



Making Connections

Insights on Engaging the Public in Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

HORIZONS OF FRIENDSHIP



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We dedicate this resource to the resilient Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan people who work tirelessly to transform the lives of women, children and families in Tonicapán for the better. We also thank the people and organizations in Canada involved throughout this project to help raise awareness about these important efforts.

HORIZONS OF FRIENDSHIP

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Canada 

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When I came to Canada, I was greeted by different worldviews that helped me grow stronger in my profession and as a person. The confidence in my own decisions and my value as a woman were reinforced during my visit. Part of this empowerment came from being able to speak to people with my own voice – I was able to tell my own story and share our collective struggles in Guatemala.”

Verónica Mazariegos
Traditional Maya K'iche' Midwife Trainer and Knowledge Exchange Participant

Experiencing this in person – stepping out of my comfort zone, being part of important conversations and having genuine relationships with Horizons' partners in Guatemala – deepened my understanding and motivated me to support international development like nothing else had before.”

Taryn Woolsey
Registered Midwife and Knowledge Exchange Participant

Change needs to happen – to improve life expectancy, the lives of women and children and in the delivery of health service that ensures cultural humility. Change will not happen until more people understand the need to ensure equity for all, regardless of race, religion or location. I'm grateful Horizons is at the forefront for change.”

Cristine Rego
Ojibwe Knowledge Teacher, Professor and Knowledge Exchange Participant

INTRODUCTION

When people make connections with each other, they are taking part in a powerful act. Building spaces for interpersonal interactions enables fuller, more meaningful understanding and opens the door to crucial conversations. These connections make way for the sharing of experiences, which lies at the heart of solidarity and collaboration.

When Horizons of Friendship (Horizons) began working on the large-scale, multi-year **Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Project** in Totonicapán, Guatemala with its local partners, we knew that building opportunities to make connections would be vital for its undertaking.

This is why we developed enriching and immersive public engagement initiatives that brought people in Canada and Guatemala together to talk about the importance of improving the health of women and children. Building these connections not only allowed key partners to share their own stories and experiences but also generated new ones for the more than 6,700 people in Canada who were intimately engaged through the project.

They include the story of an Inuk Registered Midwife in Canada and her trip to Guatemala to meet traditional Indigenous Maya K'iche' midwives and health practitioners. The midwife was so moved by the meeting, she invited her new friends to travel more than 5,000 kilometers and visit her home in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, to exchange cultural practices.

And the story of a determined traditional Indigenous Maya K'iche' midwife who visited a midwifery clinic in Belleville, Ontario. There, she shared her journey from being a young mother to becoming the youngest traditional midwife in her community, avidly advocating for the rights of Maya K'iche' women and girls.

In the coming pages, you will read about the process through which Horizons facilitated these connections and stories. By offering our critical reflections on this process and the evolving principles that guided it, we hope you will:

- **draw from the 22 insights Horizons** gleaned through its experience engaging with health practitioners and advocates, youth, the general public and Indigenous Peoples living in Canada;
- **learn more about the challenges** Indigenous Maya women, children and families face in Guatemala and how support from Canada is helping address them; and
- **be inspired to support** Canadian international development and the health of women and children around the world.

About the Maternal, Newborn And Child Health (MNCH) Project



This resource is part of a large (\$13.2 million) project called MNCH: Reducing Gaps for Indigenous Peoples in Totonicapán, Guatemala, which was funded by the Government of Canada and is improving maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) for thousands of women and children. Horizons of Friendship and our local partner, the Association for Health Promotion, Research and Education (PIES de Occidente), implemented this project in close collaboration with the two key MNCH care providers in Totonicapán: the more than 900 traditional Indigenous Maya K'iche' midwives who attend the majority of births in the province and the Totonicapán Health Directorate (a provincial division of Guatemala's Ministry of Health).

Launched in March 2016, the initiative contributed to reducing the deaths of women and children across all eight municipalities in Totonicapán. Cradled by mountains and valleys in Guatemala's Western Highlands, Totonicapán is a department (province) with approximately 500,000 inhabitants. More than 90% of Totonicapán's population is Indigenous Maya K'iche', and nearly four out of five people live in poverty. Prior to the start of the project, Totonicapán suffered from some of the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the country and in Central America.

Now lives are being saved by strengthening the delivery and use of quality, culturally sensitive health services for pregnant women, newborns and children under five, as well as providing sexual and reproductive health and rights education for adolescent girls and boys. More than 400,000 people in Totonicapán have benefited from the MNCH initiative.

The initiative contributed to reducing the deaths of women and children across all eight municipalities in Totonicapán.



About Horizons Of Friendship

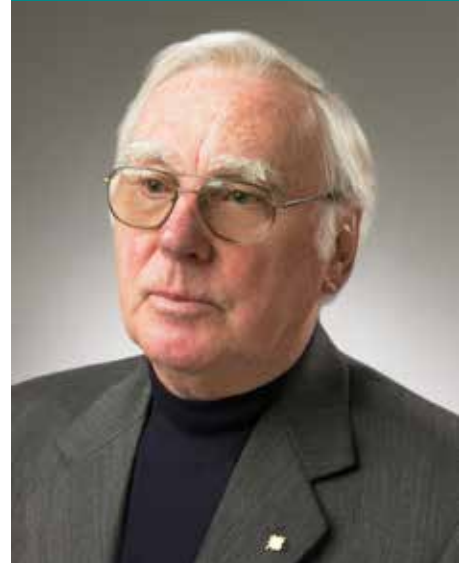
Founded in 1973 by three residents of Cobourg, Ontario – Father Tim Coughlan, and David and Christine Stewart – Horizons of Friendship is a non-profit international development organization with charitable status committed to eliminating the root causes of poverty and injustice in Central America and Mexico.

Over the past five decades, Horizons has implemented thousands of projects from Chiapas to Panama – and everywhere in between – guided by a simple, powerful principle: helping people help themselves. With the support of Canadians, our local partners have transformed their communities for the better.

We know the support that enables these transformations is rooted in understanding and solidarity, which is why Horizons has always provided opportunities for people in Canada to directly engage with the priority issues affecting the communities our partners work to improve.

Two flagship Horizons initiatives have provided Canadians with opportunities to learn firsthand from our partners in Central America and Mexico: speaking tours across Canada by our visiting partners from the region, and educational tours – including youth exchanges – for Canadians to countries where our partners' projects are located. Both have been central to creating deeply engaging experiences for people that have paved the way for long-lasting, meaningful involvement in supporting international development.

At their core, these community outreach initiatives help build bridges between the North and South. This rich history has helped shape the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health project's public engagement strategy.



“When we undertake a project in Latin America and you support it, it is our mutual vote for freedom and justice.”

Father Tim Coughlan
Horizons' Co-Founder



MNCH: The Public Engagement Strategy



Our goals for this project's public engagement strategy were to encourage people in Canada to develop a deeper understanding of maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) issues and to become actively involved in addressing them.

The project's engagement efforts focused on five initiatives:

Canada-to-Guatemala Knowledge Exchanges: Canadian maternal, newborn and child health providers and advocates, along with gender-based violence experts, visited Tonicapán, Guatemala alongside Horizons to exchange knowledge, experiences and practices with their Guatemalan and Indigenous Maya K'iche' counterparts. These exchanges emphasized two-way learning opportunities and explored the connections between global health and social justice. *(See Chapter 1.)*

Guatemala-to-Canada Knowledge Exchanges: Guatemalan and Indigenous Maya K'iche' health workers visited numerous cities, towns and communities in Canada to share stories, knowledge and experiences. Horizons organized diverse events to engage people from different backgrounds, including health practitioners, youth, the general public and Indigenous Peoples living in Canada. *(See Chapter 2.)*

Youth Engagement Program: Students in Grades 7-8 across Ontario participated in activities designed and facilitated by Horizons addressing global health, social justice and the importance of youth action. A visit to schools by our Guatemalan and Indigenous Maya K'iche' partners provided a unique experience for youth living outside major urban centres and in rural areas. *(See Chapter 3.)*

Exchanges with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples: During their trips to Canada, Horizons created many opportunities for exchanges between the Indigenous Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan partners and Indigenous Peoples living in Canada. Visits were made to Indigenous communities, territories and organizations in Ontario, Quebec and Nunavut. During these visits, MNCH cultural practices and strategies to establish culturally safe health initiatives in both Canada and Guatemala were discussed. A special exchange visit to Guatemala by Indigenous health workers living in Canada was also carried out. *(See Chapter 4.)*

Communications and Social Media: Project milestones, updates and testimonials were shared on social media platforms and traditional media outlets. Online metrics used to evaluate effectiveness revealed people-centric stories were the best received. Horizons followed clear ethical guidelines when compiling these stories. *(See Chapter 5.)*

We hope you will be inspired by what you read and that this resource will assist in your own public engagement efforts!

CHAPTER 1: Canada-to-Guatemala Knowledge Exchanges

“I did not anticipate the deep impact this exchange would have on me personally. Being able to see firsthand the barriers people face has resonated with me more than I appreciated it would. This helps solidify my resolve to continue my involvement with the project and help in any way I can.”

Ashley Holloway

Licensed Practical Nurse and Knowledge Exchange Participant

When your goal is to have more people in Canada understand maternal, newborn and child health issues (MNCH), numbers matter. However, numbers are not the end-all measure of success. Providing meaningful opportunities for Canadians to directly engage with those same issues is just as important.

Horizons set out to share these opportunities with Canadians by giving them the chance to witness firsthand – through 10-day exchange visits to Guatemala – the enormous difference being made by traditional midwives, health educators, health workers and community leaders in Totonicapán. Once they returned home, these Canadians were supported by Horizons in acting as champions for global health among their peers.

Corresponding to the project’s focus, these “champions-in-the-making” were Canadians who actively worked or advocated for the health of women and children. By engaging this group of people, Horizons was able to tap into the expertise of Canadians who were already professionally interested in these issues. This approach also allowed for meaningful exchanges of knowledge and practices between Canadian participants and their counterparts in Guatemala.

Finding our champions

Health practitioners and experts from across Canada were invited to submit applications to participate in the exchanges. We asked hospitals, family health teams, clinics and professional associations to help spread the word about this unique initiative.

A selection committee (comprising Horizons’ executive director, MNCH program manager and community outreach and communications coordinator) reviewed the applications using the following criteria:

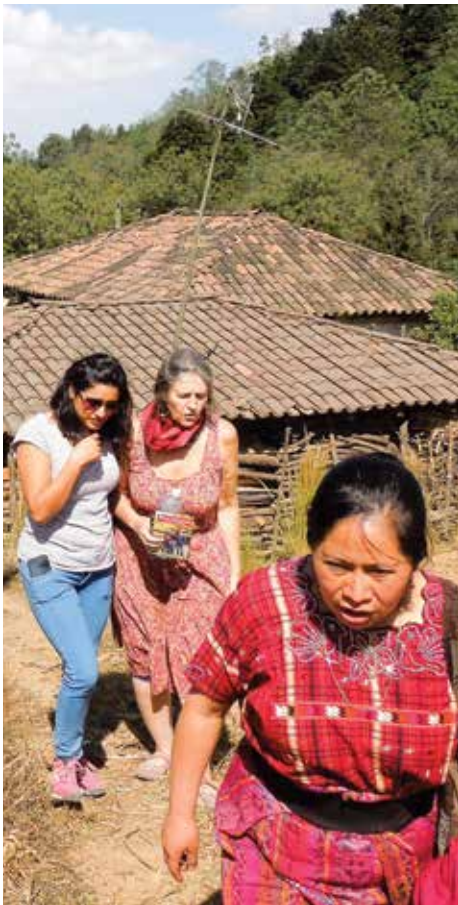
- **experience providing care** to underserved populations or Indigenous Peoples. Such experience aligns with the mission of our local partner PIES de Occidente, which has worked to strengthen the health of underserved Indigenous Maya populations in Guatemala’s Western Highlands for more than 20 years.
- **eagerness to learn** about maternal, newborn and child health from a social justice perspective. We looked for applicants who demonstrated interest in connecting health gaps to larger systemic issues and a readiness to view disparities through the lens of social justice, a philosophy that is integral to the work of Horizons and our partners.



