

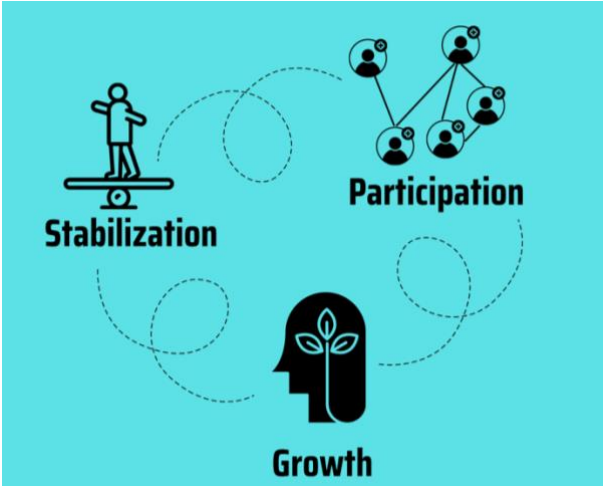
Understanding Start Me Up Niagara’s Radically Inclusive Service Model (Draft)

Report created by: Shannon Moore, Kim Duffin, Karen Louise Smith, Julie Gregory and Curtis Tye

Date: Dec 2021

The Project

Start Me Up Niagara (SMUN) is a community based non-profit organization that works with individuals facing significant life challenges such as addiction, mental illness, poverty, homelessness and unemployment. In partnership, members of Brock University’s Social Justice Research Institute (SJRI) and the community of SMUN collaborated to understand SMUN’s Radically Inclusive Service Model. An infographic to represent the Radically Inclusive Service Model was developed from the research.



As we attempt to illustrate through this graphic, SMUN makes great efforts to facilitate participation. Our research was also participatory, meaning members of the SMUN community were a part of each phase of the design and data collection for this research. The project was initiated in 2018 by the director of SMUN and her request to learn more about how SMUN’s Radically Inclusive Service Model works on all levels of their organization. From 2018-2021 the SMUN-SJRI team collaborated to complete a total of 28 interviews with service users, staff and

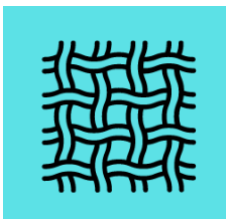
volunteers as well as participant observations. All service user interviews were conducted in person by peers and included participants from across levels of programming at SMUN. Peer interviewers were mentored and trained to conduct interviews by the Brock research team prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. All interviews with staff and volunteers were conducted virtually by members of the Brock research team and in alignment with regional health directives as the Covid-19 pandemic was ongoing. The summary of participants is as follows:

- Two peer interviewers were interviewed and trained by the Brock research team
- 19 service users were interviewed by peer interviewers. Participants reported being engaged in SMUN programming from 6 months to more than 10 years.
- Two practicum students were interviewed by the Brock research team
- Five staff were interviewed by the Brock research team.

This project was generously funded by the Niagara Community Foundation and the Social Justice Research Institute, Brock University.

What We Found

Start Me Up Niagara (SMUN) is an organization that connects community from inside/outside of its physical space. SMUN has a distinctive atmosphere where relationships grow into friendships and social networks through the operating philosophy, physical and relational context. This makes SMUN larger than the sum of the parts. A collective of service users, staff, volunteers, programs, activities, services, operating philosophy and inside/outside community. All aspects of the system are integrated like a net woven with the threads of social networks, knots that give structure and shape to the flow of services and programs. One staff person explained this as follows:



It is so woven together and integrated. If we remove a piece... we remove [other] opportunities... Each piece is integrated. This may not be fully seen by service users. A service user may say how important housing is, but they might not say or see that the real thing that got me the housing was that I completed my income tax.

