Understanding Your Community

WELCOME! This document is adapted from Jack.org's many resources to train and equip young leaders to take action for mental health across Canada.

Objectives:

- To develop an understanding of how people think and talk about mental health in your community

- To recognize barriers people experience in your community that prevent help-seeking behaviour surrounding mental health

- To provide a foundation for goal setting for your team

ACTIVITY: What prevents help-seeking in your community? (20 mins)

This activity will get your team to start considering what the culture surrounding mental health looks like in your community. Your team will first brainstorm their observations regarding mental health in your community, and then group them into categories based on common themes.

Materials Required:

Sticky Notes
Markers
An empty wall or other large flat surface

Steps:

1. As a group, brainstorm and write on sticky notes some ideas, attitudes, actions, or behaviours that **positively** influence help-seeking surrounding mental health in your community. Put these on the left side of the wall. **(6 mins)**

Example: *Events in the community during mental health awareness week.*

2. Discuss why these things positively impact mental health. **(2 mins)**

3. As a group, brainstorm and write on sticky notes some ideas, attitudes, actions, behaviours, or stereotypes that **negatively** impact mental health in your community. Put these on the right side of the wall. **(6 mins)**

Examples: *nobody talks about mental health, people think it's embarrassing to talk about mental health.*

4. Discuss why these things negatively impact mental health. **(2 mins)**

5. As a team, group your sticky notes together based on common elements and identify which themes of barriers are emerging. Have someone record your findings. **(4 mins)**

Some examples of themes of barriers that may come up in your group discussion include (but are not limited to):

- *Lack of knowledge surrounding mental health*
- *Misinformation surrounding mental health*
- *Shaming of those who struggle*
- *Lack of appropriate resources / nowhere to go for people who struggle*

Making Sense of Your Findings

By working to identify the main barriers to help-seeking in your community, you've created a foundation for the goals you'll set for your work. You won't be able to tackle all these factors as a team, but you will be able to challenge negative perceptions, give your peers the valuable information they may be lacking, and work to eliminate any shame or silence people may have around mental health. Working to directly combat the issues most relevant in your community is exactly what will make your team's work successful, so keep these barriers in mind in everything you do.