Once they landed in Guatemala, the participants from Canada took part in major activities designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of maternal, newborn and child health.



CANADA-TO-GUATEMALA KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGES



- **openness to learning** about Indigenous Maya approaches to health. In promoting the exchanges, Horizons emphasized that the sharing of knowledge, experiences and practices would be a reciprocal process among peers.
- **willingness to engage** new and established networks to champion the health of women and children and promote the project. A readiness to speak with friends, colleagues and other circles about the experience signalled initial enthusiasm for becoming a champion of global health.
- **support for gender equality** within and outside the applicant's own practice. All project activities included a gender equality focus and participants' personal experience on this front aligned with this overarching approach.
- **some fluency in Spanish** to help ease the flow of information and coordination during exchanges. Nevertheless, Horizons made it clear that translation would be available for all participants.

Once they landed in Guatemala, the participants from Canada took part in various activities designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the maternal, newborn and child health issues the project addressed. Cultural activities were also organized, allowing participants to further appreciate the country in which the project was implemented.

This extensive initiative generated five valuable insights. Other organizations looking to engage Canadians in similarly intensive and personal ways may find these helpful.



INSIGHTS

INSIGHT 1***Firsthand experience is the most powerful way to engage people***

More than 90% of participants rated these exchanges as “excellent” in their evaluations. The most cited reason was the opportunity to meet and have direct conversations with both the Maya K’iche’ women and families benefiting from this project and with the women and men working in Totonicapán to bring this project to life.

Participants pointed out that the nuances and emotions conveyed by the people at the forefront of these efforts simply could not be captured in written materials, or even talks by Horizons’ staff. In several cases, it was this “human connection” that led participants to commit – above and beyond expectations – to championing maternal and child health.

Activities for participants revolved around dialogue and connections with the women and men involved at all project levels, which included:

- ***introductions to the MNCH project, the Maya worldview and maternal and child health realities in Totonicapán*** – This first set of activities provided essential information on the social and cultural contexts in which the project operated. Through panels and roundtables, Canadian participants heard from a wide range of people involved in the project, including Totonicapán Health Directorate staff, traditional midwives and even traditional Indigenous Maya K’iche’ community leaders.
- ***accompanying traditional Indigenous Maya K’iche’ midwives, health staff and health educators in their daily work*** – Participating in planned home and community health visits (including health posts and clinics) was a highlight for many Canadian participants, providing a unique opportunity to directly learn about the enormous difference traditional midwives, staff and educators make in the lives of Maya K’iche’ women, children and families. During the health visits, the midwives and health educators demonstrated practices and educational materials delivered by the project. All homes and communities visited were consulted in advance.
- ***discussions with adolescents to learn about their views on sexual and reproductive health and rights*** – Panels featuring adolescents allowed youth to speak directly with Canadian participants about the impact the project’s popular education initiatives promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights had on their lives. Dozens of young women and men likened the new information and process of empowerment to a “veil being lifted from [their] eyes.” These encounters had a profound effect on Canadian participants’ understanding of the vital importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights education.
- ***workshops with Totonicapán Health Directorate staff, traditional midwives and health educators to exchange knowledge, practices and experiences*** – Canadian participants were invited to exchange



Learning and sharing experiences and ideas were at the centre of the knowledge exchanges.



Consulting and working directly with established partners is essential.

experiences and practices in maternal, newborn and child health with their Guatemalan and Maya K'iche' counterparts. Rotating stations covering different themes were set up to take full advantage of the allotted time. Canadian participants were asked to engage in a reciprocal and respectful dialogue between peers when sharing experiences and practices and to adapt the information to local contexts. Doing so encouraged participants to engage with and reflect on what they had learned at a deeper level and share a contextualized experience with our local partners. Horizons differentiated this experience from initiatives that focused more on technical training or services provision.

While other organizations may not have the institutional or financial capabilities to carry out exchanges like these ones on a regular basis, it's important to create spaces and opportunities for people in Canada to hear directly from the women, children and men being supported by community development initiatives. New technologies can be used to facilitate direct conversations and enable local partners to tell their own stories in novel ways.

INSIGHT 2

Planning is critical – but be ready to adapt to unexpected changes

A significant amount of planning and preparation went into organizing these exchanges: from logistics, such as hotel and translation coordination, to program-based components, such as organizing the number and types of activities for participants and providing them with guidance.

Horizons supported participants both before and after the exchanges. Once participants were selected, Horizons asked them to join two preparatory briefings and review a comprehensive reading package.

The first briefing occurred a few months in advance and allowed Canadian participants to introduce themselves to each other and share their backgrounds and perspectives. It also provided an overview of the social and historical background in which the project was taking place.

Held much closer to departure, the second briefing almost exclusively addressed logistics for the exchange. Horizons staff reviewed the itinerary, including day-to-day activities, provided precise instructions about departure plans and international travel, shared a comprehensive list of necessities, clothing and sundry items and discussed the top health and safety concerns for the regions in Guatemala the Canadians would visit.

Horizons was greatly aided in its planning and preparation by the expertise and presence of our local partner, PIES de Occidente, in Totonicapán's communities. PIES provided logistical support when organizing community visits, taking care to respectfully request and receive the approval of women, traditional midwives and community authorities. Coordination with the Totonicapán Health Directorate was also necessary for visits to health posts and clinics. Consulting and working directly with established partners or organizations prior to and during community visits is essential when carrying out this type of public engagement work.

However, even the best-laid plans can be disrupted by unexpected circumstances, especially given the social and economic realities in Totonicapán – and Guatemala

as a whole. In the case of the exchanges, we had to adjust activities and travel itineraries quickly to respond to occasional regional and national mobilizations and roadblocks caused by impromptu religious processions and protests.

Once again, the adeptness of our local partner in rapidly responding to these developments and proposing alternative activities was pivotal. Organizations interested in pursuing this type of public engagement work should ensure they and their partners have the capacity to swiftly react to these kinds of developments to guarantee the safety of participants. It is also important to build enough flexibility into activities and programming to be able to react quickly.

INSIGHT 3

Ensure there are opportunities for reflection and introspection

In the first few exchanges, Horizons strove to provide a large number of activities for participants each day to enable them to fully understand both the massive scope of the project and the maternal and child health issues it addressed.

A typical day would begin with travel at 7:30 a.m. to remote communities in Totonicapán, followed by tours and conversations with Totonicapán Health Directorate Staff at health posts and clinics. Next, traditional midwives and health educators would invite participants to join them on their home visits while they explained the training and practices being delivered by the project. The participants would return to their accommodations for dinner between 6 – 6:30 p.m.

While this may not seem like an overloaded itinerary, the constant travel between remote communities and sheer amount of information to discuss and absorb added up over the course of 10 days. Participants were exhausted but extremely satisfied with the organization of the exchanges. However, in exit evaluations, some expressed the need for more time for personal reflection on what they'd seen and learned.

As a result, Horizons adjusted the design of later exchanges by building in time for participants to reflect on their own or with other participants. This was achieved by slightly reducing the number of workshops and presentations each day and returning to accommodations earlier on one or two days.

These changes were rated positively in subsequent exit interviews and even led to more in-depth discussions of the project and the challenges it tackled. When conducting this type of public engagement work, it is important to recognize that replacing a few activities with time for reflection is not a sacrifice, but rather an investment in the quality of participants' engagement.

INSIGHT 4

Provide participants with support before and after the initiative

Exchange participants praised the level of preparation provided prior to departure. The two briefings described earlier, background reading and continual email and telephone contact, boosted the confidence of the participants – especially those who had never been involved in such an initiative before. Participants received the utmost level of preparation – primarily in areas such as intercultural communications



Horizons adjusted the design of later exchanges to build in time for personal reflection.

CANADA-TO-GUATEMALA KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGES



Numerous participants told us the exchanges had a great impact on their lives, with lasting results.

and contexts, trip goals and expectations, logistics and traveler well-being.

Exit evaluations held with participants provided an essential opportunity to receive feedback that could help improve each exchange. Participants rated the support they received from Horizons prior to and during exchanges as very positive. During follow up interviews after the exchanges to talk about the impact of the initiative, a few participants expressed the need for the same level of support and contact after their return to Canada.

One participant felt she had not had the chance to properly discuss the impact the exchanges had on her both personally and professionally and suggested that a meeting of participants be held some weeks after the exchanges. Another encouraged Horizons to host meetings between former participants from different exchanges to talk and share lessons among themselves.

Horizons has concluded that a stronger level of support was needed for participants to process their experiences and emotional impacts once the exchanges ended, building safe spaces to debrief in order to reduce any negative carry over when returning home. This should be considered vital when engaging in public engagement initiatives that are as immersive as these exchanges.

INSIGHT 5

Create a what's next plan for participants after return

Numerous participants told us the exchanges had a great impact on their lives, with lasting results. They learned to identify the socioeconomic inequities that contribute to poor maternal, newborn and child health outcomes. They also gained a new or deeper understanding of international development initiatives and the power of collaborative partnerships to strengthen the health of women and children abroad. The next step was to determine how they could help at an individual level after returning to Canada.

The exit evaluations sessions gave Horizons the opportunity to speak with participants about their return to Canada as champions of maternal, newborn and child health – and how Horizons could assist them in taking up that role. Horizons worked with participants on what they understood a champion would do, allowing for different levels of availability.

One of the most important insights that came out of these exchanges was to prepare and present detailed ways for participants to be directly involved in the project's public engagement strategy immediately after the exchange. During the exit evaluation sessions, many ideas for direct participant involvement were discussed. These included jointly organizing presentations and guest lectures at workplaces, colleges and universities, organizing public events within personal networks and immediate communities and assisting in preparing speaker series featuring their Guatemalan and Maya K'iche' counterparts during visits to Canada.

As a result, former participants became instrumental in reaching out to more Canadians – and even aided in coordinating activities during the Guatemala-to-Canada exchanges. (*See Chapter 2.*)

Organizations that take up this kind of public engagement work need to recognize the increased willingness of participants to lend direct support after being a part of these experiences and be able to direct that enthusiasm towards action.

CHAPTER 2: Guatemala-to-Canada Knowledge Exchanges

I have always held the belief that gender-based violence is a global issue. Building networks and collaborations, sharing practices and working with our international partners can help us move closer to the elimination of violence and improving maternal, newborn and child health.”

Nancy Johnston

Executive Director, Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre

Horizons held several events in Canada to engage with people on the importance of strengthening maternal, newborn and child health, including public presentations, film screenings and guest lectures at universities. Although excellent ways to start conversations, these events could not fully convey the voices of the people at the forefront of our project in Guatemala.

Providing opportunities for Canadians to hear directly from those who benefit from, and those implementing, international development initiatives was a key insight identified in the last chapter. By listening to these personal stories, people in Canada can be inspired to act in support of international development and even become strong allies of the causes they learn about.

Recognizing this, Horizons worked to host local partners and implementers from Totonicapán on 10-day exchanges to Canada similar to the Canada-to-Guatemala exchanges. Because most of the visitors were health practitioners, Horizons organized activities that would allow them to share experiences and practices with their counterparts in Canada in a reciprocal and respectful manner.

Choosing participants and event partners

To help our local project partner PIES de Occidente choose participants from Totonicapán, Horizons provided a series of potential participant profiles based on the target audiences that would likely be present at events and the major project developments to highlight.

PIES in turn connected with people involved in the project and communities in Totonicapán to identify participants who were highly committed to project activities and demonstrated leadership among their peers.

At the same time, Horizons began reaching out to Canadian organizations with like-minded values and missions to inquire about jointly hosting and organizing events for the exchanges. Overlaps with other organizations included a focus on social justice, global health, the health of women, girls and underserved populations and the elimination of gender-based violence, to name a few.

Former exchange participants from Canada-to-Guatemala played a major part in this outreach process. These new champions of maternal, newborn and child health connected Horizons with university departments and programs such as midwifery and nursing, hospitals and community health clinics and professional associations.





