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Making Allyship Work: Allyship Perspectives in a Community-Based Research Study

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The authors would like to acknowledge that the writing of this paper took place throughout what is now referred to as British Columbia. Most of the authors and contributors live, work, study and contributed to the writing of this paper on traditional, unceded lands of numerous Indigenous nations throughout the province.

OVERVIEW OF THE MAKING IT WORK PROJECT

Making it Work is a community-based research (CBR) study looking to highlight how integrated community services for people living HIV, hepatitis C, and/or challenges with mental health or substance use work best for people accessing them. This project has a particular focus on services that are provided through an Indigenous worldview of health, and that have a commitment to cultural safety for their clients. Making it Work was born from discussions between community service providers and people with lived and living experience(s) wanting to showcase the important and diverse services being provided in the community. Making it Work has a long, rich history, collecting different team members and life experiences as it has evolved into what it is today.

To help understand *how, why, when* and *for whom* these services work best, Making it Work combines three approaches: Two-Eyed Seeing, Community-Based Research and Realist Evaluation. The team recently described our approach to research and key learnings in a poster presentation for the 2020 Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research (Figure 1). We share this poster first to ground the discussion about allyship that follows, in the way that Making it Work does research together.

ALLYSHIP WITHIN THE MAKING IT WORK STUDY

The construct of allyship is a complex term taken up in different ways across academic and activist literature, including (but not limited to) gender-based violence, decolonizing solidarity movements, mental health and substance use and HIV (Carlson et al., 2019; Klutz, Walker, & Walter, 2020; Happell et al., 2018). Allyship has been defined as the participation in addressing health and social inequities for social good (Nixon, 2019). Thus, one can argue that the central

¹ Please see Appendix A to view the biographies of each of the authors. It is important to acknowledge the various territories on which each author resides and works. Additionally, the ancestral backgrounds and positionality of each author is an important factor in doing this work.

goals of allyship are opportunities for development and growth between communities that are often labelled and/or have lived or living experiences of injustice and those in positions of privilege (Happell et al., 2018; Nixon, 2019).

Critiques of allyship suggest it is often presented as a hierarchy, separating those with privilege and those in need of advocacy (Carlson et al., 2019; Kluttz, Walker, & Walter, 2020). Moving away from this idea, we frame allyship through the founding principle of capacity bridging, a term developed by members of the *Visioning Health* research team and put forward by the AHA Centre (AHA Centre, 2018). In contrast to the similar term “capacity building”, capacity bridging moves away from the idea that one team member’s ideas are more valuable than another’s, rather, it recognizes that everyone around the table has something to share and contribute to the project. We can learn from one another. Capacity bridging also acknowledges that each individual on a team has the capacity to build and promote learning for other members of the team, while learning and improving their own capacity at the same time. Capacity bridging presents itself across three significant areas of allyship within the Making it Work study: allyship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; between those with lived/living experience(s) of HIV, Hepatitis C, substance use and/or challenges with mental health and those who do not have these lived/living experience(s); and between academics and community.

Using a Two-Eyed Seeing Approach to Realist Evaluation in a Community-Based Research Project
 Nancy Clark, James Daulty, Madeline Galland, Darren Louscheis, Joarena Mendell & Sherri Pooyak on behalf of the Making it Work Research Team
*The Making it Work team gratefully and respectfully works and partners with Indigenous Peoples in what is often referred to as British Columbia.
 The team has no conflicts of interest to disclose.*





Background

Making it Work is a research project looking at integrated community-based services provided for people living with HIV, hepatitis C, and/or challenges with mental health or substance use. The study is particularly interested in services delivered through an Indigenous worldview and how organizations create cultural safety for their clients. Our research questions are:

1. Do services based on an Indigenous worldview of health and wellbeing produce improved outcomes for people living with HIV, hepatitis C, and/or challenges with mental health, or substance use (regardless of Indigenous ancestry)?
2. Does linking case management and community development programs and services improve health and social outcomes for clients?

To answer these questions we are working with three confirmed case study organizations: Positive Living North (Prince George and Smithers), Central Interior Native Health Society (Prince George) and PHS Community Services Society (Vancouver and Victoria). We are also continuing to build relationships with other potential case study sites that are not yet confirmed.

