said they are more likely to seek help before a situation escalates into a crisis.

4. Increased hopefulness and sense of belonging

The survey results showed that participants experienced significant improvements in emotional and social well-being:

- 93% reported feeling more hopeful about the future.
- 92% indicated a greater ability to engage in their community.
- 91% reported a heightened sense of belonging.

CMHA acknowledges the full evaluation of CMHA's West Fraser Rural Mental Health Micro-Grant Initiative: Mitri, K. & Newberry, J. (2025). From Isolation to Connection: Evaluating the Impact of the West Fraser Rural Mental Health Grant Initiative. Evaluation report submitted to the Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA]: Taylor Newberry Consulting. For more information, contact ruralandremote@cmha.ca.



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