Once PIES had selected the participants for the exchanges, Horizons began coordinating international travel arrangements. Participants from Totonicapán represented a broad range of roles within the project, including:

- **traditional Maya K'iche' midwives** – As highly respected leaders in their communities, traditional midwives are often the first care practitioner women and families in Totonicapán consult when seeking maternal and child care. They are central to the Maya worldview and culture.
- **PIES health educators** – Local workers hired by PIES carried out tens of thousands of home visits in Totonicapán's most isolated villages where they discussed health practices for pregnant women and children in the Maya K'iche' language.
- **Totonicapán Health Directorate staff** – The project worked in close coordination with the provincial division of the Ministry of Health to equip most health posts and centres in Totonicapán with medical supplies and to train frontline health workers.
- **traditional Maya K'iche' community authorities** – By working with local and ancestral leadership structures, PIES cultivated the support of Maya K'iche' role models at the community level. These leaders attended workshops facilitated by PIES on the importance of ensuring the well-being of women and girls and ending gender-based violence.
- **Totonicapán Hospital staff** – The project provided an unprecedented amount of medical equipment to the Totonicapán Hospital, where major emergencies during and after pregnancy are referred.
- **Maya K'iche' youth** – Adolescents in school and out of school settings received dynamic workshops that covered a range of topics often considered taboo in their communities related to their sexual and reproductive health and rights: bodily autonomy and self-esteem, identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships and the development of a “life plan” for the future, among others.
- **Local PIES staff** – As the lead project implementer, PIES ensured that project activities (from workshops and training to equipment delivery) were carried out. Their expertise on promoting research and education for the health of Indigenous Maya peoples made them uniquely able to talk about the historical context for the project and why culturally pertinent care is crucial.

These exchanges helped engage thousands of people in Canada. They present five important insights that may be useful to other organizations planning to connect with people through similar initiatives.

INSIGHTS

INSIGHT 6

Collaborate with other organizations for more impact

As one of the few international development organizations in Canada based entirely out of a small rural community, Horizons' presence and history gives it advantages when engaging with people outside major urban areas. However, this

location also limits the number of people Horizons can reach through its public engagement efforts.

To reach more people during the Guatemala-to-Canada exchanges, Horizons partnered with other organizations to hold joint public events. For smaller organizations, the advantages of working with other groups cannot be stressed enough. Arriving at clear, shared goals on joint public engagement initiatives by comparing missions and values with potential collaborators should result in more natural and energetic partnerships.

Institutions and organizations that hosted public events, meetings and sessions with the participants from Guatemala included:

Health and Gender Violence Prevention Institutions and Organizations

- New Life Midwives
- Northumberland Hills Hospital
- Generations Midwifery Care
- Canadian Partnership for Women and Children’s Health
- Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit
- Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre & Cobourg Police Services
- Women’s College Hospital & Mount Sinai Hospital
- Quinte Midwives & Belleville General Hospital
- Markham Stouffville General Hospital
- Northumberland Family Health Team
- East Ottawa Midwives
- Kingston Community Health Centres
- City of Hamilton Public Health Service
- Peterborough Public Health
- Ininew Patient Services

Universities

- Ryerson University Midwifery Education Programme
- Trent/Fleming School of Nursing & Trent University First Peoples House of Learning
- Queen’s University Faculty of Health Sciences
- Carleton University Pauline Jewett Institute of Women’s and Gender Studies
- University of Toronto Department of Family & Community Medicine and Dalla Lana School of Public Health
- Ontario Tech University Faculty of Social Science and Humanities

Service Clubs, Civil Society and Labour Organizations

- Women’s Inter Church Council of Canada
- Rotary Club of Cobourg
- KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union
- Christ the Servant Catholic Church
- Rotary Club of Ottawa
- Rotary Club of Belleville
- Ontario Council for International Cooperation
- United Steelworkers
- Kawartha World Issues Centre (KWIC)



To reach more people during the Guatemala-to-Canada exchanges, Horizons partnered with other organizations to hold joint public events.



INSIGHT 7

Ask champions for introductions to collaborating organizations

Horizons' champions from the Canada-to-Guatemala exchanges were instrumental in initiating conversations with organizations that would go on to collaborate on public engagement events and meetings in Canada. For example: registered midwives introduced Horizons to the Ryerson Midwifery Education Program, a doctor connected Horizons with the Markham Stouffville General Hospital and its Alongside Midwifery Unit, and a public health dietitian helped host a conversation with the City of Hamilton Public Health Services.

This insight is very closely related to the preceding one. Small organizations such as Horizons – and larger organizations too – should do their best to mobilize individual supporters in facilitating the connections needed for collaboration. Relying on champions to do so also points to the importance of sustaining relationships with them over time. Suggesting they engage in concrete actions, such as setting up introductory phone calls or meetings ahead of desired events, is a step in that direction. Regardless of the actions they take, building and maintaining personal relationships with supporters should be viewed as public engagement investments that can yield fruitful, long-term results.

INSIGHT 8

Welcome different perspectives to increase learning opportunities

A project this large in scope can be understood through a multitude of perspectives. The care of traditional midwives, the efforts of health educators, the work of public health personnel and officials, the involvement of community leaders and the realities of adolescents all speak to different issues the project addresses.

Horizons endeavoured to include all of these voices in events to allow people in Canada to engage with different dimensions of the project. It was exciting to find that bringing diverse participants together created unforeseen learning opportunities for Canadian audiences and visitors from Guatemala alike.

Prior to the exchanges, for example, it was uncommon for the members of the various groups involved in the project to meet with each other for a prolonged period, let alone travel together. But a new level of understanding and dialogue was created when these individuals came together in Canada. For example, traditional midwives and adolescents shared their experiences directly with high-ranking Ministry of Health officials while riding a train. And, as they travelled to an event, community leaders spoke with PIES staff about the importance of getting more men involved in the project. People attending the public events saw this dialogue in action, as presenters shared their own views and challenges but restated their mutual commitment to the well-being of women, children and families.

INSIGHT 9

Find a reliable means to gather contact information of audiences

The events organized by Horizons during the knowledge exchanges to Canada became important avenues for expanding networks of supporters that would share what they had learned with others. Listening to the stories of visiting participants working in the Western Highlands of Guatemala had such a galvanizing effect on people attending events, many inevitably asked, “How can I stay involved?”

To catalyze this excitement, organizers need to put in place effective ways to stay in touch with attendees after events wrap up. Set up protocols at the start or end of the events to collect contact information from those who opt to share it. Smaller organizations could consider integrating the use of mobile apps that allow for attendee registration. These methods are often more reliable than pen and paper, especially if a limited number of staff or volunteers is available to run events. The financial cost of using an online app should be weighed against the potential growth in the number of supporters an organization can mobilize with it.

INSIGHT 10

Adjust presentations according to different audiences

To be effective speakers, the participants from Guatemala (supported by Horizons) needed to be keenly aware of the people likely to attend the public events, meetings and activities in Canada. Some obvious assumptions could be made when presenting to health organizations and institutions, but knowing the audience was more nuanced when carrying out public speaking engagements. Would most attendees have a base level of knowledge about maternal and child health, or would their understanding revolve more around international development or issues of social justice? Or would many people learn about these issues for the first time through the events?

Asking these types of questions helps presenters to adapt their stories and messages to be more easily understood by their audience. Throughout the exchanges, Horizons especially focused on reaching out to and engaging:

- **rural communities and communities outside of major city centres** – Quite often, opportunities to hear directly from partners in international development are only available in large urban hubs such as Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. Recognizing the need to give people living outside of these hubs the same opportunity to learn about international cooperation, Horizons organized events like speakers' panels, talks and roundtables in mid-size and small communities – from Peterborough and Cobourg to Hamilton Township, Ontario, with a population of less than 11,000 people!
- **youth** – Engaging youth is vital; young people are impacted by the most pressing issues around the world and therefore need to be part of the process to overcome them. Horizons engaged young Canadians (from elementary, high school and university students to young professionals) in speaking events held throughout the exchanges. Elementary students also participated in a unique program that tied directly into the exchange visits. (See Chapter 3.)
- **health workers and gender-based violence experts** – In keeping with the goal of respectful knowledge sharing, Horizons coordinated workshops and meetings between visiting participants and Canadian practitioners in health

“Knowing that youth from so far away have taken an interest in helping us deal with our situation and speaking with them about why this is so important, was so impactful for me.”

Mirna Pretzantzin
PIES Health Educator



Powerful stories motivate and inspire all audiences, regardless of background. They demonstrate the impact of making human connections.

and the prevention of violence against women. These activities touched on different levels of care and involved a variety of organizations, including community health centres, midwifery practices, hospitals and even a local Cobourg organization – Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre – with innovative programming to prevent violence against women in Northumberland County, Ontario.

- **First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples** – Participants from Guatemala had the unique opportunity to visit and exchange knowledge and experiences with Indigenous communities and organizations in Canada. Discussion focused on the efforts and strategies by Indigenous Peoples living in both countries to establish and carry out culturally pertinent initiatives to provide for the health and well-being of their community members. Cultural practices were also shared. (See Chapter 4.)

To effectively connect with these different audiences, Horizons drafted speaking points and loose scripts for presenters according to those in attendance. However, the speakers from Guatemala also shared personal stories at presentations. These powerful stories motivated and inspired all audiences, regardless of background. They demonstrate the impact of making human connections.



CHAPTER 3: Youth Engagement Program

“As an educator it is my job to not only teach children about the world, but also to create in them a sense of compassion and empathy to help them grow into responsible citizens who are responsive to those around them. The work of Horizons of Friendship helps to make those connections. When they hear it from people other than myself, especially those that are going through the experiences firsthand, it is some of the most valuable learning that a student can have.”

Donna Elliott
Grade 8 Teacher

More and more young people in Canada and across the world are becoming powerful leaders. Their contributions in tackling the most pressing issues facing communities at home and abroad are invaluable because young people are often directly affected by those same challenges. But while the new generation of youth in Canada grows savvier in supporting causes for greater equity and justice, they still lack easily accessible information and opportunities to engage with global health and international development concepts – especially in areas outside major urban centres.

Horizons has always worked to help fill that gap by providing interactive and informative sessions on the development efforts of our partners in Mexico and Central America to young Canadians, particularly those living in rural communities surrounding Northumberland County, Ontario. These have included presentations, mock debates and in-person talks with visiting partners from the countries in which Horizons works.

By building on this experience and in large part by establishing a resilient and unique partnership, Horizons devised a special program to engage young Canadians in Grade 7 and 8 classes on the health of women and children as part of the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) project. This Youth Engagement Program would also give the young participants tools with which to support and champion causes they cared about.

When designing the program’s activities, Horizons kept three factors in mind:

- **student age** – Students in Grades 7 and 8 fall into the formative years between 12 and 15 when adolescents develop interests outside of their immediate community. We recognized that activities had to be designed in a way that would make the information and concepts comprehensible to students.
- **direct links to curriculum** – Ensuring activities were linked to the learning framework of the Ontario Grade 8 Geography curriculum gave the Youth Engagement Program two clear advantages:



Activities were designed to make information and concepts comprehensible to students.



In one activity, students were able to have conversations with traditional Maya K'iche' midwives.

- it would help students engage in a citizenship education framework that covered themes like social justice, equity, the role of institutions, interconnectedness among people and active participation.
- it meant that the activities could be incorporated easily into participating teachers' own plans, making the program more relevant for their classrooms.

- **incremental learning leading to action** – Global health, particularly the health of women and children, can be a complex topic. Therefore, we would have to design activities to incrementally build a body of knowledge among participating students. With each consecutive activity, they would be able to engage with the issues at a deeper level.

Introducing concepts

A few weeks before the program began, participating teachers attended a professional development session to explore theories and methods of social justice education and review program activities. During the first half of the session, teachers reflected on how they addressed social justice issues in their own classrooms. They then worked through modules encouraging them to think about new strategies for teaching these topics.

The second half of the session presented the program activities, and school visits were scheduled for each activity. Bolstered by a much clearer understanding of what the activities would entail, several teachers shared additional background information with their students after the professional development session.

The classroom program included these five activities:

- **a presentation** on maternal health indicators, followed by young people graphing data on maternal and child health for Guatemala and Canada;
- **an interactive discussion** in which students were asked to share their thoughts and explore three key words: justice, fairness and equality;
- **a conversation** with Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan participants who were participating in knowledge exchanges to Canada;
- **a follow-up reflection** with students on the visit by the Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan guests to their school. This activity included students exploring the nature of interviewing and news reporting; and
- **a workshop** on how young people could act on global issues, including women's and children's health. Students considered strategies and tools shared during this final activity that could apply to the issue of their choice.