Our approaches to research

Two-Eyed Seeing	Community-Based Research	Realist Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It foregrounds Indigenous Ways of Knowing and assists in the incorporation of decolonizing research strategies into western CBR strategies¹ • Allows us to mediate, but not resolve, the uncertainty of and the irreconcilable ways Indigenous Ways of Knowing may relate to western research methods. • Helps understand different perspectives and experiences (based on social location and cultural identity) • Seek out common ground, respect differences, avoid knowledge domination and assimilation² • Offers a way to approach conceptual tensions between western and Indigenous concepts of health and wellbeing <p style="font-size: x-small;">1. Lewis, Marshall, Washell, & Seidell, 2003 2. Hertz, & Barick, 2018; Barick, 2002(2019); Lewis, W., Washell, & Seidell, 2003</p>	<p>Community-based research (CBR) is a type of research that places community partnerships at the forefront. CBR approaches are marked by the following principles:</p> <p>Collaborative: The communities in which the research is taking place are full partners in all stages of the process</p> <p>Inclusive: Community-based research seeks to democratize knowledge by recognizing and valuing the unique strengths and perspectives of all members involved in the research process.</p> <p>Change-oriented: Although community-based research can make important contributions to knowledge, its ultimate objective is to promote positive social change. Community-based research seeks to empower communities and effect policy changes.</p>	<p>Realist Evaluation is particularly good at helping understand complex programs, and is designed to not only ask 'if' a program works, but how, why, when, and for whom. This approach begins with developing a program theory in the form of Context + Mechanism = Outcome statements.</p> <p>Contexts: Features that affect how a program works. The contexts influences which 'mechanisms happen'</p> <p>Mechanisms: Describes peoples' reactions, interpretations and actions to the program. "How" and "why" a program works.</p> <p>Outcomes: The impacts of a program</p> <p>Many different sources of information can help you develop your program theory. Once our program theory is developed, we will be testing and refining this theory within our case study sites.</p>

Two-eyed seeing in our project

Indigenous ways of seeing	Western way of seeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It foregrounds Indigenous Ways of Knowing and assists in the incorporation of decolonizing research strategies into western CBR strategies¹ • Takes an Indigenous perspective such as the preliminary study that used the medicine wheel as its framework • The medicine wheel looks at 4 aspects or quadrants of a person or organization: Emotional, Mental, Physical, and Spiritual • Case study – focused on what worked for the Indigenous participants within an Indigenous organization. • Initial findings were FIRST reviewed with Indigenous team members • Using a strengths-based approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses Realist Evaluation methods • Linear thinking in its approach • Is a theory-based approach that asks: "How or why does this work, for whom and in what circumstances?" rather than just "what works." • MIW team has many non-Indigenous team members

Developing our Realist Evaluation Program Theory

Our team wanted to adjust the standard linear **Context + Mechanism = Outcome** configurations to a form that acknowledges the ongoing relational and evolving nature of these services. The program theory is still under development however, at this point the team has discussed representing our CMO statements as spirals. The example shown here describes how organizations with a welcoming environment (Context) contributes to people developing relationships with staff and peers (Mechanism) which leads to people feeling valued (Outcome). We believe the spiral helps illustrate how something like developing relationships is an ongoing process. Different CMO spirals exist within the framework of the medicine wheel, to emphasize how organizations provide services that support **emotional, mental, physical and spiritual** wellbeing for their clients.



Key learnings so far

1. In integrating the Realist Evaluation approach into our study it was important for our team to be clear on what we were not willing to be flexible on. The principles of Community-Based Research and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing are paramount to the *Making it Work* project, and are important to keep intact while working through the Realist Evaluation approach.
2. Realist Evaluation lends itself well to **incorporating diverse sources of evidence and experiential knowledge**. Data sources to inform a program theory can come from literature, primary data, and/or content experts. In our project, the experts informing this work are people with lived experience(s), those working in community-based organizations, and other community leaders, knowledge holders and Elders. We feel this part of Realist Evaluation complements Community-Based Research and Indigenous methodologies well.
3. Using Realist Evaluation, and trying to tease out the 'contexts', 'mechanisms' and 'outcomes' has **pulled us to think outside the box**, and has opened up the questions we are asking our selves as to how services work well for clients, and under what circumstances.
4. The importance of dialogue, and spending time to discuss things from different perspectives has been evident in integrating Realist Evaluation into our project. This process has been one of **capacity bridging** between members of our research team with different life experience, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members. Having people come together with different knowledge and worldviews and spending the time to develop our program theory using 'both eyes', or ways of seeing – without one eye being dominant over the other – has allowed us a wealth of information to build into our understanding of the 'contexts', 'mechanisms' and 'outcomes' that ultimately will become our program theory.
5. Part of coming together as a team with different experiences and knowledge has meant we have needed to be clear with our language and defining concepts well. We have done this in team discussions and have made a "key definitions" document to help guide our work.