Radically Inclusive Service delivery is held within this netlike support woven with the operating philosophy, integrated and interrelated programs, and relationships built on radical acceptance, tolerance and inclusivity where space is created for participation. Any identified needs or choices regarding change are driven by the service user. Radically Inclusive Service delivery is to meet people where they are without judgment or trying to change them: *Listen, Collaborate,*

Act Now. The crux of Radically Inclusive Service delivery is the immediate action when service users identify a need. Volunteers and staff explained this as follows:



Accepting people for who they are, and where they are. Not judging. Not trying to change them. Let them live their lives and be there if they need us. Welcoming, when they come in ...and don't try to change them

If you need help and I can help you. I will do it. Let's do it now. People are used to waiting and they are surprised. That is what removes the barriers. Remove the waiting. Remove the forms. If we can help you we will help you. The action removes the barrier. Removing the wait.

When the person is ready, when they want to get better, you got to provide the service.

Radically Inclusive Service delivery combines listening, collaborating and an immediate response that removes barriers to entering the service pathway: stabilization, participation and growth. The operating philosophy shapes the services and relationships. Action now is driven by the service users' identified needs and action is facilitated by the atmosphere and the network of relationships that connect the inside of SMUN with service and community outside of the physical space of SMUN. The range of programs within one organization like SMUN makes all the difference for facilitating change now. Responses are highly inclusive, individual and engage one-on-one collaborative dialogue.

Radically Inclusive Service delivery reflects the principles of trauma informed care¹. It makes sense that service users most often experienced trauma in the past and on an ongoing daily basis given the precarious context of their lives: deficits of permanent housing, income, food security and lack of access essential services such as healthcare and mental health services. Trauma informed care provides integrated services that are shaped by understanding of how trauma impacts life and the unique vulnerabilities traumatized individuals. For instance, when the body is driven to survival mode our brain function changes to a "fight, flight, freeze" mode. Trauma is extreme stress. An immediate response to a service user's identified needs offers an immediate relief to a stress. If that present moment of stress is addressed, then an opening is created, and a relationship may begin between the world inside/outside the Center. Here is an example of Radically Inclusive Service delivery as immediate action and radical listening:

¹ Wilson, C., Pence, D., & Conradi, L. (2013). Trauma-Informed Care. Encyclopedia of Social work. Retrieved 7 September, 2021, from <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-1063>



...a woman and a man came inthey were supposed to be in court that morning...One staff member ever so gently attempted to comb out the woman's hair ... another staff person told them he would drive them to court [they had just 15 min to get to the courthouse for their hearing]...

The key is for service users to hear they will get help and then experience the follow-through. The immediate response by staff and volunteers to an identified need of a service user may have a positive consequence that begins the thread of trust and relationship. For staff and volunteers to respond in the immediate moment they are listening in an unconditional way: a radical listening² for which they are totally present and responding to the identified needs of the service user.

For service users, SMUN, is more than a place to get a cup of coffee. SMUN offers social connection, a sense of purpose, sustenance and a feeling of comfort and safety:



This is the first place we come when we wake up. The second we wake up it's get dressed and go get a coffee. And then you know it's a good start to the day.

When I started here, at first, I was so exhausted sometimes during the day...I like the fact that people could feel so comfortable, they'll just, like curl up under a table and have a nap when they need to.

...Even if they notice you are crying or something they'll pull you aside, which a lot of places don't do, shelters won't. They give you blankets, they have taken me off the street, they have brought me to hospitals. I think they are amazing...

These examples show how SMUN meets people where they are without judgment and with an understanding that participants enter their programs and activities from multiple levels. Radically Inclusive Service delivery offers a context for which service users may gradually begin movement through the client service pathway established by SMUN. When service users begin movement through that pathway, they are ready for change.

² Moore, S.A. (2018). Radical Listening Transdisciplinary, Restorative Justice and Change. *World Futures: The Journal of New Paradigm Research*, 74 (7-8), 471-489.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

Staff and volunteers explained that SMUN build their program around low barrier access and accepting people where they are. Staff and volunteers explained that *“all of a sudden there's covid and covid is all about restrictions”*. *“We've changed our services so much. We only can have like 10 people at a time in. You actually have to be homeless”*. Yet, some changes may be beneficial going forward: *“when you don't have 60 people and you only have 10 the depth of service that we can give to one is probably greater”*. All these changes were met with resilience and acceptance by services users. Overall, the impression staff and volunteers had was a sense of relief from services users that the doors of SMUN stayed open during Covid-19 and a wish, that if anything, services and hours could be expanded going forward.