The implementation of our Youth Engagement Program provided Horizons with five key insights that we hope will be useful for other organizations looking to engage with youth on global health topics – especially in school settings.

INSIGHT 11

Establish and nurture long-lasting institutional relationships in education

The foundation of the program was a long-lasting partnership between Horizons and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario Kawartha Pine Ridge Teachers Local (KPR-ETFO), a local of a trade union that represents elementary teachers across the province. The organization's priorities closely mirrored Horizons', which helped initial talks of collaboration. They included providing professional development opportunities for members, fostering a climate of social justice in Ontario through a leadership role in areas such as antipoverty, non-violence and equity and giving students and teachers rich learning experiences about issues of justice across the globe.

Horizons and KPR-ETFO connected a few months after the launch of the MNCH project and agreed to work together on the program. Horizons would design and carry out the activities for students and lead the professional development session. KPR-ETFO would help Horizons link up with schools and teachers interested in participating, easing the coordination of communications and activities.

The program would be delivered to three Grade 7 and 8 classes each year of the MNCH program. KPR-ETFO focused on reaching out to schools in one of four areas of the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board each year. This would ensure schools throughout the district were involved, regardless of school or community size.

Those wanting to bring their cause to young Canadians through schools should consider reaching out to well-established educational organizations that are active in the region you are working in. Collaborating with such organizations lends both resilience and reach that can enhance the impact of engagement initiatives with youth.



INSIGHT 12

In a school setting, connect all engagement activities to the curriculum

Each of the five activities in the Horizons Youth Engagement Program linked directly to expectations of the Ontario Grade 8 Geography curriculum. Activities aligned with a learning framework that Horizons staff could draw from, reinforce and fit easily into teachers' evaluation and educational plans. People seeking to engage youth in schools on global issues should therefore become intimately familiar with the curriculum relevant to the issues they want to present to students.



Students can relate more to global issues if they are framed in terms of social justice, but these should also be centred around cultural humility.

Curricula for a variety of subjects at schools in different provinces are available online.

The first activity in Horizons’ program provides an example of these links in action. Horizons staff delivered an interactive presentation using Prezi to introduce students to the concepts of maternal and child health in an accessible manner. Age-friendly videos on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the United Nation’s World’s Largest Lesson were played, with special emphasis placed on SDG 3 – *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*.

Afterwards, three indicators for maternal and child health – maternal mortality, infant mortality and child malnutrition – were explained rigorously. The presentation concluded with a comprehensive overview of Guatemala – its territory, population and history – aided by photographs and videos.

The activity continued with students exploring the question, “Why does the MNCH project focus on addressing maternal and child health in Guatemala?” To find answers, they performed a statistics and graphing exercise using the three maternal and child health indicators. Separated into six groups, the students plotted statistics on graphs for one of the three indicators for either Canada or Guatemala. Each group received a set of data for their respective indicator and countries obtained from Statistics Canada, the World Bank and the World Health Organization.¹

Students were guided through their graphing with discussion questions, several of which focused on how their data would compare to indicators in other countries. Once each group completed their graphs, they joined the group that shared their indicator but plotted the other country. Students compared their graphs, leading to conversations about disparities between the two countries. To conclude the activity, students explored possible causes of the disparities in the context of fairness and equity.

The first activity helped address Ontario Grade 8 Geography curriculum expectations by covering:

- **the interrelationship** between factors and quality of life in developing countries; and
- **the gathering and use of data** to investigate issues related to quality of life from a geographic perspective.

INSIGHT 13

Incorporate a social justice perspective to contextualize global issues while ensuring cultural humility is at the centre of activities

When students were asked what they knew about maternal or infant mortality, or how to measure child malnutrition, Horizons staff was commonly met with a sea of blank faces. This is not to discredit young Canadians; the average Canadian citizen would likely have the same difficulty. However, when asked about justice or fairness, a great majority of students were quick to engage in discussion.

It became clear that students could relate more to issues around maternal, newborn and child health if they were framed in terms of social justice. For example,

¹It is important to note that child malnutrition was presented to participating students through the prevalence of stunting in children under 5 years of age, and data in Canada for this indicator is not easily available. One group therefore had to compare stunting rates between Guatemala and the United States.

learning that Indigenous Maya K'iche' women are twice as likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than non-Indigenous women in Guatemala prompted the students to ask why these inequalities existed and what could be done to resolve them.

By not only presenting facts about a global issue, but also contextualizing what these facts say about factors and structures causing inequality, realities that initially may seem far away become more personal and relevant to the lives of young Canadians. Both facilitators and teachers should work together to make sure students participate in a respectful manner when discussing these issues.

Raising awareness of inequities and discussing the structures behind them was the aim of the second program activity. After briefly reviewing the three maternal and child health indicators used for graphing during the first activity, the second activity picked up on initial discussions on fairness and equity. The students first shared their thoughts on three key words: justice, fairness and equality. Horizons staff expanded on these themes based on the responses, making sure to encourage discussion while facilitating respectful conversations. Students then took part in an experiential learning activity to further explore questions of fairness.

Students were asked to separate into four groups and choose one person to be the main participant in a sprint race. The four participants lined up at the starting point while the remaining students observed. Before signaling the start of the sprint, Horizons staff gave each of the participants a unique flash card.

Each of the cards had statistics and factors on socio-economic indicators – including data on maternal and child health indicators and access to health care – for one of four separate population groups: non-Indigenous Canadian population First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples in Canada, non-Indigenous Guatemalan population and Indigenous Maya Peoples in Guatemala.

Horizons staff read out prompts that affected where the participants stood in relation to one another based on the statistics and their impact on quality of life – taking steps forward, backward or staying where they were in response to data in the cards. Data was obtained from Statistics Canada, research from academics and non-profit institutes in Canada, the Guatemalan Ministry of Health and the United Nations Population Development Fund.

By the end of the prompts, the participants and students could see the gaps caused by disparities between and within Canada and Guatemala, especially in relation to maternal and child health. The participants were then asked to complete the sprint.

Once the sprint was over, the students returned to their classroom to participate in a critical group discussion revisiting the concepts of justice, fairness and equality in response to the inequities they had seen in the activity. The concepts of equality and equity were distinguished from each other during the discussion. Students shared their views on inequalities present in both global and local communities, how structural factors – such as discrimination and barriers to accessing appropriate care – contributed to these disparities and how these gaps could be closed. It was at this point that students learned in accessible detail about the MNCH project and how it was addressing those very same disparities in Totonicapán.

However, we later learned that the concept of cultural humility should have further informed the design of the activity. (*See Lessons Learned: Youth Engagement Activities & Cultural Humility on page 26.*)



We encourage other organizations and individuals to consistently question and reflect on the methods being used to address and educate on issues of social justice, working from a position of cultural humility.

Lessons Learned: Youth Engagement Activities & Cultural Humility

The Youth Engagement Program focused almost exclusively on the health of Indigenous Maya women and children, and the planned activities were designed to give Grade 7 and 8 students a broader understanding of the issues and challenges they face.

The second exercise (*described under INSIGHT 13*) intended to raise awareness of the structural inequalities and disparities that continue to affect Indigenous Peoples – a reality that is also present in Canada. Horizons adapted the exercise from a series of similar activities that have been used by other non-profits and educators in classroom and workplace settings.

Intentions notwithstanding, after later consultation with an Indigenous expert on culturally safe education it became clear that the format of this and similar activities presents four core challenges.

- It relies on individuals to physically demonstrate inequities, ultimately using the situation and experiences of marginalized peoples to teach others less affected by those same barriers. If a student is from the marginalized group discussed, the exercise can be triggering and re-traumatizing.
- It can lead to feelings of guilt or shame by both people with and without privilege when personifying the disparities, which can detract from further engagement with issues of systemic injustice.
- It may inadvertently reinforce an “us versus them” mentality, hindering efforts for understanding and collaboration across different population groups.
- It did not adequately incorporate Indigenous concepts of health and wellness, nor did it identify positive, protective factors such as resilience and self-determination.

As a result of learning these lessons, we encourage other organizations and individuals to consistently question and reflect on the methods being used to address and educate on issues of social justice, working from a position of cultural humility. Cultural humility invites organizations and individuals to become aware of the unconscious biases that may be causing harm regardless of their initial intentions. Organizations and individuals can thus seek alternative activities that still provide interactive learning experiences but minimize the aforementioned challenges and provide a safer learning space for everyone.

One activity available online, “Privilege for Sale”, is an example of an alternative that creates a powerful opportunity for discussion. It does not rely on individuals or personal disclosure to demonstrate inequities. These inequities can be adapted to fit different thematic areas, such as maternal and child health disparities.

(See Appendix on page 46.)

It is important to note that activities for youth should also include more explanatory context on how the colonial structure has affected the determinants of Indigenous health and how Indigenous-specific, community driven indicators can help improve well-being. By working with social justice and Indigenous education experts to do so, cultural humility can remain at the forefront of activities with youth. *(To learn more about cultural humility, see Chapter 4.)*

INSIGHT 14

Introduce different modalities and approaches to learning in engagement activities

Carrying out group work, graphing, moving, watching videos, listening to guests and conducting public speaking are all elements of differentiated instruction present in the program's five activities. When Horizons staff presented information on the MNCH project and the health of women and children, we used varied modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile) to help accommodate learning differences among students. Using varied approaches also helped keep the activities fresh for the students even though themes and information may already have been covered.

The next two student engagement activities also used different modalities. In the third activity, Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan participants on knowledge exchanges to Canada visited schools involved in the program. This provided students with an unprecedented opportunity to hear directly from people working on a global health initiative. For this reason, Horizons usually invited the larger cohort of Grade 7 and 8 classes within participating schools to join in a brief assembly.

Each of the guests talked about themselves, their work, the challenges they faced in relation to maternal, newborn and child health and how the project was helping them overcome these challenges. Young Canadians were deeply moved by the dedication and bravery of the traditional midwives, health educators, Tonicapán Health Directorate and PIES de Occidente staff, hospital workers and Maya K'iche' adolescents who spoke to them.

Once the assembly concluded, the Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan guests followed the students participating in the program back to their classrooms for an extended and more personal conversation. Questions prepared in advance by the students showed their eagerness to learn more about the work and project and also the visitors' own lives and experiences.

Questions included:

- Do you think the current system of health care in Guatemala is effective?
- How many people do you care for or help in one day?
- If you have a family, do you find it challenging to balance caring for yourself and family with caring for your patients/people you help?
- What are some daily challenges that you face in your line of work?
- What made you decide to help people in your community?
- What do you think should be done in Guatemala to decrease maternal and infant mortality?
- Has the MNCH project helped you in your line of work so far?
- What can we do as Canadian students to help you and your communities?

The fourth activity for students built on the third, using an enticing modality. As Horizons staff explained, the chance to meet and directly talk with the Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan visitors was so unique it could be considered "newsworthy." Students would put together their own news reports and present them in mock newscasts to the rest of their classmates.



Students put together their own news reports and presented them in mock newscasts to the rest of their classmates.



First, students reflected on the visits. Next, they learned how to define the news, conduct interviews and write a news script – with lessons adapted from *School Report*, the British Broadcasting Corporation’s online journalism program.

Students created their news reports in groups, following two guidelines: the reports must clock in at exactly one minute and 30 seconds when read aloud and must include two interviews with fellow students, their teachers or even Horizons’ staff. The first guideline helped the students learn how to be concise and added an element of fun, while the second encouraged students to share and listen to others’ impressions of the visit. To help with scriptwriting, students were given news articles from local papers talking about the public events organized as part of the MNCH project’s knowledge exchanges.

When scripts were completed, the groups performed their mock newscast in front of the class. To the delight of teachers and their fellows, most students prepared comprehensive and exciting reports based on the news outlets they watched or listened to at home. After the presentations, groups provided constructive feedback to their peers. The activity concluded with a discussion of how students could be directly involved in helping resolve global issues such as those tackled by the MNCH project.

Organizations looking to engage with youth on global issues don’t have to reinvent the wheel but rather adapt features and activities from the many educational resources available online to fit their own programs – all while keeping cultural humility front and centre. Use these questions to guide your efforts:

- What is the core learning objective of this activity in relation to our cause?
- How could that core objective be communicated in activities that emphasize seeing, hearing, doing, writing, graphing, or talking?
- How could these activities build on previous ones and set up knowledge required for future activities?

