



A Community Wellness Learning Centre

Final Progress Report May 2024



Recovery College YVR. Real people. Sharing. Learning.



Canadian Mental
Health Association
North and West Vancouver
Mental health for all

Vancouver
CoastalHealth

We respectfully acknowledge that Recovery College YVR (RC YVR) operates on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Executive Summary

RC YVR, established in May 2023 with one-time funding from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, has flourished under the collaborative efforts of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) North & West Vancouver Branch (NWV) and Vancouver Coastal Health's (VCH) Consumer Involvement and Initiatives program. Over the past year, the college has demonstrated significant strides, delivering 633 sessions and registering 2631 individuals. Notably, the introduction of two new courses Group Facilitation 101, and Journalling, along with the transition of two in-person courses to online formats, has enhanced accessibility and engagement.

Feedback from participants underscores the program's efficacy, with 94% expressing high satisfaction with the facilitation of social support groups. Remarkably, participants entered these groups with mild distress on average and departed with no distress, highlighting the program's positive impact.

Looking ahead, RC YVR aims to expand its offerings and reach. In collaboration with the



Recovery College of Central Alberta, a course on "Grieving the Lost Healthy Self" will be co-developed, addressing a crucial theme in mental health recovery. Additionally, the adaptation of a series of "Insight" courses from the Well-being Learning Centre in Winnipeg will enrich our course catalogue, covering topics such as stress management and boundaries. Locally developed content, "Feeling Supported" and "SEEDS of Self-care" will focus on fostering compassion and practical self-care strategies.

Through these initiatives, RC YVR is projecting to reach an additional 700 individuals by March 2025, furthering its mission to provide accessible and impactful mental health education and support within the community.

Using this momentum, we plan to continue to explore our expansion to include Fraser Health Authority, and extending our reach to rural and remote communities within the Vancouver Coastal Health Region.



"I love the group because it gives me a different focus and it's great to meet together with other ladies ... if I am unable to make group, I can send an email with my contribution—this is really good as, otherwise, I would be very isolated." —course/group participant

Introduction

RC YVR is a web-based community wellness learning centre.

Our mission is to support individuals on their mental health, substance use and wellness journeys while pursuing system transformation through free, low-barrier, co-produced, and peer-led education. Co-production is a way of working where service providers and service users (peers) work together to reach a collective outcome that is deeply rooted in the principles of equity, diversity, accessibility, and reciprocity. Those who are likely to use RC YVR are the best people to help develop the program and design courses. Through collaborative and transformative learning

experiences, we aim to promote hope, social connectedness, and personal growth.

RC YVR offers courses that cover a wide range of wellness related topics aimed at helping people improve their health and well-being. Course categories include arts, self-discovery, wellness, training, and social connection.

At RC YVR, our foundation is built upon providing a safe, welcoming space where individuals can create meaningful connections, explore mental health and wellness, and feel empowered in their own journey.

Participant Engagement: Cultivating Connection



2,631 course and group registrations



633 course and group sessions

We had 13,000 new users visiting our website between June 1st, 2023, and March 31st, 2024. The top five locations of website visitors were Vancouver, Toronto, Quebec City, Surrey, and North Vancouver, indicating a broad reach across various regions.

Share Your Voices, Shape Our Courses Survey

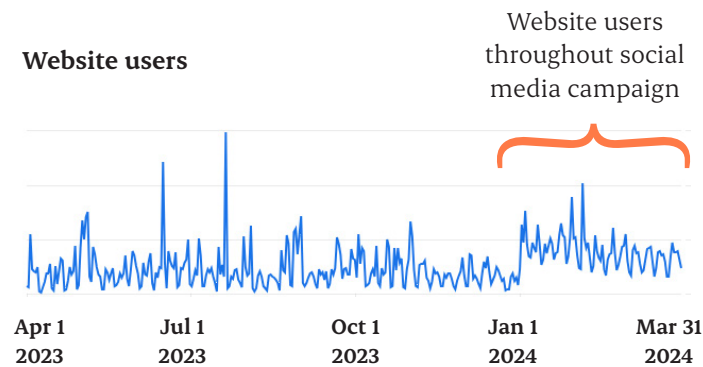
RC YVR has demonstrated improvement and growth in engaging participants, especially within digital platforms. Our recent digital community outreach efforts focused on connecting with a younger demographic aged 25 to 35, a recognized gap in our participant base.