To frame our approach to allyship in the context of working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, we work to incorporate Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing throughout each stage of the research project. The Making it Work team consists of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members and approaches this work from a Two-Eyed Seeing perspective. While we understand that there are multiple perspectives and understandings of Two-Eyed seeing in the literature, the Making it Work team is using the following approach in order to guide our work. Two-Eyed Seeing underscores that to improve and advance Indigenous wellbeing, research needs to honour diverse and evolving Indigenous approaches to health and wellbeing while also recognizing the value of Western, scientific approaches to health (Iwama et al., 2009). Allyship with Indigenous peoples is taken up in the Making it Work project not only through respecting and implementing the Two-Eyed Seeing approach, but also through the core principle of grounding the study in Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing, which centre and see “the whole person (physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual) as interconnected to land, and in relationship to others (family, communities, nations).” (Cull et al., n.d.). The Making it Work Study has incorporated Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing by working to place Indigenous voices and epistemologies at the centre of the research processes, where the design and methods reflect the values and world views of Indigenous cultures, as knowledge is based on values and interests of those who generate it. By incorporating different approaches to research and grounding the work in principles of cultural safety, this project strives to empower and bridge capacity for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on the research team.

The second type of allyship evident in our work is allyship between people with lived or living experiences of HIV, hepatitis C or challenges with substance use or mental health and those who do not have lived experiences. The approach of Making it Work engages people with lived and living experiences as vital voices on the team. The team members acknowledge that those with lived and living experiences are the experts of their own histories and experiences, and therefore bring unique perspectives. In community-based research, people with lived and living experiences (PWLE) are actively and meaningfully engaged in research and often come from communities or priority populations that are not traditionally engaged in research and have lived or living experience with the phenomenon being studied (Belle-Isle, Benoit, & Pauly, 2014; Greene et al., 2009; Guta, Flicker, & Roche, 2013; Jagosh et al., 2012; Marshall et al., 2015; Roche, Flicker, & Gupta, 2010; Salmon, Browne, & Pederson, 2010). For successful allyship, it is not enough to simply include those with lived and living experience(s) on the Making it Work team. It also requires team members without lived experience, or who hold privilege, to work to actively make space for these voices to be amplified, and at the forefront of discussions and decisions directly relating to the research, findings and impacts to community. It is here that we can see and understand how capacity bridging works and what it looks like.

Finally, the third type of allyship is between academics on the Making it Work team and the people coming to this work from community-based organizations or the larger community impacted by the study. Making it Work follows the principles of community-based research, which place community partnerships and collaboration at the forefront, are empowering and change-oriented, and are inclusive of the unique strengths and perspectives of the diverse members involved in the research process (Israel et al., 2010). For our team, this has meant balancing the needs of academic, university-based researchers with community members and community-based organizations (an example might be thinking through what

‘outputs’ can be developed from the project – formal publications versus more community-oriented knowledge translation). This can be challenging, as there needs to be buy-in and understanding from the team that all members are equally valued and have meaningful contributions; in doing this, however, “both the quality of the research and the long-term learning by team members will benefit greatly from the effort” (Center for Community Health and Development, n.d.).

Allyship in the Making it Work project is a process of collaboration which enriches community-based participatory processes in our ongoing commitment to learning with and from Indigenous knowledges and people’s diverse experiences. Allyship is more than standing with, but doing, acting, and working in solidarity toward levelling the playing field to create an opportunity where each team member is treated with equal respect and their knowledge is equally valued. Similarly, as discussed in the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network’s “Indigenous Ally Toolkit” (2019), ally is not a self-appointed identity, rather, it requires learning through action, recognition and relationship. One should not simply claim they are an ally. Instead, there should be a recognition, acknowledgement and willingness to better understand how to stand beside and support those we are working with, such as people living with HIV/hepatitis C, or challenges with substance use or with mental health, and Indigenous people.

In the context of our community-based participatory research project, we define allyship as an ongoing process of negotiation-learning and unlearning, which has required many team conversations and the creation of guiding documents and principles for our work together. Drawing from experiences within the Making it Work research team, we add to the conversation on allyship in the context of our work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, people with lived/living experience(s) of HIV, hepatitis C, substance use or challenges with mental health, and working in community-academic partnerships.

COMMENTARY – REFLECTIONS FROM THE TEAM

In preparing for this paper we gathered thoughts and learnings from our study team members and also provided space for conversation at our study team videoconference meetings to reflect on how we have worked together and the successes and challenges of being part of the team, particularly as it relates to allyship. All team members understood that their thoughts and words would be used in this paper, and, as co-authors, were provided with the opportunity to clarify statements and contribute to the development of the ideas and the paper.