INSIGHT 15

Encourage youth to take concrete actions and explain their impact

The Youth Engagement Program concluded with a special workshop on how young people could act on global issues, including women’s and children’s health. The strategies and tools shared could apply to the issue of their choice. Rather than limiting action to a specific topic, the workshop encouraged youth to identify an issue that they were truly committed to – which could include maternal and child health – and then take steps to act on it.

An interactive Prezi presentation was used for this activity, again including a variety of videos and photographs. For example, students watched a video available through Global News about Canadian siblings who used music and singing to raise awareness about world issues. Their activism journey had started during elementary school, which resonated strongly with the students.

Students chose the issue they cared about most, using the Sustainable Development Goals as a starting point to explore ongoing challenges in the world. Student were reminded to consider fairness, justice and equity when looking at the different goals.

Next, they created a hypothetical plan to act on their issue, which was divided into three elements:

1. **Getting Support** – How could students raise awareness to get people in their communities to support their cause? Tips were shared on awareness-raising methods, including setting up pop-up tables in school and in public spaces, running creative awareness campaigns and delivering effective class announcements.
2. **Mobilizing** – Once students had gathered supporters, how could they lead them into action? Tips were shared on different mobilization activities, including organizing events, marches and walks and connecting with politicians from different levels of government.
3. **Fundraising** – How could students and their supporters provide resources to help resolve global issues? Tips were shared on different student-led fundraising methods for the organization or cause of their choice, mixing in arts (movie nights or painting auctions), sports (teacher vs. student tournaments) and more traditional approaches (bake sales or yard sales).

While taking this approach broadened the possibilities for youth to be involved in global issues, there were two potential drawbacks: first, some students reported feeling too overwhelmed by the variety of ways to engage; and second, there was no mechanism or structure to encourage students to commit to acting – that decision depended on their own willingness to act.

To address these drawbacks, when future youth engagement initiatives give young Canadians multiple options for actions, it would be wise to pick one or two of these options after several have been reviewed and then provide straightforward examples. Facilitators can work with participating classes to commit to a single follow-up visit where students would present their progress.

When it comes to global health, and the health of women and children specifically, concrete actions may not be as clear-cut as for other issues (for example, participating in a beach clean-up to support the environment). However, by helping students appreciate the impact of actions such as writing letters to Members of Parliament, facilitators can illustrate meaningful involvement that strengthens the role Canada plays in supporting projects abroad.

Tips were shared on different mobilization activities, including organizing events, marches and walks and connecting with politicians from different levels of government.

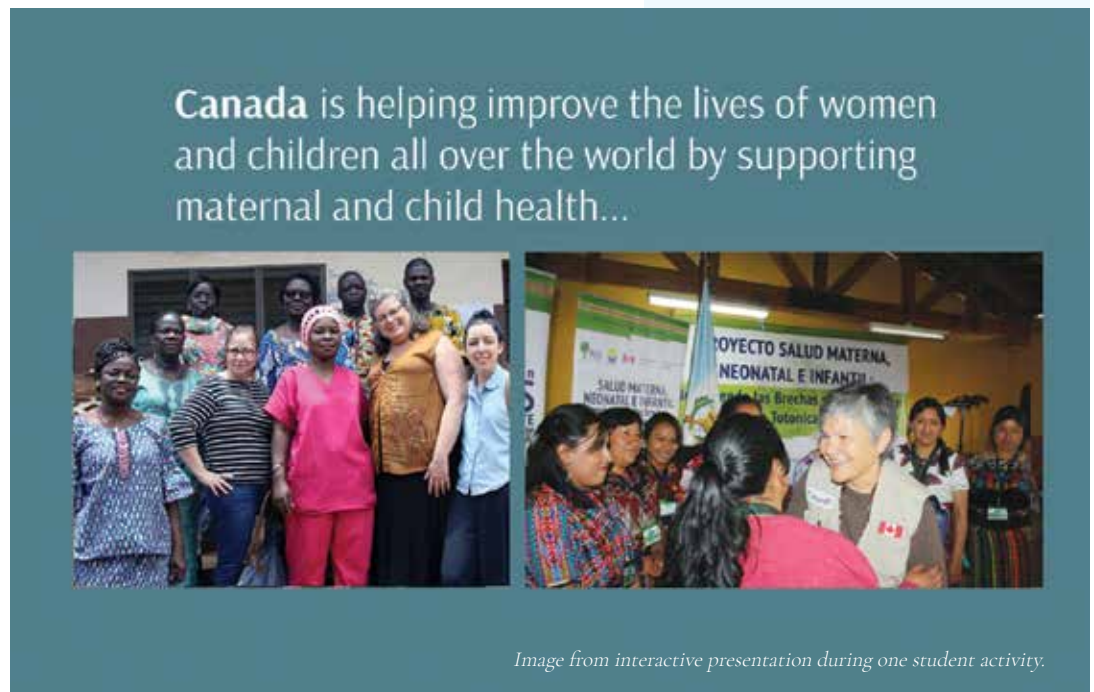


Image from interactive presentation during one student activity.

CHAPTER 4: Exchanges with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples

The trip to Guatemala with Horizons left a profound impact on my heart. As a social worker and professor, I teach about having compassion and social justice across the lifespan. I thought I understood global issues but this trip brought teachings that cannot be explained in a book. It helped me understand from a lived experience what poverty is and the resilience of people. I brought lessons home that I teach in the classroom and to friends and associates.”

Cristine Rego

Ojibwe Knowledge Teacher, Professor and Knowledge Exchange Participant

Some of the most deeply moving moments of learning and sharing during the knowledge exchanges occurred when the participants from Guatemala met with Indigenous Peoples, organizations and communities in Canada.

Horizons has long worked with Indigenous partners in countries across Central America and Mexico. Fostering mutual respect, nurturing understanding and supporting Indigenous rights have been the cornerstones of our partnerships in the region. Together these principles guide Horizons towards playing the role of *facilitator* in relation to its partners in Central America.



Photo Credit © CBHSSJB.

It is our partners, and by extension their community members, who are best positioned to identify the challenges they face and the solutions they need. This reality also reflects the importance of protecting and advocating for Indigenous worldviews in the countries where we work, which are central to the efforts of our partners' projects.

This guiding philosophy is embedded in the Maternal Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) project, especially in its culturally pertinent approach to activities in Tonicapán. With their ample experience working to strengthen the health of Indigenous Maya Peoples in Guatemala's Western Highlands, our partner PIES de Occidente ensured that efforts within the project were culturally sensitive and responded to the Maya K'iche' worldview.

Opportunities for genuine exchange

The above provided the background for the meetings between our partners coming from Guatemala and Indigenous Peoples living in Canada. By facilitating these meetings, we hoped our partners would have the opportunity to engage in a genuine exchange by:

- **learning about the history and realities of the many Indigenous Peoples living in Canada** and the resilient ways in which they work to address challenges – especially surrounding maternal and child health; and

- **sharing the realities Indigenous Maya K'iche' Peoples face**, and how their efforts in the context of the MNCH project are helping overcome challenges in their communities – especially in terms of maternal and child health.

Most of the meetings took place during the knowledge exchanges to Canada, when Maya K'iche' health practitioners, educators, community leaders, PIES staff and youth, along with Totonicapán Health Directorate representatives, visited the country. The connections made by Horizons, through project champions who had participated in the exchanges to Guatemala and through public events, helped us reach out to Indigenous organizations and communities in Ontario and Quebec. Some of these included:



- **Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB)** – With the assistance of CBHSSJB staff, Horizons facilitated a day of exchange activities in the Cree Nation of Mistissini in Eeyou Istchee – a Cree-governed region in Northern Quebec. Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan participants met and talked with practitioners directly involved in the CBHSSJB's Maternal and Child Health program, which addresses Mistissini's high birth rate and prevalence of young families. Next, the visitors talked to Wellness Walkers with the Nishiiyuu Miyupimaatsiun program, which promotes *wise practices* in Cree communities. The Nishiiyuu program framework is built upon the knowledge and leadership of Cree Elders and is inspired by traditional knowledge and culture. Memorable exchanges also took place between the visitors and Cree Elders, who recounted how they were working to rescue maternal and child health cultural practices that were lost because of the residential school system and other colonialist structures.

- **Toronto Birth Centre and Seventh Generation Midwives** – The Toronto Birth Centre (TBC) is a regulated, Independent Health Care Facility that offers pregnant people and families from diverse communities a comfortable and culturally safe place to give birth. Supporting Indigenous families and Indigenous midwifery through the Indigenous Framework is a focus of the Birth Centre. Seventh Generation Midwives Toronto (SGMT) offers maternity care to women from the City of Toronto, particularly those from the downtown area and from the Indigenous community. They also aspire to help more members of the Indigenous community enter health professions, including midwifery. Accompanied by TBC representatives and SGMT midwives, the Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan participants were given a tour of the Birth Centre and exchanged cultural practices related to maternal health.
- **Six Nations Maternal and Child Centre** – The Aboriginal Midwives at Tsi Non:we Ionnakeratstha Ona:grahsta', the Maternal and Child Centre on Six Nations, provide a balance of traditional and contemporary midwifery

Wise Practices

The use of the term *wise practices* recognizes a growing body of strategies when working with Indigenous communities.

While *best practices* is often used to encourage others towards improvement, it also implies a universality that does not consider different contexts, perspectives, values and criteria for being successful. By contrast, a *wise practices* approach recognizes the wisdom and culture of each Indigenous community in achieving success. It describes actions, tools and principles that are contextual, textured and not standardized.

In highlighting this term, we honour the important efforts by Indigenous community workers, scholars and leaders on this model. *(To learn more about wise practices, see the Appendix on page 46.)*



services and programs. They offer a choice of programs and services to complement and support personal beliefs and customs of the Indigenous community, family and specifically the expectant woman. Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan visitors took a comprehensive tour of the Centre, led by the Aboriginal Midwives, and then exchanged cultural practices and experiences in providing care.

- ***Kahnawá:ke Doulas*** – Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan exchange participants visited the Kahnawá:ke Mohawk Territory located to the southwest of Montreal, Quebec. There they met with a group of Kanien'kehá:ka doulas who provide support throughout the birthing process by incorporating traditional Kanien'kehá:ka teachings. The doulas and the Maya K'iche' midwives discussed their respective situations, challenges and initiatives.
- ***Dibaajimowin Cultural Centre*** – Located in Northumberland County, Ontario, the Dibaajimowin Cultural Centre shares Indigenous intergenerational cultural teachings among Indigenous Peoples through ceremony including healing circles, traditional medicines and land based lifestyle events. Members of the Centre met with Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan visitors to talk about the ongoing impacts of colonialism in both Guatemala and Canada and strategies to protect and preserve the cultural practices of Indigenous Peoples living in Canada.
- ***Kenhtë:ke Midwives*** – Kontinenhanónhnha Tsi Tkahà:nayen, “They are protecting the seeds at the Bay of Quinte”, is an Indigenous midwifery practice located on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. As primary health care providers, Onkwehón:we midwives provide culturally appropriate maternal and newborn care to Indigenous families by harmonizing traditional and contemporary knowledge systems. Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan visitors took an extensive tour of the practice and learned how the Onkwehón:we midwives are “reclaiming the responsibility of life by birthing our children in the hands of our people, on our land, using our language, traditions, culture and traditional medicines.”

Unique events with visitors

Organizations Horizons had worked with previously carried out four unique events involving the visitors from Guatemala:

1. ***KAIROS Blanket Exercise in Spanish*** – The First Peoples House of Learning at Trent University (FPHL) offers cultural services to a diverse community of Indigenous learners (First Nations Status, Non-Status, Métis and Inuit). They collaborate with students to support their academic success, personal development and leadership potential, as well as embody the Indigenous worldview of education as a ceremony of learning. FPHL staff formed part of a cultural exchange with the Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan visitors, where cultural practices and experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and Guatemala were shared. After the exchange and in collaboration with FPHL and representatives from Canadian non-profit organization KAIROS, a KAIROS Blanket Exercise was led in Spanish.

