

Subtheme 3: Strengthening Personal Skills, Relationships, and Resilience

How can wellness programs build individual skills in coping, self-esteem, and resilience?

The breakout sessions around “Strengthening Personal Skills, Relationships, and Resilience” were facilitated by Corrie Mekar, Kelly Gallant, and Maura Frunza. Corrie is a registered psychologist and post-secondary instructor at several campuses in Edmonton. Kelly is a career specialist at University of Calgary, as well as a Strengths Facilitator and Mental Health First Aid instructor. Maura is the Services Manager at the Students' Association of MacEwan University where she oversees significant support services including Peer Support, the Pantry and Safe Walk.

Celebrating and Learning from Successes

- Highlighted the importance of building strong relationships and community connections as a key facet of individual resilience.
- Presenters encouraged attendees to look for the low to no-cost approaches, like connecting with grassroots advocacy (which doesn't rely on institutional funding or formal programming) and identifying natural leaders and helpers on campus.
- Other strategies included: sharing stories with diverse/inclusive examples, deep breathing at start/end of class sessions, building self-care into curricula, culture sharing, reaching out to non-engaged students, and laughter initiatives (e.g. comedy night, laughter yoga, etc.).
- Providing opportunities for student leadership is key for growth/change, and it is also important to take a whole-campus approach, as students aren't the only group on campus with wellness and mental health needs
- Mental Health First Aid and SAIT's Outreach Wellness Leader Program (OWL) were identified as successful initiatives

Acknowledging Challenges

- Accessibility to mental health care/lack of upstream work increasing demand for care
- Limited funding, loss of staff and student services, resulting in competition against other programs/priorities
- Adapting to online service delivery
- Gathering metrics on impact (e.g. struggles measuring resilience outcomes in general population)
- Student/staff may not have the time/capacity/interest in investing/participating

Emerging Opportunities and Next Steps

- Start with student-led and low/no cost initiatives and adapt strategies for a smaller scale (i.e. focus on what can we do as individuals)
- Measure outcomes through data collection so you can tell the impact story of the work
- Cultivate collaborative relationships between staff, faculty, and students by offering shared training opportunities, building trusting relationships, and running shared events
- Create long-term plans for sustainability in learning objectives
- Openness about self-care practice within our communities & “filling your own tank”