We asked team members to discuss their experiences on the Making it Work team and what allyship means in the context of this work, including challenges and successes, as well as lessons learned. We also asked team members to reflect on where allyship has shown up in this work across the three areas mentioned above. Team members hold different positions related to the research and also the communities they live in or priority populations they represent. The contributors are Nancy Clark, Janice Duddy, Darren Lauscher, Sherri Pooyak, Deb Schmitz, Michelle Stewart and Catherine Worthington. Biographies of the authors and contributors are available in Appendix A.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

It is common knowledge in Indigenous research and among Indigenous people, that before any work can be done relationships must be developed, and time must be taken to get to know one another. As an Indigenous researcher, Sherri received a teaching from another Indigenous researcher that before the work can be done, 10 cups of tea must be had. In many ways, this team has had 10 cups of tea repeatedly, with new team members coming on over a period of several years. It is what has made this commentary and research project successful. We have had 10 cups of tea, many times over.

The concept of trust as a result of relationship building came up in discussion with several team members who reflected that building relationships and increasing trust within the group highlighted both successes and challenges on the Making it Work team. Michelle notes that one of the greatest strengths of the project is the element of mentorship and gaining deeper relationships with the team, explaining “I actually feel like I’ve gained another family.” According to Darren, the notions of allyship and relationship run parallel to one another, but “there is a difference between allyship and relationship. People from a broad spectrum with a common goal can come together to work on projects involving allyship, but that does not mean they have relationships”. Michelle explained that the process of doing community-based research as a team can get easier with time as you gain relationship with team members and learn and grow together.

Relationship building is not an easy task for some. Deb indicated that historically, it was tough to build relationships with some members of the team, because team meetings were held by teleconference originally, whereas now they are held by videoconference. Videoconference allows us to see each other’s faces, instead of just hearing each other’s voices, something that can help with communication and relationship building at a distance. As Nancy described, in her experience, the process of adjusting to a new community partner, a new role and new people impact relationship building. At the same time, when fellow team members have left the study during the research process, the team not only loses a knowledgeable person, but also may lose good working relationships that were established. Thus, Nancy indicated that opportunities to interface and engage in capacity and relationship-building as a team is vital. She used the example of a training around realist evaluation that some team members attended to illustrate her point:

When we work on things together in a respectful way, I would say that's very successful... for example you would come with your own perspective, I would come with my perspective, but we're able to work on something together to produce some new way of looking at something and I think that's where the success is.

KEY LESSONS TO SHARE

- It is vital to create time for a study team to build relationships and trust. Granted this is challenging in a virtual team setting, but thinking creatively about how to do this effectively can lead to a stronger and more cohesive team.

- We must provide opportunities for study team members to work on key activities together: When you roll up your sleeves and engage in work that is relevant to the team, a stronger sense of the collective work and how it impacts community is realized.

MAKING SPACE

From the earliest phase of this project, engaging Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing has required the study team to actively learn and engage with key lessons and areas of growth. As Janice explained:

[Making it Work] did not start out as a project focused on Indigenous people and communities, but through many conversations with the study team it was decided that this was a very important focus for the research... The team had a lot of growing pains, as did I personally, and I don't think that we were very successful at the beginning. We had good intentions but the reality of negative experiences, feelings and outcomes for some engaging with the team and the work could not be ignored. Learning that intentions are not good enough but rather we are judged by our actions and the impacts of these actions was painful but important learning.

Deb similarly mentioned that Making it Work has pushed her to learn about and change her approach to allyship, explaining, "It's important to... be intentional about how we – as non-Indigenous people, as settlers and white people – and wanting to be good allies - work through our sometimes potent feelings and reactions". One of the Making it Work lessons about allyship has been the understanding that harm can be perpetuated in this process of working together. It was important for the team to wrestle with this and to also come to terms with Deb's point: "Allyship is not about tokenism or simply checking a box. What we have to answer and then put into action is what allyship really needs to be."

Through conversation, dialogue, and new direction, the team has been working to improve its approach, taking a more active listening role and bringing on an Indigenous Principal Knowledge User (PKU) and additional Indigenous team members. Sherri discussed the process of onboarding an Indigenous PKU, explaining that it was noticeable to her as an Indigenous woman that the perspectives and voices of Indigenous peoples on the team were not being heard. However, when she raised this issue with Janice, there was immediate support for engaging an Indigenous PKU, thereby increasing Indigenous knowledge and experience on the study team, which Sherri viewed as indicative of the strength and trust of her relationship with Janice and PAN. Ultimately, Janice invited Sherri to fulfill this role. Sherri stated that putting Indigenous voices at the forefront has not always been typical, especially in academic settings, so she viewed it as a success that the team has now taken an approach that centres and values the perspectives of Indigenous peoples as well as those with lived and living experiences of HIV, hepatitis C, substance use and/or challenges with mental health.

Deb similarly noted that though the project team had not always created space for Indigenous voices and voices of people with lived experience, there have recently been significant changes in the team's approach to working collaboratively, where more opportunities to connect are

being presented. This relationship building helped to shift the overall dynamic of the team, which has been a success of Making it Work.