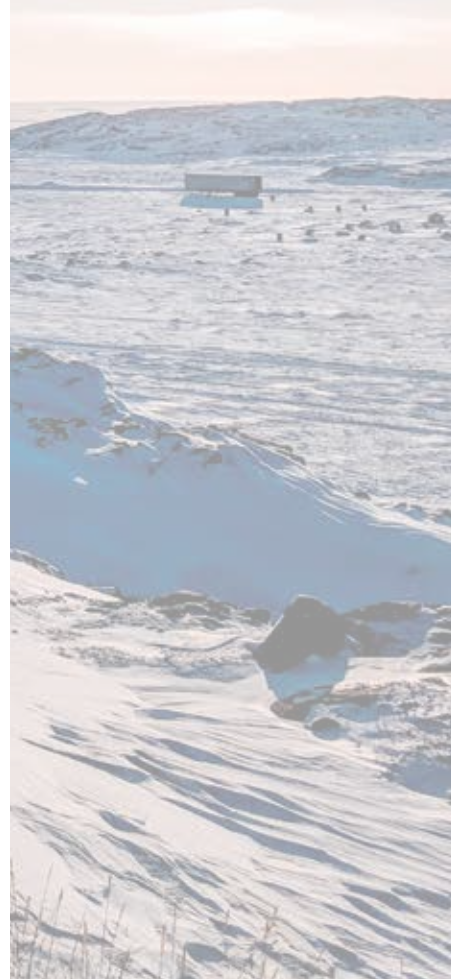
The KAIROS Blanket Exercise (KBE) is a unique, participatory history lesson – developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, knowledge

keepers and educators – that fosters truth, understanding, respect and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. During the exercise, a group of Guatemalan visitors, including a traditional Maya K'iche' midwife, a Maya K'iche' PIES staff member and the head of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Totonicapán Hospital walked on blankets representing the land and into the role of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples to 'walk' through situations that include pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization and resistance. The KBE concluded with a debrief, conducted as a 'talking circle' where participants discussed the learning experience and processed their feelings. Greatly affected by the KBE and how it addressed colonialism and the resilience of Indigenous Peoples living in Canada, the visitors began to consider utilizing similar popular education methods to convey the challenges of colonialism and inequities in Guatemala.

2. **OPSEU Water is Life Symposium** – The Ontario Public Service Employees Union Indigenous Circle (OPSEU Indigenous Circle) is a group of OPSEU First Nations, Inuit and Métis members in good standing, who work to protect, preserve and promote the culture, traditions and language of these diverse Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Circle also supports and assists members within their workplaces in addressing, educating and/or lobbying for Indigenous issues. Two traditional Maya K'iche' midwives and the director of one of Totonicapán's Maternal and Child Care Health Centres joined the OPSEU Indigenous Circle for the Water is Life Symposium at George Brown College in Toronto, Ontario. Organized by the OPSEU Indigenous Mobilization Team, the symposium brought together Elders from communities under water advisories, water protectors in the Toronto region and Indigenous activists to address the impact of privatization on potable waters in Indigenous and other vulnerable communities. The Maya K'iche' women delivered a speech to attendants and OPSEU members about the MNCH project and the challenges they face as they help strengthen the health of women and children in their communities.
3. **Biennial OPSEU Indigenous Conference** – Two Guatemalan visitors took part in the second Biennial OPSEU Indigenous Conference – one of PIES's lead traditional Maya K'iche' midwife trainers and a traditional Maya K'iche' midwife who is also a prominent activist in Guatemala's Western Highlands. With the aims of inspiring and equipping OPSEU members to partner and work with Indigenous communities during a time of reconciliation, the Conference was planned with Elders and community members of Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation. Building on the conference's theme of Cultural Reclamation and Restoration: Weaving Culture Back Into our Blanket, the two Maya K'iche' women met directly with Indigenous leaders, as well as OPSEU members, to share their own efforts towards increased recognition for the work of traditional midwives and better health outcomes for Maya women, children and families.
4. **Exchange Trip to Nunavut** – Our Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan partners traveled to Nunavut to meet two Inuuk Registered Midwives. The midwives provide maternal and child care in the predominantly Inuit

“This was a special encounter. We learned that Indigenous Peoples in Canada and Guatemala continue to face similar challenges. We trust our participation in this exchange helped build solidarity between Indigenous Peoples in the North and South.”

Antonia Buch
Maya K'iche' midwife and activist





The visitors to Nunavut were honoured to spend time with two Inuuk Elders, who shared traditional birthing and infant care experiences.

fly-in community of Rankin Inlet; one of them was a former knowledge exchange participant who had travelled to Totonicapán. Visitors included a traditional Maya K'iche' midwife, the Totonicapán Health Directorate head nurse, the Horizons MNCH program manager and communications officer, and a Global Affairs Canada senior international development officer.

As well as visiting the midwives, the team toured social services facilities and met with local community members. English, Inuktitut, Spanish and K'iche' translation was provided. On the trip, they learned about the disproportionate burden of illness Inuit in Canada face compared to the non-Indigenous population. These include high infant mortality rates and chronic housing shortages, issues that resonated with the Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan guests. The visitors were also honoured to spend time with two Inuuk Elders, who

shared their intimate knowledge of Rankin Inlet and Nunavut, as well as their own traditional birthing and infant care experiences and the impacts of colonialism. The Maya K'iche' midwife noted that Indigenous families in Totonicapán face similar challenges, with little cultural pertinence to the health services offered. This barrier is being directly addressed by the MNCH project.

Special exchange to Guatemala

Most of the meetings and sessions bringing Maya K'iche', First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples together took place in Canada. But during the fourth year of the project, Horizons organized a special exchange to Guatemala by Indigenous health and community workers living in Canada. Invitations and coordination took place with several organizations and individuals Horizons had already involved in its public engagement efforts, from open presentations featuring Guatemala partners to direct community meetings and visits. In particular, Horizons coordinated with the OPSEU Indigenous Circle, the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives, Pauktuutit – The Inuit Women's Association of Canada, and the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay.

The goals of this special exchange closely mirrored the overarching approach already described: facilitating spaces for the Indigenous participants visiting Guatemala to learn about the practices, successes, challenges and strategies of our partners in Totonicapán; and providing opportunities for our Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan partners to learn from and be part of conversations on topics the visiting participants were comfortable sharing.

Seven Anishinaabe, Cree, Inuit, Mohawk and Oji-Cree women joined Horizons for the exchange to Guatemala. Each of them drew from a wealth of knowledge and experience coming from varied backgrounds in maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health and rights and support for youth. The group was composed of:

- CBHSSJB community health representatives in the Cree community of Mistissini, Quebec;

- an Anishinabe midwife and Assistant Professor in the Department of Gender Studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario;
- a Registered Midwife at the Inukjuak Local Community Services Centre in Nunavik, Northern Quebec;
- an Indigenous Registered Social Worker and Professor at the School of Justice and Community Wellness of Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario;
- the former President and current Board Member of Pauktuutit, the Inuit Women's Association of Canada; and
- an Indigenous Child Protection Worker in Ottawa, Ontario specialized in working with youth in crisis and part of the strategy to address human trafficking and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Horizons built on the previous Canada-to-Guatemala knowledge exchanges during this unique initiative. Several activities followed a structure and focus like those covered in more detail in Chapter 1. The participants visited maternal and child health centres and community health posts, in addition to holding sessions with traditional Maya K'iche' midwives and Maya K'iche' youth. However, some changes were made during this exchange. These included:

- **putting a strong emphasis on organizing meetings and conversations with Indigenous Maya organizations and leadership structures in Totonicapán.** Two were given prominent attention:
 - The '48 Hamlets' Community Leadership Organization – 'Los 48 Cantones de Totonicapán', a traditional Indigenous Maya K'iche' leadership structure, wields significant provincial and at times, national influence. It brings together Maya K'iche' leaders from across the municipality and has organizational and advocacy capacity to mobilize around community development issues, including health. The MNCH project worked closely with these community leaders, who are predominantly male, to inspire more men and women in organizing and advocating for increased and improved maternal and child health services in their community. The Indigenous women participating in the exchange met with three representatives of the 48 Hamlets executive, who talked about their role and efforts in addressing challenges affecting Maya K'iche' Peoples in Totonicapán, especially concerning the health of women and girls. The leaders also listened to the exchange participants as they talked about the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples living in Canada and the work being done to address these impacts.
 - The Nim Alaxik Movement – The 'Movimiento Nacional de Abuelas Comadronas Nim Alaxik Mayab' (Nim Alaxik) is a national body that

Participants on the special exchange to Guatemala met with Indigenous Maya organizations and leadership structures.





represents thousands of traditional Maya midwives in their struggle to secure greater state recognition for their essential role in ensuring maternal and child health in Guatemala. The MNCH project has supported Nim Alaxik in its efforts to organize and mobilize traditional Maya midwives in support of their rights. When they met, the Indigenous women participating in the exchange heard directly from women on Nim Alaxik's steering committee, who talked about their ongoing efforts for legal advocacy, including a Supreme Court challenge to existing Guatemala Ministry of Health policies and practices with respect to traditional midwives. The exchange participants in turn spoke about similar efforts on advocating for Indigenous rights in Canada, with the hope of establishing connections between Nim Alaxik and the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives in Canada.

- ***adapting the final knowledge-sharing workshop, based on the experiences and practices of the exchange participants.*** This workshop was facilitated as consecutive presentations and discussions. It provided an opportunity to engage in broader conversations with input and questions from almost all major actors involved in the project: department heads from the Totonicapán Health Directorate (including nursing, reproductive health, health promotion, epidemiology, service provision, psychology, capacity building and Indigenous Peoples liaison); traditional Maya K'iche' midwives; PIES health educators and staff; and Maya K'iche' youth leaders. Despite their varied approach, the presentations led by the Indigenous health and community workers visiting Guatemala helped address four overarching questions, which our partners were interested in learning more about:
 - What steps are being taken to reclaim and protect Indigenous culture and languages, and how are Indigenous Peoples advocating for ending inequalities in Canada?
 - What is the role of Indigenous midwifery in restoring and protecting cultural practices, and how are births delivered in different communities?
 - What are some strategies or programs that seek to integrate cultural pertinence in health education?
 - How are violence against women, and the intergenerational trauma that affects Indigenous youth, being addressed in a way that integrates and respects cultural practices and knowledge?

This session was essential in providing an opportunity to share lessons learned through different efforts being carried out in Canada to bring about awareness and change in working with Indigenous Peoples.

- **providing additional support from Horizons' staff.** The knowledge exchanges in Guatemala coincided with an Horizons' educational tour to Guatemala by supporters from Canada. As mentioned earlier in this document, one of Horizons' signature public engagement initiatives is its educational tours to give groups of Canadians the opportunity to connect and learn directly from our partners in the field. Every year, a new tour is organized to a country in Central America or Southern Mexico hosting a partner project. Holding both the tour and the special knowledge exchange in Guatemala allowed for more Horizons staff to be available for logistical support for both groups. While the groups had separate agendas and sessions responding to each trip's goals, some partner meetings and activities were held together, which also helped ease the organizational demands on Guatemalan partners in the country.

When the special exchange to Guatemala concluded, the Maya K'iche' partners that met with the visiting Indigenous women expressed their profound gratefulness for the opportunity to have a sincere exchange that not only highlighted their own efforts to improve the well-being of Maya K'iche' women, girls and families, but also provided spaces for the women traveling to Totonicapán to share their resilience and experience in supporting Indigenous Peoples living in Canada.

In turn, exchange participants indicated an increased understanding of the challenges Maya K'iche' Peoples face in relation to health throughout the multiple visits and sessions and noted that the foundations of solidarity between Indigenous Peoples and organizations were being laid out. They expressed their hope that these relationships would grow into future collaborations.

Facilitating these powerful opportunities for learning and sharing underlined three crucial insights when conducting the exchanges between our Maya K'iche' partners in Guatemala and First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

Exchange participants indicated an increased understanding of the challenges Maya K'iche' Peoples face in relation to health throughout the multiple visits and sessions.

