



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



## REENERGIZING WELLNESS: COMMUNITY DINNER TOOLKIT

This toolkit is inspired by Kiki and Vanessa, Tsleil-Waututh Nation community members. Before Tsleil-Waututh Nation had a formal peer support program, Kiki and Vanessa started to host dinners in their homes for their peers. Kiki and Vanessa wanted to start a dialogue about mental health and substance use. Their dinner nights were an opportunity for community members to come together to share a meal, build connections and learn more about wellness topics in a safe and substance free space. This initiative set the foundation for the development of the peer support program at Tsleil-Waututh Nation. This toolkit is designed for peers to use in Indigenous communities.

### Why host a dinner?

- To create an opportunity for community members to build new connections or rekindle existing ones
- To give community members a chance to get to know you as a peer support worker
- To provide a safe space to talk about wellness and substance use
- To provide education on wellness topics and share resources

## Sharing Learnings from Kiki and Vanessa

### Start by building relationships

When someone in the community is ready to get help they won't go straight to a doctor or counsellor. They will usually go to someone they feel comfortable with and someone they trust. We started hosting small dinners in our homes to create a more relaxed social situation where people could get to know us better and start to build trusting relationships with us.

### Start with lighter discussion topics and work your way up to heavier ones

Make sure everyone feels more comfortable before you dive into more sensitive topics. If you just dive into the sensitive topics it can be discouraging for people. It is better to break the ice with something more fun, something that just brings people together and they can share a meal and some laughs before you get into the trauma and the healing. It is important to introduce the

topics that will be discussed in advance so that people can decide for themselves whether they are ready to engage in that discussion or not. It is also important to have a plan to follow up with people and make sure they are doing ok after a heavy topic is discussed.

### A note on sharing your story

When you host a more intimate dinner there is an opportunity for people to share their stories. One of the greatest gifts a peer support worker can give to someone is hope. Anyone sharing their story allows people to realize that they aren't dealing with this alone. Even if it's not the exact same situation, I think everyone is looking for that message of hope, that they aren't in this alone and that there will always be someone listening and someone who cares to hear their story and that everyone's story is important. When you share your own personal story and journey it allows people to feel more comfortable to share their own story with you, without pressure and judgement.



## CONNECT

### Get the word out

Identify community members looking for opportunities to connect and learn more about wellness. Choose one of two approaches:

#### 1. Host a community wide event

This is a great way to introduce yourself as a peer support worker and explain your role. This is also a great way to bring the community together and ask what types of peer support programs they would like to see offered. Community wide events are a great opportunity to facilitate cultural activities.

#### 2. Host an intimate gathering

By bringing together a small group of people to share a meal you can build relationships and have discussions in a safe setting.

| Task                 | My Plan |
|----------------------|---------|
| Pick a date and time |         |

Pick a location

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Get the word out | <i>You can invite community members in person, over the phone and by posting in the community newsletter and local facebook pages. You can also make a poster and put it up at the health and band offices.</i> |
|------------------|---|

## BUILD

Plan your event and prepare for the day of

### 4 weeks to event

- Pick a date and time
- Book your event location, ideally it will have a kitchen
- Invite community members

### 2-3 weeks to event

- Create a menu for the evening and prepare a grocery list
- Determine who will do the shopping and cooking
- Plan the layout of the room—where you will set up dinner tables and serving stations
- Make a list of all dishes and equipment you will need (see suggested items below) and a plan for where you will purchase or borrow these items from
- Create an agenda or schedule of activities for the event

### Week of event

- Shop for groceries and supplies
- Confirm number of guests attending and ensure there will be enough food
- Print any handouts or resources you want to share as part of your discussion

### Supplies list

- Tables and chairs, have a few extra set up just in case
- Cups, plates, cutlery and napkins
- Serving utensils and dishware
- Markers, pens and large sheets of paper for group discussions
- Tinfoil or take away containers for extra food
- Cleaning supplies, including tea towels
- If you are showing a presentation or videos you may need an extension cord, laptop, projector and screen

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## EXPERIENCE

Facilitate a welcoming and safe environment at the event

### Make an agenda for the event

Example:

- Share a meal, check in
- Present a wellness topic (video, guest speaker)
- Have discussion about the topic
- Have a closing check in to see how people are feeling after the topic or to identify what their favourite part of the session was

### Set group guidelines before discussing wellness topics

- Let the group know this is meant to be a space where people feel safe to share openly
- Confidentiality: what is shared in the circle stays in the circle
- One person speaks at a time without being interrupted
- Warning that you may ask people to leave the event if they are disruptive or unkind to other members
- Warning that you will follow up with people to check on them if they seem upset or triggered by a topic

### Make a plan for the wellness topic to be discussed

- Do some research on the topic
- Find a video to share or invite a guest speaker, Knowledge Keeper or Elder to attend and speak
- Prepare some discussion questions to ask
- Make sure the appropriate supports are in place if a heavy topic is being discussed
  - Watch for changes in body language, this is a good indicator for follow up
  - When discussing topics like trauma or abuse, peers have found great value in having a counsellor present during the session and available to provide follow up support
  - Peers have also found value in providing brushing or smudging for participants after heavy or triggering discussions
  - End the event ensuring that attendees know that you are available to connect 1-1
  - if anything has come up for them and they could use some support

## LEARN

Reflect back on your event



**Which community members should I follow up with and offer support to after the event?**

*Did anyone seem triggered, angry, upset or overwhelmed?*

**What went really well during the event?**

**What were some challenges that came up at the event?**

*Example: One person talked the whole time and other people didn't have the chance to share*

**How can I prepare to address these challenges next time I host a similar event?**

*Example: When we review group guidelines I will ask that we make sure we leave space for everyone to share and participate*