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Evaluation Report - Year 3
Healthy Communities Project

Submitted to Special Olympics PEI

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***Special
Olympics***
Prince Edward Island



**Healthy Communities Project
Year 3 - Final Evaluation Report**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 31, 2021



Special Olympics
Health

MADE
POSSIBLE BY **Golisano** FOUNDATION

Report prepared by The Quaich Inc.

THE **Quaich** INC.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2017, [Special Olympics PEI](#) (SOPEI) was selected to receive three-year funding for a Healthy Communities Project spanning 2018-2021. The vision of the project is to create communities where Special Olympics athletes and others with intellectual disabilities (ID)¹ have the same access to health and wellness resources – and can attain the same level of good health – as all community members, and where there is no “wrong door for someone with ID to walk through”.

Components of the Healthy Communities Project include:

- Leadership for Sustainable Change
- Health and Wellness Programming
- Access to Follow-up Care
- Health Provider Engagement
- Partnership Development

This project is part of an international outreach of Special Olympics International to establish similar projects worldwide. Funding is provided by the [Golisano Foundation](#) (April 2018 – March 2021).

In October 2018, [The Quaich Inc.](#) was contracted by Special Olympics PEI to evaluate the Healthy Communities Project. This report outlines the evaluation approach and provides a report on project activities, focusing on innovation and impact as assessed in its final year. It provides a picture of how the activities unfolded to meet the objectives and outcomes of the project, and serves to inform the funders and SOPEI Board of Directors on the project achievements. It also provides recommendations and suggestions to SOPEI for sustaining and advancing work initiated during this funding period.

Approach

Evaluation activities were initiated by SOPEI at the beginning of this project to assess its evaluability and ensure the project was well set up for evaluation. The Quaich Inc. worked with the Program Director to consult on the evaluation planning process, development of the logic model, the evaluation framework, and data collection tools. Short and long-term outcomes were outlined in the logic model. In 2020, in

1. Intellectual disability

An individual is considered to have an intellectual disability based on the following three criteria*:

- i. Intellectual functioning level (IQ) is generally below 70-75;
- ii. Significant limitations exist in two or more adaptive skill areas;
- iii. The condition generally manifests itself before the age of 22.

(* based on the *American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* (AAIDD) definition)

recognition of Public Health restrictions which constrained gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic, 'Flexible Criteria' directives were given to Special Olympics teams undertaking Healthy Communities projects, which adjusted the criteria the project was required to meet. The list below includes initial objectives along with 'Flexible Criteria'.

Short-Term Outcomes

- By 2021, the project will meet or exceed the minimum standards of becoming a certified Healthy Community as outlined by Special Olympics and will be closer to self-sustainability, providing more resources to other growing programs.
- The number of athletes involved in health and wellness programs will have increased by 20% and health status of athletes and others participating in health and wellness programs has improved, measured by reduction in obesity and improved self-reporting of mental health.
 - 2020 Flexible Criteria adjusted to 10%.
- A streamlined follow-up process will have resulted in 70% of athletes having access to follow-up care as recommended in screening results.
 - 2020 Flexible Criteria adjusted to 50%.
- At least 25 healthcare professionals in the community have an increased awareness of the health work of Special Olympics, the unmet health needs of people with ID and have increased professional support for people with ID.
- By March 2021, 10 new or redefined sustainable partnerships will have influenced a change in provincial policy and services taking a more whole of government, whole society, holistic approach to health for SOPEI athletes, for all who have an Intellectual Disability, and for communities in general.

Long-Term Outcomes

- SOPEI Healthy Communities Project is recognized for leadership in informing and advocating for policy and service change at local, regional and national levels.
- Systems change through policy and programs has resulted in communities that are healthier and more inclusive.

The evaluation framework guided the development of methods and tools to evaluate both the process and progress toward the stated outcomes each year. Key methods used each year for data collection were document reviews, and focus groups with the SOPEI Board and Project Team. This year, the final year of the project, feedback was sought from external stakeholders. Interviews were also held with Clinical Directors and online surveys conducted with SOPEI Board members, athletes, coaches, caregivers and community stakeholders.

Conclusion

The story of this final evaluation is truly about the SOPEI Healthy Communities Project's innovation, adaptation and virtual engagement in the time of the pandemic. The experiences reflected in this evaluation report demonstrate how the solid foundation on which the project was built and the talented team assigned to the project served to innovate and adapt, while keeping its focus on the purpose of the project in creating system change.

By defining project outcomes at the onset, the Project Team was clear on what they were to achieve. In review, the project met and in most areas exceeded expectations. With reference to the short term outcomes: the project achieved certification as a Healthy Community in each year spanning 2018-2020; the level of participation in health and wellness programs has increased through partnerships with other organizations; more than 25 healthcare professionals have been involved; 100% of athletes had access to follow-up care; and more than 10 partnerships have been initiated and sustained.