What's Next

The information shared in this report and the accompanying PowerPoint slide deck is based on analysis of the interviews conducted for this research project. This report and the accompanying presentation materials could be posted on SMUN's website as a way for potential service users and community members to find out more about SMUN .

The presentation was originally created using [Canva](#) and thus individual images/components also can easily be shared with SMUN via this program (free accounts available). We envision that SMUN may be able to use this presentation (in whole) in the following ways:

- Presentation (narrated or not) to employees and other key stakeholders/partners
- Manual for new employees
- Video (narrated or not) on website demonstrating SMUN's theory of change

We also envision that SMUN may be able to use individual parts of this presentation and report (i.e. infographic, images, quotations) in the following ways:

- Add graphic of the radically inclusive service model on SMUN webpage (<https://www.startmeupniagara.ca/site/about>) and/to business cards, postcards, posters and/or other materials to be shared within the community and to partners
- Have printed on socks, toques, scarves, etc. for service users and staff and/or to support fundraising efforts

The research team from SJRI at Brock University plan future scholarly reports of these findings in academic journal publications and will share these with SMUN when they become available. We are grateful to everyone in the SMUN community for this opportunity to learn from your stories and experiences.

Appendix: Slide Deck

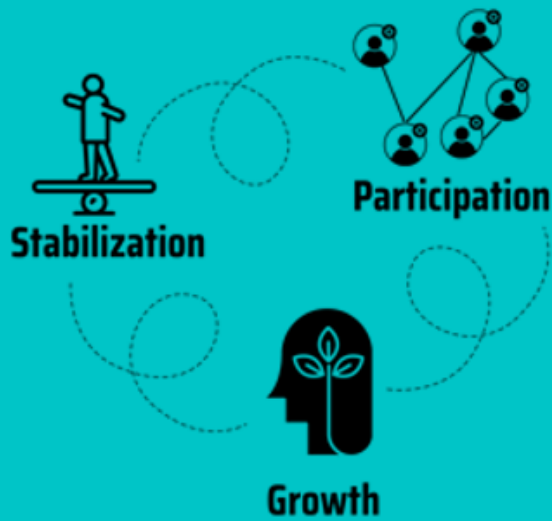
The diagram features three icons connected by dashed lines. On the left, a person stands on a balance beam labeled 'Stabilization'. In the top center, a network of five people icons is labeled 'Participation'. In the bottom center, a silhouette of a head with a plant growing inside is labeled 'Growth'. To the right is the 'START ME UP NIAGARA' logo with the tagline 'Working Together... Moving Forward' and a large upward-pointing arrow.

**START ME UP
NIAGARA**
Working Together... Moving Forward

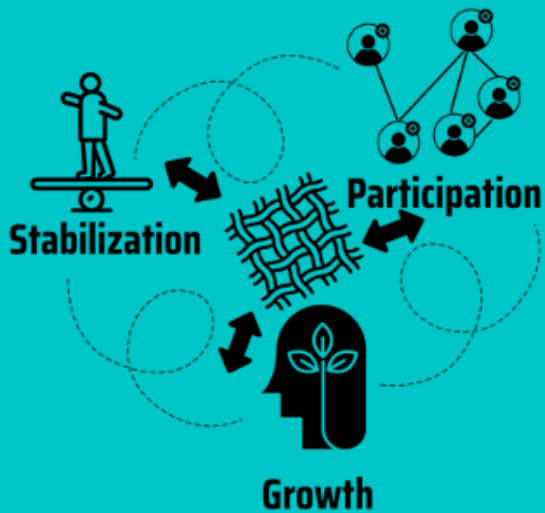
**RADICALLY
INCLUSIVE**
Service Model

Background

- Members of Brock University's Social Justice Research Institute partnered with Start Me Up Niagara (SMUN) to explore their *radically inclusive service mode*
- A participatory research project was conducted and it involved 28 interviews with service users staff and volunteers as well as participant observation
 - 19 service users, individuals engaged with SMUN for 6 months to 10 years, were interviewed
 - 2 peer interviewers participated as both researchers and interviewees
 - 5 staff members
 - 2 practicum students
- Interviews with service users were conducted before the pandemic with staff interviews taking place after the pandemic



What is radically inclusive service delivery?