While the team recognized the potential of engaging realist evaluation to answer the research questions it was interested in, from a methods perspective, some reflected on the process of thinking through the Two-Eyed Seeing approach with the team. Cathy described Making it Work's approach to Two-Eyed Seeing as "flipping or turning [realist evaluation] around so it is more about the Indigenization of the process than it is about realist evaluation". However, it has not always come easily to think through how a method that is very linear, like realist evaluation, comes together with Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing in the Two-Eyed Seeing approach. Joanna added that working to develop our realist evaluation program theory has illustrated the Two-Eyed Seeing approach:

Working between team members with different ways of thinking has had us going back and forth between different ways of looking at our program theory. Recognizing my need to fall back on the rigid way I am used to thinking about things has meant using spreadsheets and lists, but it has also meant doing the work to bring it back to how our Indigenous team members are envisioning it and reframing it within an Indigenous perspective. We have moved out of our spreadsheet (that no one really wants to look at), to using the framework of the medicine wheel with our program theory represented using spirals that do such a good job of reflecting how these services work the way they do.

An example of the program theory spiral to which Joanna is referring is included in the above poster [Clark et al., 2020]).

For Sherri, it was learning how to think in a new way that was non-Indigenous – lines instead of circles or spirals. Her capacity bridging learning moment included learning about Joanna's spreadsheet – many lines and many conversations about what was on this spreadsheet. It helped her understand how to better communicate with the team and provided an opportunity for her own learning.

Janice explained:

Working with a Two-Eyed Seeing approach has been very interesting for me – as someone who comes from a very Western, scientific perspective (and someone who loves charts, Excel, and numbers). It has been important for me to actively listen and learn about how to see data and findings in a different way - in a way that values connectedness, stories, metaphor and relationships... In some ways, Two-Eyed Seeing has impacted our study but I can also see it working internally within me – I am seeing a shift in how I interact with, value and use approaches that are different than how I was trained. I will carry that learning with me forward in new work and for this I am grateful.

But she also recognizes that using her way of thinking and organizing data was helpful to the process in that it allowed the team to look at the data in a structured way to make sure things were linking together and cohesive.

Darren reflected:

What we're trying to do, which is the Two-Eyed Seeing principle and academic lens. How do we take this into community? How do we evaluate organizations who are doing the same type of programming - how do you evaluate that in a good way? And what is the difference? And that's sort of really Two-Eyed Seeing and the Western way... and there's this whole movement within the scientific world, the academic world, about recognizing space taken up and making room for the Indigenous, Two-Eyed Seeing principle to come forward so we're growing at the same time that that's happening. And so, it's about us then being able to take those learnings and teachings that are happening and build that into our framework so that we're adapting together.

Making space at the research table for those from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives has been operationalized in a number of different ways at the Making it Work study team. Using the medicine wheel and exploring the interconnectedness of the research while at the same time using theory of change or realist methodology has added not only to rigor within the study methodology but it has provided an opportunity for learning for all team members.

KEY LESSONS TO SHARE

- Intentionally creating meaningful space for participation if it does not currently exist is crucial to success. This takes time, relationship building and trust and must move beyond intentions with a focus on impacts.
- Active listening and creating space for each other to share our perspectives allows us to learn from each other and gain from each other's strengths – for example, learning different ways to approach doing research.
- Sometimes it is more effective to take methodological turns - for instance, a few members of the team would use an Indigenous approach to organizing data and stories and then would hand it off to team members who engaged in non-Indigenous approaches. The important exercise was the handoff or getting each team member to engage with the other's approach, to fully understand it and to ask detailed questions of why certain decisions were made – this supported the next phase of work.

UNDERTAKING SELF-EDUCATION AND AWARENESS WHILE MUTUALLY SUPPORTING CAPACITY BRIDGING

For some team members, joining the Making it Work team led them to realize that educating themselves on what it means to be a good ally to groups of people who experience structural disadvantage was necessary in furthering their commitment to this project.

Particularly, non-Indigenous team members recognized that centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing is a vital component to this project, yet imposing the need for additional education or labour on Indigenous people felt unfair. As a scholar, Nancy stated that when she began to engage with Indigenous scholars, it required her to take a back seat, noting:

When we work with Indigenous scholars, we really need to listen and unlearn some of the pattern behavior that we have, like just stepping in and taking over as a researcher - what we think ought to happen or we're being, you know, we're positioned in that place of 'well you're the expert'.