In October 2023 we conducted the “Share Your Voice, Shape Our Courses” survey, aiming to gather insights into community interests, preferred activities, format preferences, and potential participation barriers. The community’s input has been instrumental in guiding our program development, providing invaluable direction for future initiatives.

Survey findings revealed participants’ strong interest in topics such as stress management, financial literacy, sleep improvement, trauma, communication skills, and mood. They expressed a preference for interactive activities such as small group discussions, art sessions, and sharing lived experiences. Participants highlighted barriers like chronic illness, physical location constraints, and time limitations, underscoring the importance of flexible and inclusive program offerings and virtual courses were favored for their convenience and accessibility.

Sparkling Visibility: Social Media Campaign

RC YVR conducted a targeted social media campaign on Instagram between January 2024 and March 2024. The campaign aimed to increase awareness of RC YVR among the 18 to 35-year-old population. Three different video ads were designed and ran for a month each on Instagram. The first ad reached 70,152 accounts, the second reached 85,205 accounts, and the third reached 65,689 accounts. Notably, our website experienced a significant spike in visitors during the duration of the campaign, underscoring the effectiveness of our outreach efforts.



Evaluation and Feedback

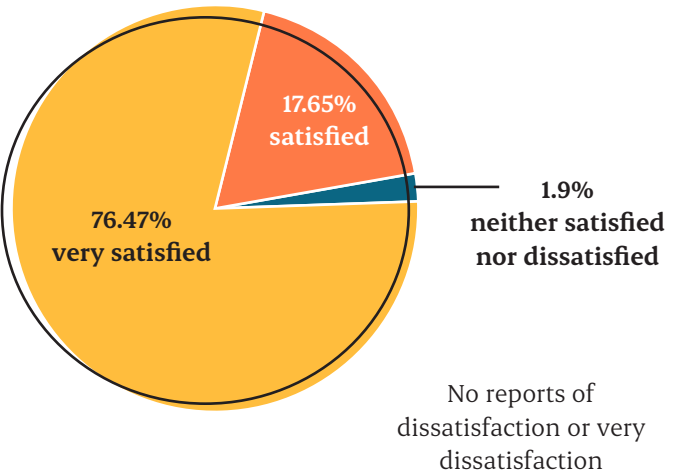
Our evaluation methods focus on measuring key participant outcomes, including reduced emotional distress, enhanced feelings of social connection, acquisition of new knowledge, and the practical applicability of learned tools post-course completion. To gather this data effectively, we employ pre-and post-course surveys, and a singular feedback survey tailored for social support groups.

Through these surveys, participants provide insights into their emotional well-being, social engagement, and the practical benefits gained from our programs. The pre-course survey serves

as a baseline assessment, capturing participants' initial states, while the post-course survey measures changes and improvements in the targeted outcomes. This structured approach allows us to track participants' progress and evaluate the effectiveness of our programs in meeting their needs.

For social support groups, a dedicated feedback survey enables participants to share their experiences and provide valuable input on the group dynamics, support received, and any areas for improvement.

We received feedback from 51 respondents through our social support group feedback. According to the findings, participants went into the social support groups with mild distress, and the average left with no distress. When asked about participant satisfaction with social support groups:



By systematically collecting feedback, we ensure that our programs remain responsive to participants' evolving needs and preferences, fostering continuous improvement and better outcomes for all involved.

Spotlight on Success: Program Highlights

Website Accessibility Upgrades

Last year, we conducted an accessibility audit to ensure our new website and associated materials meet industry standards. The audit evaluated the website's current adherence level to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 level AA success criteria. The score received was semi-compliant, with specific areas highlighted for improvement. The accessibility upgrades are now completed, and recoverycollegeyvr.ca is compliant with industry standards and best practices.

Professional Development and Strengthening Collaboration

Once RC YVR launched in May 2023, we focused on strengthening our capacity for co-design and collaboration, ultimately enhancing our programs' quality and impact. One of the ways to meet this goal was to invest in professional development for our team.

