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CAT KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

**Project Summary**

*Anti-Stigma Media & Messaging*

*The aim of this Project Summary is to provide insights to other teams that may want to undertake similar work, so that they can learn from your experience and implement effective projects! Your responses can be brief and bullet pointed.*

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| **Title of the project** | Harm Reduction Billboard Project |
| **City /organization** | Kamloops, BC – United Way BC, Tk’emlúps te Secwe̓pemc (TteS) |
| **Contact email** | NatikaB@uwbc.ca |
| **Date of project** | Spring, Summer 2021 |
| **Who was involved?** *Roles & responsibilities* | |
| * Lead by the Community Services Department at TteS, the CAT monies received were kept within the TteS community, with exception of the billboard rental (though a portion of this rental went to the land owner, who was a TteS member). * Planning for each billboard (the billboard was changed every 4 – 6 weeks) was decided by a TteS advisory group and it included the Community Services Coordinator (staff member), the Wellness Counsellor (TteS member and staff member), the Mental Health and Wellness Navigator (Williams Lake member and staff member), and the photographer, who took the pictures for the billboard (TteS member and local artist). | |
| **What was the objective?** *Goals & aims* | |
| * Trauma-informed, loving messages offered to the TteS community and everyone who were exposed to the billboard, while commuting along the highway. * To offer harm reduction messaging through the lens of community, family, land, tradition, love, respect, and culture. * The messaging was always bilingual, in both in English and Secwepemctsín (Secwe̓pemc language). * To keep the monies within the TteS economy, to ensure that the project was TteS-driven, right down to the dollar (with exception – as already mentioned – to the amount given to Pattison Billboards). * To offer an Indigenous perspective on harm reduction. | |
| **What did you do and what was the effect?** *Resources needed, outputs produced, effects & feedback* | |
| * We leased a billboard from Pattison Billboards for one year * We needed to develop a TteS Billboard Advisory Team, so that the project was driven by TteS. * We needed to hire a TteS photographer. * We needed to get permission from the TteS land owner to accept our vision for the billboard. * The billboard was well received by the TteS community and the CAT collective. | |
| **What worked well?** *Strengths, key drivers & enablers* | |
| * The billboard was well received by the TteS Community and by the CAT committee. * TteS members noticed it! There are many billboards erected along the highway within the TteS community, most of which are largely ignored. * It was the only billboard that wasn’t advertising anything. * The majority of the monies received stayed with TteS community members. * All of the images were of TteS members (without their faces showing), land, and culture. * We were able to learn together, more about Indigenous-specific harm reduction and how it needed to be reflected within the community. It was empowering doing this project, through a strength-based, TteS-lens as opposed to through a mainstream-lens. * Create a billboard where TteS members would see themselves reflected as influential, amazing people. | |
| **What was challenging?** *Less-effective work, barriers & lessons learned* | |
| * TteS members really liked the billboard and because it wasn’t explicitly referring to harm reduction re: the opioid epidemic, some folx thought that it had to with land rights. This wasn’t a barrier though, though unintentional, it was an interesting perspective, and it did align with some of the TteS land back initiatives. We chose not to correct anyone, as we were glad members had taken a keen liking to it. * We had to get the layout of the sign right, so that it wasn’t all words. We didn’t want to compromise on it being bilingual, but we also didn’t want anyone to get into a car accident trying to read it. After the first installment, we knew what needed to shift for the installments moving forward. * Some folx were hesitant about using the word “love” on the billboard, as it’s such a potent word. After discussion and reviewing of drafts, it the use of the word actually worked out really well and “you are loved, you are important” was reflective of an important TteS value. * Leasing a billboard is expensive. * In late May, 215+ unmarked graves of Indigenous children were confirmed at the previous Kamloops Indian Residential School. Shortly afterwards wildfire season started and then there was a heat dome. Along with the pandemic, the additions of these traumatic consecutive events, made it challenging to prioritize the billboard with the same energy as before. The members in our Advisory Group were generational survivors, so you can imagine the pain and of course, the TteS community needed much support as the news was devasting. The prioritizes needed to shift to meet the community needs and to support grief and healing. | |
| **What could you do next?** *Partnerships, spreading & expanding* | |
| * I would have loved to have kept the billboard project going for a few years, so that it got more attention from the wider community (municipal… provincial perhaps). * It would be awesome if more First Nations did this, for many reasons including the reclamation of land and space. A community-specific billboard isn’t trying to sell anyone a hamburger or a legal team, but rather is standing solid in place, within the traditional territory (unceded in the case of TteS) and it controls the narrative of what it wants folx to see and hear. That is powerful stuff! | |
| **Any other learnings to share with fellow Community Action Teams?** | |
| * I wish we made a book of all the images and sold to raise money for the TteS community. * Also, it would be awesome if TteS had their own billboard, so we didn’t have to lease it from Pattison. | |

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