Darren similarly explained, "I need to be aware ...open my ears, and ask the question but ask... in a respectful manner". Relying on Indigenous team members to educate their non-Indigenous colleagues is inappropriate—those individuals may be on their own learning path and should not be taken for granted as a spokesperson or a representative for the larger population. However, team members also emphasized that individual lived experiences influence how the work of the team has changed and grown over time. Janice discussed the importance of "capacity bridging" ([AHA Centre, 2018](#)) in terms of the team engaging in reciprocal learning.

Utilizing capacity bridging as an approach to the work of the Making it Work team serves to de-emphasize academic knowledge and instead build relationships and trust, as it is understood that all members of a team have unique perspectives and strengths to bring to the table and all team members can learn and grow from working together. This is also evident when doing research itself, as Michelle explained, "It was great meeting new people and hearing...their stories... everyone is so different, everyone has such a different story." Finding commonalities within our diverse experiences can bring us together and strengthen the ties of a team as well as how we approach research.

Being in a constant position of learning and co-creating allyship through our process required flexibility and critical reflection on our common goals. Team members needed to take responsibility for their own learning and unlearning, but also knew their colleagues were available if they needed to learn more. The team worked to recognize a diversity of expertise and to provide opportunities for all voices to be heard.

KEY LESSONS TO SHARE

- Study teams should prioritize the democratization of power and flatten the hierarchy of decision-making. Capacity bridging is a helpful tool for all members of a team to take on leadership positions. This could manifest in team policies, procedures or guiding documents including terms of references, authorship guidelines, data usage guidelines.
- We must be actively working to uplift other forms of knowledge and information sharing, such as community-based knowledge or knowledge of lived and living experiences to an equal footing with academic knowledge – consider how relationship building can support knowledge gathering and sharing within a project.
- Recognize that our learning processes are individual - while capacity bridging presents collaborative and meaningful opportunities to learn and grow from each other, we should

not expect team members to take on the role of educating us about their lived and living experience(s).

“CHURN” – LOSING AND GAINING NEW TEAM MEMBERS OVER TIME

Community-based research, and its methodological emphasis on being responsive to community needs and being led by community, creates dynamics that can be challenging when working as a team. While committed to the research and study, the priorities of people with lived and living experience(s) and people working with community-based organizations sometimes need to realign to be responsive to other focuses and needs. Team members reflected that “churn” (team members intermittently joining and leaving the study team) impacts the cohesion of the team. Some discussed the work that is involved when new team members are introduced and the time it takes to orient them with the project’s progress and discussions and decisions that happened before their arrival. This sometimes creates imbalances with long-time study team members. Darren elaborated that the project slows down at times when bringing new people on board, especially because “we must fill their head with the historical knowledge of the project that they need to know to be able to move forward, along with their new perspective... that's challenging. There's also these contractual deadlines that are involved.” For some, onboarding new team members within community-based participatory research approaches can be challenging in terms of relationship-building. For instance, Nancy explained that being accustomed to the group dynamics and immersed in the project can be impacted as new people join the team and the group itself changes. However, while it has been addressed that adding to and expanding the team was necessary for the success of the study and to better reflect a commitment to allyship, the team also reflected on the richness that new perspectives bring to our research team, and the privilege it is to have so much experience and knowledge captured in our work. Cathy elaborated:

It's actually one of the more personally beneficial things - that I get to see new things and I get to learn new things. . . community has so much knowledge to teach us that's not wound up in... 200-plus years of academic processes.

Community-based research and Indigenous research is built on relationships, and trusting relationships take time to develop. We often feel this churn in community-based research teams because of inevitable changes in academic, community or lived experience positions. The process of working in allyship involves building in time to continually nurture trusting relationships, and adjust work based on changing community priorities.

Likewise, both churn and the process of doing community-based research presented challenges around capacity, as some members of the team may have varying responsibilities to the project, not to mention ideas on how the work and research process should be conducted. Darren contributed that knowledge sources are dependent on the individual; some team members may have acquired knowledge through formal education while others have lived experience on the subject matter of the study. Thus, understanding the inner-workings of community-based research can be a challenge if one is not accustomed to it, which the team must respond and adapt to. Michelle also described that it can be challenging to feel like you are equally contributing to the group when you have different skills or abilities than others on the

team. Nancy described the challenges of navigating research when being both an academic/community engaged scholar while ensuring you are also working alongside community-based organizations – you must meet your academic obligations while juggling the sometimes-slower process of community-based research at the same time.