Sheryl Geisbrecht from the Well-being Learning Centre, a long-established recovery college in Winnipeg, conducted a comprehensive co-design workshop for our team. Drawing from her extensive experience, Sheryl provided invaluable insights and practical tips on how to facilitate the co-design process safely and effectively. This workshop has equipped our team with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage participants in meaningful co-design activities, ensuring that the voices and needs of the community are central to program development.

Additionally, our team attended workshops on community engagement strategies and virtual collaboration, enhancing our ability to involve stakeholders effectively.

Integrating Research—RC YVR

RC YVR successfully secured a grant from Vancouver Coastal Health's Research Institute for a two-year project titled "Learning from the Experiences of Recovery College Peer Educators and Program Organizers to Inform the Implementation of a Transformative Model of Mental Health and Substance Use Care at Vancouver Coastal Health."

This project involved inviting peer educators and program organizers from 29 Recovery Colleges across Canada to participate in a web-based survey, followed by Zoom interviews. The aim was to gather insights into what has supported these programs in preparing, supporting, and retaining peer educators. The findings will inform the development of processes and training materials to support peer educators at RC YVR, with plans to share these resources widely within the Recovery College community.

Initial findings have been categorized into four themes: Inclusivity, Connectedness, Adaptability, and Empowerment. Further exploration of these themes will inform the creation of knowledge translation materials to be shared with research participants, funders, and the broader peer support worker community. The project is scheduled to conclude at the end of December 2024.



"Thanks for offering the program. I look forward to it every week."

—course/group participant

Adding Value to Clients and Expanding Employment Opportunities

RC YVR remains dedicated to enhancing the value and accessibility of its programs while creating employment opportunities for peers in the community. Over the past year, significant strides have been made to broaden offerings and extend reach, yielding tangible benefits for both participants and facilitators.

We've bolstered our team by hiring seven new peer facilitators, with plans for four more soon. This expansion not only strengthens our ability to deliver quality programming but also empowers individuals with lived experience by providing meaningful employment opportunities, enabling them to actively contribute to others' recovery journeys. Additionally, we've established a team

of 10 peer advisors engaged in research and co-design activities.

Moreover, we've enriched our course offerings by introducing six new courses covering a diverse range of mental health and wellness topics. Recognizing the significance of accessibility, we've converted two previously in-person courses into virtual options, enhancing flexibility and inclusivity in participation. In response to community needs, we've launched five new social support groups, including specialized ones, such as the Bipolar Disorder Support Group and the Women-only SMART Recovery Group. We've expanded SMART Recovery meeting availability, providing virtual sessions five days a week and in-person meetings four days a week in Vancouver, ensuring broader access to addiction recovery support.

Kai's Facilitator Story

Kai is a former participant and current facilitator of RC YVR's Chronic Pain Support Group. Living with chronic pain and mental health challenges, Kai was able to use travel as a healing outlet until the pandemic forced them into isolation at home back in Canada. Kai describes RC YVR's Chronic Pain Support Group as something that gave value to their life at that point.

"I really just stayed home and had no one to communicate with but this lovely chronic pain group. We bonded. We were like family. It showed me how well you could connect with others on the internet. The group was really a lifeline.

I remember sobbing my whole way through the [first] chronic pain group. I couldn't believe other people were like me and believed what I said and understood how I felt. That makes it a reason to live. It made me realize what peers can do for each other."

Now, Kai co-facilitates the group. This has inspired Kai to start a couple of local support groups in their own community. "What I'm doing now is facilitating healing. As a queer, non-binary, disabled person, I feel like I'm helping set an example of diversity in my community."

On being a Facilitator and working on the Operations Committee (anonymous):

"Facilitating workshops and groups for RC YVR has helped give me meaning and purpose in my life. It also enables me to give back to my community and help others in their recovery journeys as well as helps me in my recovery journey. Being a member of the operations committee and my involvement with the working group lets my voice be heard and gives me the ability to make a difference and contribute to RC YVR in a meaningful way."