INSIGHTS

INSIGHT 16

Enact cultural safety and humility training at all organizational levels

An essential starting point for organizations and individuals seeking to facilitate spaces for exchange and dialogue is to actively and continuously educate themselves on the history of the many Indigenous Peoples living in Canada, the ongoing impacts of colonialist systems and practices, including residential schools and intergenerational trauma, the resilience and resistance of Indigenous communities, and ways in which organizations and individuals can become effective allies in reconciliation. Non-Indigenous organizations and peoples in Canada need to recognize and act upon their responsibilities in this process, making sure that efforts towards decolonization are made earnestly and in consultation with Indigenous Peoples.

Horizons recognizes the need to provide Indigenous cultural safety and humility training at all levels of its organization, from management and staff to Board of Directors representatives. Horizons will strive to provide ongoing opportunities



Acting with humility means acknowledging the need to address our own privilege and change attitudes and behaviours that may be perpetuating oppression.

for its people to participate in expert-led workshops with the same goals in mind: to support and maintain respectful and safe relationships with Indigenous Peoples; to address implicit biases that may affect these relationships; and to commit to working collaboratively towards changing oppressive systems and structures. By having people in different capacities at Horizons take part in the training, the organization as a whole can contribute to reconciliation in an open and effective manner and, by extension, talk with our own supporters and constituents about the importance of learning about and committing to decolonization efforts.

INSIGHT 17

Practice the principles of cultural humility, with a focus on listening

From the start of this initiative, Horizons understood that its role in connecting its Indigenous Maya K'iche' partners with their Indigenous counterparts in Canada was one that focused on facilitation, not protagonism.

The meetings and encounters that were organized placed the relationships and shared learning between Maya K'iche' and Indigenous Peoples in Canada at the centre of exchange activities.

This approach was rooted in Horizons' philosophy when working with Indigenous partners in Central America and Mexico. We recognize that Indigenous Peoples are the experts on their own history and challenges and therefore must be supported in carrying out the solutions they know are best for their communities. These reflections highlight the need to ground efforts for exchange and dialogue by practicing the principles of cultural humility, especially by demonstrating respect through a willingness to listen. Resources and webinars on the concept of cultural safety and humility are available online through the First Nations Health Authority. *(See Appendix on page 46.)*

When considered in the context of these exchanges and – more broadly – reconciliation, acting with humility means acknowledging that organizations and individuals need to address their own privilege and change attitudes and behaviours that may be perpetuating oppression despite good intentions. It means recognizing and being responsible for our own mistakes with honesty and respect and doing what is required to correct them. Understanding what is required to do so will be achieved by truly listening to Indigenous Peoples – not through assumptions or by taking over the conversation. Organizations and individuals looking to facilitate connections between their partners and Indigenous Peoples in Canada must also be keenly aware that it takes time and effort to build trusting relationships.

INSIGHT 18

Be open and sensitive to new learning opportunities

As stated previously, this exchange drew from previous knowledge exchanges to Guatemala. Other than the new meetings held with Maya K'iche' organizations and leadership bodies, most sessions with project partners revolved around formal presentations and workshops, in addition to visits to homes and community outposts. While this helped provide structure to the exchange, participants pointed out that some of the most meaningful learning opportunities occurred outside of the formal presentations – happening quite spontaneously, in fact.

Unbeknownst to Horizons and PIES, frontline health workers and community care providers at the Tierra Blanca San Bartolo health post in Totonicapán demonstrated a traditional Maya K'iche' dance for the visiting participants.

Exchange participants were so thrilled by this rich cultural experience they proceeded to share some of their own cultural practices with the Maya K'iche' partners, who eagerly welcomed this opportunity for learning. The trust and respect between Maya K'iche' partners and exchange participants were greatly enhanced by this spontaneous sharing. Subsequent conversations on the realities and required solutions surrounding women's health challenges in Totonicapán acquired a new degree of openness and trust.

The sharing of food is also a vital part of the trust-building process within Indigenous communities. During the exchange to Guatemala, Maya K'iche' partners and community members shared meals with the Indigenous women they met, providing an additional opportunity to discuss topics or ask questions, increasing both trust and understanding.

These anecdotes illustrate how learning and relationship building can occur in different ways other than formal meetings. More specifically, they speak to how Horizons and other organizations need to be open to building on participant feedback and continuously consult with Indigenous participants about different learning formats not previously considered. We plan to ask and listen to enable novel learning opportunities – relying on cultural safety and humility training to ensure that these conversations and planning are carried out in a safe and respectful manner prior to the exchanges taking place.





Horizons' digital communications connect Canadians to the on-the-ground developments happening in Guatemala real-time. This allows me and other supporters to instantly understand the people and the stories happening far away, and to share the outcomes of our investments of energy, money and time. There is no better way to engage younger generations in international development projects like MNCH than through accessible and innovative media."

Hannah Matthews

Canadian Mental Health Association and Horizons Supporter

Over the last 20 years, the way we communicate and connect with one another has completely changed. With the advent of social media platforms that seamlessly connect millions of users, it's never been easier for Canadians to connect with one another. To date, over 25 million Canadians have registered for social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

While Horizons still relies on traditional media (print and radio) to connect with its followers and promote its work, it's important for us and similar small international development organizations to leverage these powerful digital platforms to reach Canadians. They're essential to retaining supporters and raising awareness for initiatives like the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) project.

For the MNCH project, Horizons devised a comprehensive social media and communications strategy that would leverage each platform's strengths with the aim of building broader public engagement. Success on digital platforms can be measured using a variety of indicators, including:

- monthly project website landing page visits
- e-newsletter subscriptions
- Facebook followers
- Twitter followers
- Instagram followers
- organic and paid reach
- reach to engagement ratio

Horizons set specific internal targets for a 50 per cent increase in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram followers by the end of the project's first year. In subsequent years, we focused on increasing our reach by boosting the number of Canadians who receive our updates.

Similar organizations could analyze the statistics for a project's landing page and set a goal to increase visits to that page by X amount. Or they could customize goals or metrics to best serve the mission of the organization and specific goals within the project.

The communications initiative for the multi-year MNCH project offered up four valuable insights that other organizations may find helpful.

INSIGHT 19

Plan ahead using an editorial timeline and calendar

Staying organized and planning ahead is crucial. There needs to be clear, measurable goals and a timeline of when and how deliverables will be executed. For this, organizations can rely on two tools: an editorial timeline and a calendar.

An editorial timeline is a bird's eye view of a publishing schedule. It offers a broad look at what will be posted to social media platforms and subscribers on a month-to-month or quarterly basis. A content calendar is an online daily planner that breaks down what will be posted daily, or even hourly.

For Horizons, creating an editorial timeline was a team effort. We recommend other organizations follow suit. Horizons invited the project's program manager, communications lead and others to craft a plan for communicating the MNCH project to the public in the upcoming year. Why use a team approach? It's the program managers and staff who best understand how the project is developing on the ground. Their expertise will influence what is communicated and how often. To tap into that expertise, see Key Questions at right.

INSIGHT 20

Rely on the power of updates

Keeping followers updated and engaged is pivotal to promoting an organization's presence and public awareness of its mission. When it comes to social media updates, short and concise posts tend to perform better than posts with longer copy.² Generally, if an organization wants to post anything over 100 words, it should create a blog post or publication on its website and link followers to that. This has the added advantage of driving traffic to the website, where an organization's donate button, newsletter sign-up and other social media buttons live.

Updates need to avoid technical jargon. In the past, we have tried to engage our followers by discussing the project's logic model or performance management framework. These are technical tools that guide international development, results-based management-driven projects. But we found these concepts are often misunderstood or scare readers away because they sound too complex. In a world where audiences are scrolling quickly through social media, we need to find ways to rapidly engage them. Technical jargon does not support this goal.

Horizons found that our best performing updates are the ones with stories that connect with people on a personal level. For example, in the post shown at right, a Horizons' staff member talked emotionally about a difficult pregnancy in Canada and how essential the MNCH project is in a country with significant barriers to health service access. The post outperformed any general program update we had released in the past. In a world where companies and organizations sanitize their social media and communications, content that is raw and human often performs well.

Another post that performed extremely well showed a group of Maya K'iche' and Guatemalan participants arriving in Canada for a knowledge exchange. Their

Key Questions to Ask Program Staff

Help create an effective editorial timeline by asking your program staff these questions:

- If you could choose three major goals within the project this year, what would they be? How should we communicate these goals to the public?
- Are there any major purchases within the project that we should highlight this year?
- Will the project be facilitating any large gatherings and/or events this year? Is there an opportunity to livestream, photograph or videoconference the event to Canadians?
- Is it possible for program staff to do quarterly/semi-annual video interviews or blog posts, highlighting their thoughts, achievements and challenges for the year?



² <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-character-counter/>

presence was expected by our audience so the timing of the post factored into its popularity. But the short copy announcing their arrival and the personal style – “we look forward to connecting with you” – accompanied by a well-composed and well-lit photo also enhanced its performance.

INSIGHT 21

Use apps and partners to promote events

To promote the dozens of MNCH-related public events that took place across Canada, Horizons relied on partner organizations, as described in **Chapter 2**, backed up by social media campaigns on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We also added apps to our toolbox, including Facebook Events and Eventbrite. Although both apps are free to promote events, some paid promotion is recommended to increase awareness in the geographical location where the event will take place.

The Facebook app allows events to be posted to Facebook users who live in the same city. This was particularly helpful for attracting audiences in areas where Horizons is not well known. Facebook Events also targets who sees the advertisement based on interests, profession and other factors.

Collaborating online with larger event partners can help draw a bigger audience. For example, when we partnered with Ontario Tech University for a MNCH event in Oshawa, the university’s Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities amplified our online promotion by posting on their own platforms and connecting with their much larger number of followers.

Over the course of the MNCH project, we’ve learned that you cannot rely solely on online tools to drive attendance, but you can rely on these apps to increase the buzz around your event, generate new followers on social media and bring a few new curious minds to your events.

INSIGHT 22

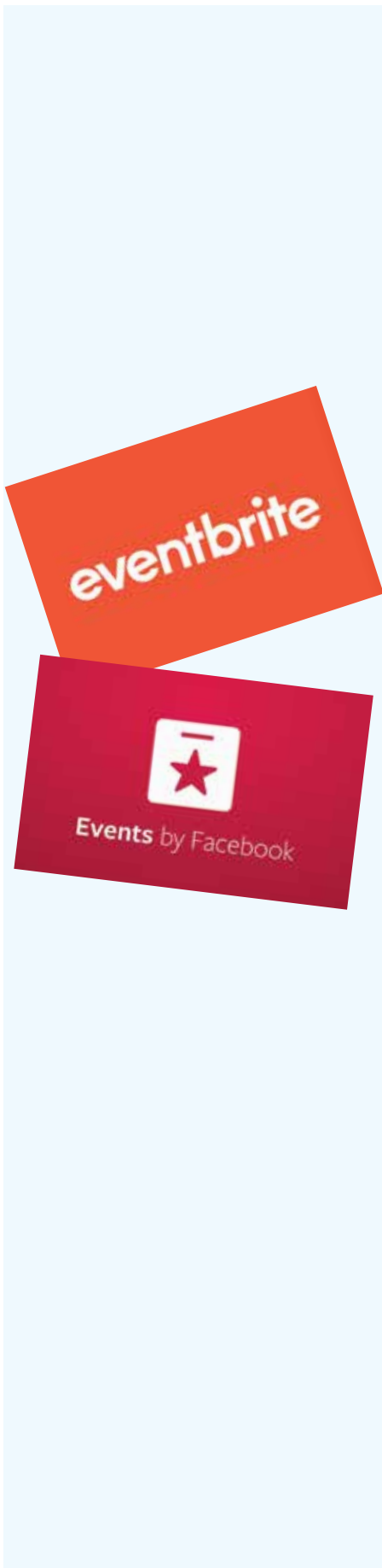
Invest in high quality assets

A key insight the Horizons team identified early on was the importance of having high-quality photos of the project.

In the beginning phases of our project, Horizons relied on photos captured by our local partner or our program officer when traveling – usually using a cell phone camera. By the end of the project’s first year, the Horizons team took a step back and made the important decision to invest in professional-grade camera equipment and appoint a staff member to take on the bulk of photo and video production on a part-time basis. With millions of images posted to social media every minute, an organization’s photos and videos need to stand out in order to have an impact.