Part of addressing different priorities within the Making it Work project has involved the creation of a few guiding documents that have helped the team navigate competing priorities. One document in particular, our [*Knowledge Translation and Exchange and Authorship Guidelines*](#), that was created collaboratively as a team outlines our approaches to Knowledge Translation and Exchange, drawing on work done by the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (2013). This document describes our commitment and responsibility in working with Indigenous communities to help ensure information that we share, and the processes we use to share it, empower and lift up Indigenous knowledge, acknowledging the damaging ways that research has been used in the past. Writing this document collaboratively, and with sign off from all team members, helped us ensure that different priorities were being reflected in the way that we are committed to doing this work. As the Making it Work study team has been bringing on new members recently, we have done some thinking about what resources and background information is needed to support their engagement. Our Research Coordinator has spent time meeting with new members to orient them to the study, which has allowed people to become active more quickly within the team.

KEY LESSONS TO SHARE

- Working with Indigenous people is based on relationships – building, maintaining, supporting and developing. Take the time to get to know who your team members are.
- The nature of community-based research is inherently fluid, as it is common for people to move in and out of the process. At the same time, the ebb and flow of team members has the potential to bring new opportunities for learning and capacity bridging. We are responsible for respecting the needs of the various team members and their capacities for engagement, while also providing more or less engagement depending on these needs.
- Making our research even more collaborative should be considered. For instance, guiding documents that help to navigate competing priorities can be created.

ENGAGING AND RESPECTING DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

Different experiences and perspectives can be challenging to navigate, but they drive the work of Making it Work forward and help us to adapt, course correct, and ensure the work is meaningful to community. Cathy highlighted that one key component of this is the experiences of community partners, such as community-based organizations; their perspectives are central in doing this work. She explained:

Community-based organizations have been very strong allies on this project...they have contributed to driving the shift in how this work is getting done because they are opening themselves up to being studied or being part of the study process. This important role is rooted in community agencies' understanding of community and community need.

Team members also emphasized that individual lived and living experiences influence how the work of the team has changed and grown over time, changing the path of the research and expanding our collective understanding of the work we are doing. Janice explained that the broad perspective of lived and living experience within the team has expanded thinking around the research questions and her colleagues with lived and living experience pushed her “to think about the study and the impacts of this research on the community in very important and valuable ways.” We all learn from diverse perspectives and gaining a different outlook. As well, despite our differences in lived and living experiences, sharing and finding commonalities within those diverse experiences can bring us together and strengthen the ties of a team. Darren noted:

We don't walk in the same shoes, we never will. But we walk in similar shoes and you know we walked within the HIV shoes...they are going to be different truths, but they are HIV shoes - that's our commonality piece.

KEY LESSONS TO SHARE

- Centring the voices of lived and living experiences on teams is a crucial component to community-based participatory research. A question that a study should always ask is: “what will the community or people with lived and living experience(s) get out of or benefit from this research”?

DISCUSSION

For many team members, allyship in the Making it Work Project has been defined by a variety of successes, challenges, and learning. One particular learning is that teams and individual team members must work to be open to change – adapting the work and course-correcting as we collectively gain from new perspectives while learning to be quiet and listen to ensure that Indigenous voices and voices of people with lived and living experience are centred. Allyship has shown up in this work in the form of creating space for open discussion and deepening our knowledge and trust of one another – spending time together and actively engaging in capacity bridging - but it has also meant taking ownership of and accountability to where we individually stand, whether this is through interrogating our own understandings of allyship for ourselves, acknowledging where tokenism appears in our work or learning to take a back-seat and the ‘listening position’ for others. This means acknowledging when we have perpetuated harm and working to respond to harm that has occurred in an active way. Allyship means trusting in the process of educating ourselves without putting the burden of labour on others to provide that education for us.

Investment in relationships and building trust is also key in being thoughtfully or emotionally present or ‘showing up’ for each other as allies in this way. It is through robust relationships and building rapport that we can both open ourselves to hearing when we have caused harm and trust that our team members will support us as we grapple with decision-making. This can be challenging when the make-up of a team changes and we feel cut off from relationships we have built. However, one learning in this is that we must work to change our perspectives and reframe

our thinking so that we see new members joining the team as a means to creating new opportunities to learn. The Making it Work team tries to intentionally recognize people leaving the team and what they brought to the project and welcome new people as they join by offering opportunities to share their knowledge and experience. There is always an opportunity to deepen our own understanding and practice through building new relationships. A second learning in this is that it is important to intentionally create opportunities for teams to dialogue and build rapport – to provide ample space for people to get to know each other beyond simply “doing the work”. Successes from the team become more meaningful when they are collective, and the ties of the team are strong.

The Making it Work project is also complex in that it not only engages Two-Eyed Seeing (realist evaluation and Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing), but that it has grown and changed significantly over the time of its inception. It has only been through much discussion and relationship-building that the project has shifted to focus on Indigenous service models, gained an Indigenous PKU, and has created more space for engagement by Indigenous team members and people with lived and living experience. The way that the work has been done has shifted – from teleconference, to in-person meetings, to videoconference – and team members have moved in and out of the project. The team acknowledges the important role of capacity bridging as a novel approach to allyship. Drawing from our orientation to allyship with Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, capacity-bridging captures the essence of bringing together Two-Eyed Seeing with western approaches such as realist evaluation methods. This requires sharing knowledge from each approach and creating space for learning.