Connections with Primary Care

We are actively engaged with the local Primary Care Networks, reinforcing RC YVR's impact on the broader health landscape. VCH is committed to extending health promotion and education opportunities to Vancouver tertiary and ACT program clients, and other communities including Sechelt and Richmond, to expand the reach of RC YVR across the region. Through an addition to the Pathways BC Directory, RC YVR is now listed as a vetted online resource, providing BC physicians and their patients with accessible information about the college and its programming. This inclusion enhances the reach and visibility of RC YVR across the province.

Partnership with Fraser Health

One of the significant highlights of RC YVR over the past year has been the ongoing discussions and collaboration with Fraser Health, a pivotal step towards broadening our reach and impact within the region.

This collaboration entails mutual interest in co-designing new courses that blend the expertise of clinicians and peers, offering a comprehensive approach to mental health and wellness education. While Fraser Health had contemplated establishing its own virtual recovery college, the established framework of RC YVR highlighted the benefits of a collaborative, cross-regional approach, providing a seamless virtual service to the wider community.

Process Review

We enlisted Pace Consulting to conduct a thorough process review of RC YVR, aiming to assess both its strengths and areas needing improvement. Twelve members of the RC YVR team, comprising staff, committee members, and peers, participated in individual interviews to provide insights for the review.

The process review of RC YVR highlighted several positive aspects, including a shared vision for the program and a commitment to co-production, successful adaptation to virtual operations despite challenges posed by the pandemic, and the establishment of valuable connections through a Community of Practice. However, areas requiring improvement were also identified, such as addressing concerns regarding slow collaboration and enhancing transparency in decision-making processes. Specific areas needing clarity include decision-making processes, roles and responsibilities, and the allocation of funding.


Recommendations from the review emphasize the importance of enhancing collaboration, improving communication, and promoting diversity while restructuring suggestions focus on refining committee roles and ensuring effective program management.



“Love the group, great facilitators. I’m a mental health clinician as well as a consumer, and I have been super impressed with the clinical skills of the facilitators!” —course/group participant

Future Plans

RC YVR has made significant progress in supporting individuals on their mental health and wellness journeys, thanks to one-time funding from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions and contributions from Vancouver Coastal Health. Exciting opportunities lie ahead, including a collaboration with the Recovery College of Central Alberta to co-develop a course addressing the theme of “Grieving the Lost Healthy Self.” Additionally, we plan to incorporate “Insight” courses from the Well-being Learning Centre in Winnipeg into our calendar, covering topics such as stress management and boundaries. Further enriching our offerings, we’ll introduce two co-designed courses: “Feeling Supported” and “SEEDS of Self-care,” aimed at cultivating compassion and practical self-care strategies. Including these courses, we estimate serving an additional 700 people by March 2025. Using this momentum, we plan to continue to explore our expansion to include Fraser Health Authority and to expand our reach to rural and remote communities within Vancouver Coastal Health region.



“This group lets me be energized yet calm, I enjoy the sharing of positive energy. Attending regularly makes me feel more balanced and happy.”
—course/group participant

Acknowledgments

RC YVR expresses sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions for their crucial funding support, enabling the establishment and growth of our program and significantly impacting the mental health and wellness journey of our community members. We also extend our appreciation to Massive Media for their invaluable contributions to our brand identity and website accessibility upgrades, and to Yulu for their effective work on our launch campaign, facilitating community engagement and awareness.

Special recognition is owed to our dedicated communications team at CMHA, whose tireless efforts have played a vital role in spreading awareness about RC YVR and fostering meaningful connections within our community. Additionally, we are immensely thankful to Sheryl Giesbrecht at the Winnipeg Well-being Learning Centre for her mentorship and contribution to enriching our program offerings.

Heartfelt thanks are also extended to our group and course facilitators, staff members, and steering and operations committee members, whose unwavering dedication and passion have driven the success of RC YVR. Their commitment to supporting individuals on their mental health and wellness journeys serves as a true inspiration to us all.

In closing, RC YVR remains deeply grateful for the collaborative efforts and unwavering support of all individuals and organizations involved, as together, we continue to positively impact the lives of those we serve.



2024



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