We aimed to build up a repository of high-quality communications assets for every component of the MNCH project. For instance, as Horizons worked to support traditional midwives in Guatemala, we took photos of midwives participating in project related activities, or doing their work in their community. When other organizations approached us to collaborate on events, we could tap into these high-quality assets to create engaging social media posts and event posters.

If a picture says a thousand words, what does that mean for videos? Since 2017,



Horizons began dedicating more effort into producing videos. Among these were a three minute video overview of the MNCH project, testimonials by staff involved in the project and a 13-minute documentary about the special exchange visit to Nunavut, to name just a few. Although video production requires much more work than other forms of content, they perform well on social media and are worth the effort. We kept the videos short (between one and three minutes) because it's difficult to retain peoples' attention beyond the three-minute mark on social media.

Horizons took an ethical approach when collecting photos and video assets in the Global South for the MNCH project. In the past, and even recently, we have seen photos of people benefiting from and involved in international development initiatives being used to exploit suffering and helplessness. This perpetuates narratives that deny people's capacity to be self-sufficient.

Horizons believes the opposite, and our work over the years reinforces this. With support from a local grassroots partner, communities and individuals (such as Maya K'iche' traditional midwives and leaders, frontline workers, mothers and families) are very capable of creating sustainable transformation that's based on their own worldview. And our photos and videos depict this truth.

Community-focused organizations, including Horizons, can help protect the human dignity of their partners and the communities participating in development initiatives by developing a code of ethics for the stories they tell in public engagement activities. This code can be tailored to fit each organization's mission and philosophy, but some core principles should be considered universal regardless of the medium used.

- **People are the owners of their stories and have a right not to share them** – Asking people for their permission to have their image taken or their testimonial shared is the first step in respecting partners and the communities they support.
- **Place the voices of people telling their stories first** – Remain accurate in the representation of communities and people being supported, highlighting their input and being conscious of personal and editorial biases.
- **Do no harm to the people sharing their stories** – The traumatic nature of some of the stories of partners and community members may indirectly cause mental or emotional distress and harm if revisited. The well-being of people must outweigh the telling of a powerful story.

Horizons uses photo and video consent waivers in both Spanish and English. When visiting regions with different language requirements, Horizons staff has the waivers translated to suit the cultural context of the location they are visiting – for instance, translation into Inuktitut when we visited Rankin Inlet, Nunavut.

However, consent waiver forms are not necessarily inclusive or appropriate in certain cultural contexts. In Guatemala, a high number of people face significant barriers to literacy. In cultural contexts like the one we encountered in Tonicapán, it may be inappropriate to ask people to read and sign a document. For this reason, our local partner PIES advised us to use verbal consent.

When designing the communication strategy's activities and deliverables, Horizons focused on connecting the North and South – allowing our local partner to be the leading voice of the project as much as possible.



CONCLUSION: Making Your Own Connections

“I came on the exchange to enrich my knowledge. As an Indigenous woman, I am now committed to working towards strengthening the bonds of sisterhood between women in my country. I am confident that in the future we will be able to build communities based on solidarity, without prejudices or sexism.”

Virginia Ramos
Young Maya K'iche' Leader and
Knowledge Exchange Participant

Over the years, public sector funding for awareness raising and public education related to international development has markedly declined. In this climate, Horizons continued to engage with people in Canada through its own programming and resources, which have been limited.

The Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) project presented a vital opportunity for Horizons to reinvigorate its public engagement initiatives, but more importantly, demonstrate why engaging with people in Canada on international development issues should be considered an essential undertaking.

Dedicating resources towards public engagement allows for the creation of vital partnerships. Every chapter in this resource notes the advantages of these partnerships – whether the focus is on reaching out to participants in the exchanges to and from Guatemala, enabling engagement with youth, or organizing a growing number of public events. Were it not for these partnerships, the MNCH project simply would not have had the reach and positive recognition among different groups and communities that it did.

Prioritizing public engagement also gets to the root of an often-quoted problem: when audiences or people seeking to be involved are perceived to be dwindling, public engagement activities are first on the chopping block. But it is precisely at this juncture that public engagement activities should be enhanced and reinvigorated. That's because connecting with people in Canada for earnest conversations and involvement on international development issues helps create demand for further dialogue and education.

Public engagement could therefore be reframed as not necessarily needing a large audience to start with to be successful, but rather as being an active process of building those audiences and connections along the way.

Creating your own journey

While we hope that this resource will be valuable for profiling the various components of one long-term integrated program, public engagement represents a journey that will take individual organizations down their own path. Presentations, workshops, posts and videos – all of these will naturally continue to evolve if organizations make an honest effort to listen and respond to their own partners and supporters. After all, making connections that facilitate dialogues and learning are at the heart of public engagement.

Organizations should not feel daunted if they are starting or re-starting with limited resources. Rather, they should set time and energy aside to ask themselves: are we dedicating enough resources and efforts, within our means, to connect with our supporters? How can we embody our own values when reaching out to people in Canada? What avenues can we pursue that make the best use of our strengths when engaging in conversations, and which avenues could use improvements?

In reading through the insights we have compiled here, we hope that you have learned, been inspired and share our commitment to helping support Canadian international development, including initiatives that enhance the health of women and girls worldwide. The next chapter, where you will make new and exciting connections, begins now!

SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS

The 22 insights contained in this resource represent the sum of Horizons' years of experience engaging with people in Canada and the collaboration with our partners, individuals and organizations in the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health project. When taken together, we hope they will support you in making meaningful, long-lasting connections.

Canada-to-Guatemala Knowledge Exchanges

1. Firsthand experience is the most powerful way to engage people
2. Planning is critical – but be ready to adapt to unexpected changes
3. Ensure there are opportunities for reflection and introspection
4. Provide participants with support before and after the initiative
5. Create a what's next plan for participants after return

Guatemala-to-Canada Exchanges

6. Collaborate with other organizations for more impact
7. Ask champions for introductions to collaborating organizations
8. Welcome different perspectives to increase learning opportunities
9. Find a reliable means to gather contact information of audiences
10. Adjust presentations according to different audiences

Youth Engagement Program

11. Establish and nurture long-lasting institutional relationships in education
12. In a school setting, connect all engagement activities to the curriculum
13. Incorporate a social justice perspective to contextualize global issues while ensuring cultural humility is at the centre of activities
14. Introduce different modalities and approaches to learning in engagement activities
15. Encourage youth to take concrete actions and explain their impact

Exchanges with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples

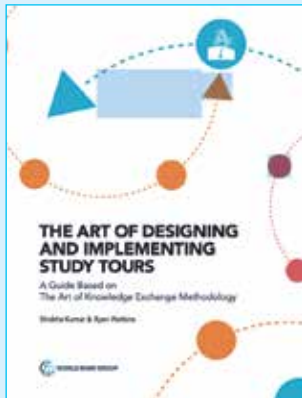
16. Enact cultural safety and humility training at all organizational levels
17. Practice the principles of cultural humility, with a focus on listening
18. Be open and sensitive to new learning opportunities

Communications and Social Media

19. Plan ahead using an editorial timeline and calendar
20. Rely on the power of updates
21. Use apps and partners to promote events
22. Invest in high quality assets



APPENDIX: Resources



These resources, listed by chapter, will help you find further advice and information as you continue to make your own connections.

CHAPTER 1: Canada-to-Guatemala Knowledge Exchanges

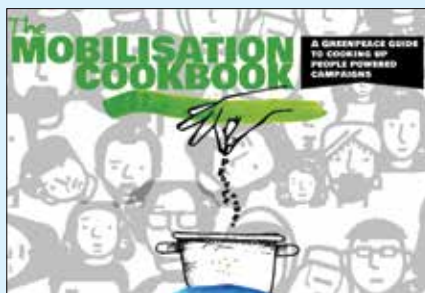
The Art of Designing and Implementing Study Tours: A Guide Based on the Art of Knowledge Exchange Methodology (English), Sobha Kumar & Ryan Watkins. World Bank Group, 2017

While this document focuses on study tours intended for policy-makers and international development practitioners, its step-by-step suggestions on defining, designing, implementing and evaluating study tours can provide practical lessons for organizations interested in organizing knowledge exchanges and solidarity trips abroad. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/627831505971785628/pdf/119847-WP-PUBLIC-aoke-studytour-guide-web.pdf>

CHAPTER 2: Guatemala-to-Canada Exchanges

The Mobilisation Cookbook: A Greenpeace Guide To Cooking Up People Powered Campaigns, Emily Hunter, Michael Siberman and Ted Fickes. Mobilisation Lab at Greenpeace & International Volunteering Lab at Greenpeace, 2016

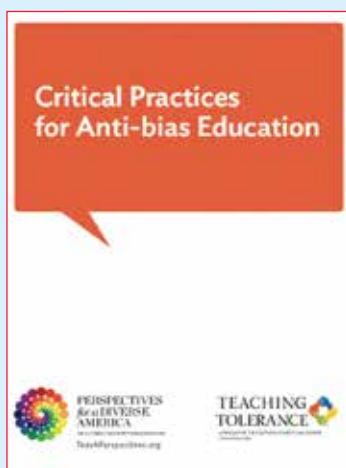
This guidebook breaks down several key public engagement concepts – such as broad and deep engagement, the difference between organizing and mobilizing, and open campaigns – with clear examples. Understanding these concepts can help organizations bolster their public events and outreach during exchange visits to Canada. <https://mobilisationlab.org/resources/the-mobilisation-cookbook>



CHAPTER 3: Youth Engagement Program

Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education, Teaching Tolerance Project, Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2018

A series of modules invite teachers to reflect on and implement practical strategies to create spaces for culturally responsive pedagogy that brings anti-bias values into their classrooms. The critical practices in this guide helped design the professional development workshop with teachers participating in Horizons' youth engagement program. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/critical-practices-for-antibias-education>



Privilege for Sale, Social Justice Toolbox. Meg Bolger, 2018

This activity was suggested to Horizons as a powerful alternative that allows for discussion on social justice – without relying on individuals or personal disclosure to illustrate examples of inequities. The inequities listed on the activity can be adapted to fit different thematic areas as required.

<http://www.socialjusticetoolbox.com/activity/privilege-for-sale/>

CHAPTER 4: Exchanges with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples

Indigenous Ally Toolkit, Dakota Swiftwolfe, Leilani Shaw. Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK, 2019

By providing an overview on terminology along with do's and don'ts, this easily accessible toolkit provides suggested steps and critical self-reflections for people and organizations that want to be effective allies of Indigenous Peoples living in Canada. https://reseau.mtl.network.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ally_March.pdf

Cultural Safety & Humility, First Nations Health Authority, 2016

The First Nations Health Authority carried out an extensive initiative to support health service staff in achieving the collective goal of culturally safe health services for First Nations and Indigenous people in BC. The initiative was called 'Creating a Climate for Change (#ItStartsWithMe)'. Materials produced and available online to support the initiative include print and video resources, webinar recordings and presentations, and promotional items. <https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/cultural-humility>

Wise Practices Resources These readings provide a more comprehensive explanation of a *wise practices* approach across different disciplines and contexts.

"A Wise Practices Approach to Indigenous Community Development in Canada", Brian Calliou and Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux. www.banffcentre.ca/sites/default/files/Lougheed%20Leadership/Research/Indigenous/2_Chapter_1.pdf

"Wise Practices: Integrating Traditional Teachings With Mainstream Treatment Approaches," Herbert C. Nabigon, MSW, Annie Wenger-Nabigon, MSW. www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/thesecanada/vol2/OSUL/TC-OSUL-1981.pdf

"System-Level Change for Funders and Policy Makers," Ed Connors and Jennifer White. <https://wisepractices.ca/system-level-change/>

CHAPTER 5: Communications and Social Media

Advice for Non-Profit Organizations These books provide a series of hands-on recommendations and tips in efficiently managing communications and marketing strategies with a specific focus on non-profit organizations.

CALM not BUSY: How to Manage Your Nonprofit's Communications for Great Results, Kivi Leroux Miller. Bold & Bright Media, 2018

Data Driven Nonprofits, Steve MacLaughlin. Saltire Press, 2016

Mobile for Good: A How-To Fundraising Guide for Nonprofits, Heather Mansfield. McGraw-Hill Education, 2014