One learning from this is that community-based research must be flexible and nimble – we must always be willing to change the way we work in order to be as responsive as possible to community need. CBR is not so much about doing the research in a specific way (though we acknowledge that teams will grapple with different goals, such as the pressure for academic outputs alongside ensuring benefit to community). Instead, allyship in this sense means recognizing that community *always* leads and that we need to be okay with the fact that the project may look quite different and evolve significantly over time as we learn and grow together. Allyship as it shows up in the CBR process means that no element of the research needs to stay static – from the research questions, methods, team make up – all things can and must change to ensure community is always at the forefront.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE LEAD AUTHORS

Katsistohkwí:io Jacco - As the newest member of the Making it Work study team, taking on an authorship role for this paper allowed me to fully immerse myself in this project. Particularly, I had the chance to connect with other team members on a more personal level, and I learned that this team is truly diverse and that each individual brings an important perspective to this work. As an Indigenous person, it is refreshing to see that research teams, such as the Making it Work team, are prioritizing the inclusion and centralization of voices that have long been silenced and overlooked.

Madeline Gallard - My role on the team sees me typically in the background – a “fly on the wall” if you will, taking notes and helping to edit and write. So it seemed like a bit of a step outside of my normal role to engage in these conversations for this commentary.

What has struck me about these conversations is that each person we talked to took a totally different tack on the project itself. All of them swirled around some of the same ideas, but no two people talked about exactly the same elements of the work - we could see common themes but no duplication. Overall, though, the biggest takeaway for me is how much respect each person has for their fellow team members. We are very different and bring different thoughts, ideas, and perspectives to the table, but we all can see each other as fully realised and complex people with something to offer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all members of the Making it Work team—both past and present—for their leadership, thoughtful engagement, and hard work. You have made the project what it is today.

We would like to thank our funders, including CIHR, the AHA Centre, and the CIHR Centre for REACH.

Finally, we would like to thank all of those in our lives who help us to learn and grow.

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APPENDIX A

Authors:

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Joanna Mendell is the Research Coordinator for the Making it Work Project at the Pacific AIDS Network. Joanna was born into a white settler family on Coast Salish Territory where she spent most of her life. She now has the privilege of living in the north of what is often called BC, where she enjoys the mountains, rivers, lakes and forests of unceded traditional Wet'suwet'en territory.

Commentary Contributors:

Darren Lauscher is a PAN PHA volunteer. His mother's side of the family comes from the British Isles and eventually settled in Saskatchewan. On his father's side, Darren is a second-generation settler, as his parents immigrated from Germany and also settled in Saskatchewan. Darren now resides in Vancouver as a settler on the unceded territories of Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

Deb Schmitz, Executive Director, Pacific Hepatitis C Network (PHCN) Deb Schmitz is of western European, Scandinavian and English ancestry. She was born into settler families on traditional, unceded Secwepemuc (suh-Wep-muhc) territory to settler parents and has lived as an uninvited, grateful guest on the traditional, unceded territories of Katzie, Sto:lo, Mowachaht/Muchalaht, Tla'amin, Ditidaht, Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Wet'suwet'en, Skwxwú7mesh and shishalh Nations.

Michelle Stewart is a Peer Research Associate with the Making it Work project at the Pacific AIDS Network and also works as a receptionist and Peer Advocate at Positive Living North. Michelle is Métis and was born in Edmonton while growing up mostly in Prince George on traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh.

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Investigator of the Making it Work project. Dr. Clark is of bi racial heritage and first-generation immigrant to Canada from the former Yugoslavia and Palestine; and self identifies as she/her. She is a visitor and settler on Southern Vancouver Island on which the University of Victoria sits with the Lekwungen peoples, Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continues to this day.

Janice Duddy is the Director of Evaluation and Community-Based Research at the Pacific AIDS Network (PAN) and is co-Principal Knowledge User on the Making it Work project. Janice is an uninvited settler of European descent and is grateful to live on the traditional, unceded territories of the Semiahmoo, Katzie, S'ólh Téméxw (Stó:lō), Coast Salish and WSÁNEĆ peoples where she lives with her family of boys -- husband, two sons, and her dog Skeena who loves walking on the beach of these beautiful lands.

Sherri Pooyak is a Community-Based Research Manager at the AHA Centre/Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN). Sherri is of Cree ancestry from Sweetgrass First Nation, Saskatchewan and currently resides in Victoria, BC. She is the co-Principal Knowledge User on the Making it Work project.