“Each piece is integrated. This may not be fully seen by service users. A service user may say how important housing is, but they might not say or see that: *The real thing that got me the housing was that I completed my income tax.*”

Service is woven together and integrated



“If you need help and I can help you now. I will do it. Let’s do it now. People are used to waiting and they are surprised.”

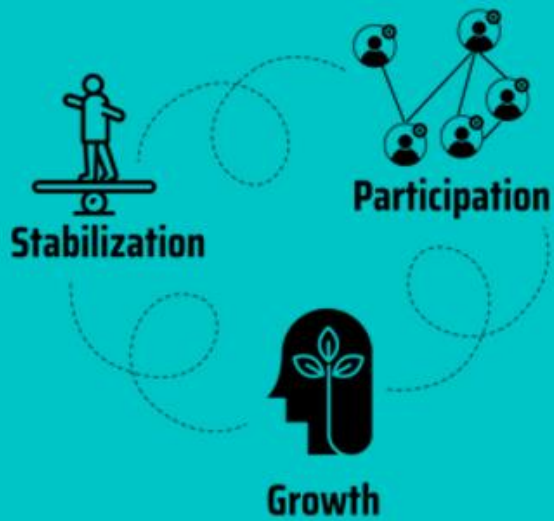
**It removes
barriers and
includes
immediate action**



For staff to respond in the immediate moment they are listening in an unconditional way: a radical listening for which they are totally present and responding to the identified needs of the service user in the moment.

“You notice what service users need like a pair of boots.”

**It involves
radical listening**



Stories from service users



A cup of coffee at SMUN represents different things to service users --- social connection, purpose, sustenance.

“This is the first place we come when we wake up. The second we wake up it’s get dressed and go get a coffee. And then you know it’s a good start to the day.”

It’s not just a cup of coffee



"When I started here, at first, I was so exhausted sometimes during the day... I like the fact that people could feel so comfortable, they'll just, like curl up under a table and have a nap when they need to."

People feel so comfortable



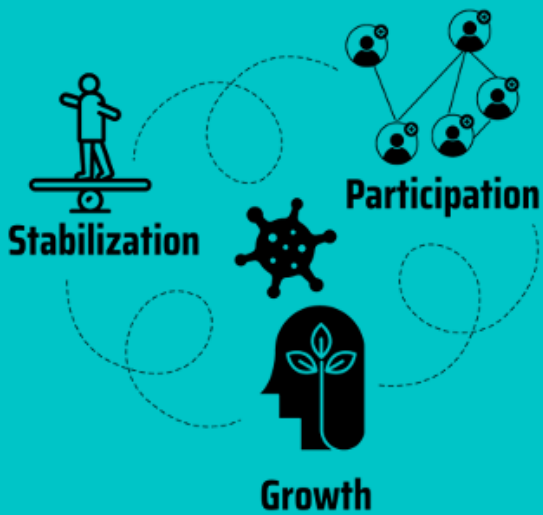
"....Even if they notice you are crying or something they'll pull you aside, which a lot of places don't do, shelters won't. They give you blankets, they have taken me off the street, they have brought me to hospitals. I think they are amazing."

They have taken me off the street



"...a woman and a man came in...they were supposed to be in court that morning. ...One staff member ever so gently tried to comb out the woman's hair. ...[Another staff member] came in and told them he would drive them to court [with their attendance required in just 15 minutes]"

Acting non-judgementally to help



Some implications of Covid

- “Start me up Niagara built their program around accepting people where there are, being friendly.... low barrier access anyone comes in at any time...and then all of a sudden there's covid and covid is all about restrictions”
- “we've changed our services so much. We only can have like 10 people at a time in. You actually have to be homeless”.
- “when you don't have 60 people and you only have 10- the depth of service that we can give to one is probably greater”.

Thanks

This research was financially supported by:



Special thanks to Start Me Up Niagara's service users, volunteers and staff who made this project possible!