With reference to long term outcomes, the project has again excelled. Through its work at a national level, SOPEI's Healthy Community Project has taken a lead role in the country, sharing information with all national and provincial initiatives through SOI calls and spearheading collaboration amongst Healthy Communities Projects in Canada. While there is work to do on system change in PEI, community stakeholders pay tribute to the fact that change is well on its way. The visuals created this year will be a legacy to engage public interest and support for many years to come.

When asked to identify the greatest contribution to advancing the project, the Executive Director of SOPEI again acknowledged that having a staff position dedicated to this work and a supportive team were key. The Golisano funding has been a blessing, and the level of achievement could not have occurred without it.

In the final interpretive session, the Project Team had an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of the project:

- *“Having the opportunity to be assigned to the project to build relationships and partnerships has had an observable impact. To receive e-mails now from people who say they want to continue to connect says a lot about the relationships built through the project.” – Kristen MacDonald, SOPEI Community Engagement Specialist*
- *“The Circle of Health is one of the legacies of the health project, as health and the determinants of health come into question now as we approach other events, projects and the way we work together as a team.” – Matthew McNally, SOPEI Program Director*
- *“The use of the Circle of Health is not always overt, but it is a driving foundation – the fibre of what we are now doing.” – Charity Sheehan, SOPEI Executive Director*

- *“I am excited about taking the work forward although a bit overwhelmed at the task ahead.”
– Ellen Murphy, SOPEI Sport Director*
- *“We have learned a lot about the project and about ourselves. We are committed to the work and will take time and space over the next few months to assess the impact of COVID-19 while developing a plan for continuing the work.” – Charity Sheehan, SOPEI Executive Director*

In completing the evaluation process for Year 3, the evaluators note that themes which emerged in the first two years still resonate: leadership, culture change, sustainability, relationships, and community – and above all else two key areas of action: awareness and connection. We are satisfied that the Project Team has acted on the recommendations from Year 1 and 2 and is committed to engaging with others across Canada to make a difference not only for SOPEI athletes, but for those in the broader community with ID. We have some recommendations for sustainability, but our strongest recommendation is to continue this positive work – evaluate, innovate, engage and communicate, while providing leadership to others. This legacy will make a difference in not only the lives of the athletes and those with ID, but for other more vulnerable citizens in the community and therefore society as a whole.

Recommendations

1. Project Management

- Continue to innovate, adapt and find resources to sustain project activities.
- Continue to use tools for recording meeting notes, adapting them as necessary.
- Continue to solicit feedback from participants in various programs, even when held virtually. For less structured activities, reaching out informally to solicit testimonials from participants would provide valuable feedback and content for communications.
- Within staff ability, attempt to regularly revisit the Communications Framework as a key driver of communication activity in the project, particularly in times of staff change.

2. Partnership Engagement and Management

- Continue to engage and nurture an increased number of diverse partnerships within community and systems, for sustainability and continuity of programs.
- Modify the MOU or Partnership Agreement, based on partner feedback.
- Continue to use the Community Engagement Tracking Sheet to record contact with potential partners and other community groups, and ensure that details are provided for each engagement.
- Set up a mechanism for evaluating existing partnerships and to continue engaging strategic partnerships at many levels, local community, government, professional organizations, and funders.

3. Improving Health Outcomes

- a. Develop a strategy to bring back athletes and volunteers to SOPEI programming post-pandemic as restrictions are lifted and in-person events can begin.
- b. Place continued emphasis on health provider engagement and determinants of health, working on community issues that impact the athletes.
- c. Seek resources for a research project to more fully assess the impact of the Healthy Communities Project and athlete compliance on athlete health outcomes.
- d. Create opportunities for Clinical Directors to meet with the Project Director to share information and jointly develop protocols.
- e. Consult with all Clinical Directors regarding suggestions put forward in the interviews to explore implementation of the suggestions, considering the volunteer nature of the CD positions.
- f. Keep up the momentum in maximizing opportunities for promotion, collaboration and recruitment of health service providers to increase awareness and increased sensitivity in meeting the needs with people with ID.

4. Sustainability

- a. Use the visual mapping tool created by the SOPEI Community Engagement Specialist and based on the Circle of Health, as a foundational tool that can be communicated to current and potential funders.
- b. Continue efforts to allocate funds to the work within SOPEI and through new funding partners, after the Golisano Funding ends.
- c. Continue to use the Volunteer Tracking Sheet to gather data for assessing volunteer participation levels between each year and/or each screening, and ensure that information is fully completed.

5. Board Engagement

- a. Engage the Board in planning a strategy to advocate for partnerships with corporations, governments and like-minded organizations for resources to sustain the work.
- b. Develop a Board primer using the visual mapping tool based on the Circle of Health.

6. Dissemination

- a. Consider publishing the process and outcomes of the SOPEI Healthy Communities Project in a journal article.
- b. Share products of the SOPEI Healthy Communities Project with others in the community and throughout Canada.

