19 March 2018

Circumpolar Resilience, Engagement and Action Through Story (CREATeS)
Project Title: Project CREATeS: Circumpolar Resilience, Engagement and Action Through Story

Lead Country/Project leader(s):
Co-led by:
Canada (Government of Canada Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, University of Toronto)
Finland

Summary of Required Project Inputs:
(Identify all sources and types of funding and other resources, such as in-kind contributions of technical expertise)

Relationship to other AC Working Groups:
None at this time

Summary of project objectives and main outcomes:
Project CREATeS aims to support community and youth engagement towards effective action that reduces suicide and fosters mental wellness among Arctic Indigenous youth and communities. This project sustains and builds on circumpolar efforts in suicide prevention through ongoing collaboration across Arctic states. More specifically, the project builds on the SDWG’s Sharing Hope project under the Canadian chairmanship (2013-15) and the RISING SUN initiative under the US chairmanship (2015-17). In the last of the RISING SUN workshop participants highlighted the need for further engagement at the community level, and community-based action, complemented by a strong endorsement for youth empowerment. Project CREATeS is responding to this feedback by emphasizing engagement with communities and youth as the foundation and impetus for ongoing implementation of suicide prevention and mental wellness initiatives of the SDWG. Further, this engagement also provides an opportunity for knowledge translation, informing youth and communities about the ongoing activities of the SDWG in the areas of suicide prevention and resilience. More specifically, the objectives of this project are as follows:

1. To create an opportunity and methods for community engagement and knowledge translation to support the suicide prevention and mental wellness efforts of the Arctic States.

2. To sustain the circumpolar network that has been established through the Arctic Council so that we can continue to collaborate and share best practices in suicide prevention. In addition, broaden the circumpolar network to include more community members and youth.

3. To support and promote capacity building that will foster research by and with circumpolar Indigenous Peoples (e.g. training opportunities to build capacity in digital storytelling that can be brought back to their communities).

The importance of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems to increase and expand knowledge
and understanding of suicide and mental wellness is at the core of this project. Furthermore, this initiative is an important step forward on a course of healing and reconciliation as it aims to provide the insight from Indigenous youth needed to develop policy that leads to a stronger future for Indigenous people and the Arctic more broadly.

Digital Storytelling (DST) is the chosen method for this work as it is an ideal process to achieve our objectives and deliver outcomes of community engagement, youth empowerment, and move knowledge-to-action. Elevating and empowering community and youth voices through the creation of stories or narratives in which they share their experiences and ideas on building strengths and resilience will contribute crucial perspectives in the dialogue and solutions for suicide prevention. This engagement and empowerment is an important next step in moving forward SDWG’s mental health and suicide prevention efforts.
Project Objectives:

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Background

Suicide is a preventable global public health issue that disproportionately impacts some groups more than others (WHO, 2014). In the circumpolar Arctic, suicide is one of the most pressing public health issues, where Indigenous populations experience some of the highest rates of suicide globally (Bjerregaard and Larsen, 2015; Herne et al., 2014; Oliver et al., 2012). While governments, communities, researchers, and healthcare and service providers in the circumpolar Arctic have dedicated significant efforts to identify and reduce risk factors for suicide and strengthen protective factors, suicide rates in the Arctic continue to be the highest in the world. More must be done.

Under the Arctic Council, past efforts of Arctic States to reduce suicide include the Sharing Hope project under the Canadian chairmanship (2013-15), which focused on community-based initiatives and establishing best practices. Under the US chairmanship (2015-17), the RISING SUN initiative focused on creating metrics for suicidal behaviors, key correlates, and outcomes across Arctic States. Project CREATeS continues this work to address the high rates of suicide and mental health issues in the circumpolar Arctic.

At the last of the three workshops held under the RISING SUN project in March 2017, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) hosted focus groups with the goal of exploring how the 25 suicide prevention indicators identified through the RISING SUN project fit with existing circumpolar suicide prevention strategies. During these focus groups, participants noted the need to strengthen use of Indigenous knowledge, focus on strengths-based approaches, and enhance community involvement in decision-making for all aspects of suicide prevention, including research.

Following these focus groups, ICC Canada developed a discussion paper to continue advancing this work. The World Health Organization (WHO) framework from Preventing Suicide (2014) was used as a reference model to enable comparison across the outcomes of the RISING SUN project, the National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy (Canada), the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention in Greenland, and the Plan for Suicide Prevention Among the Sámi People in Norway, Sweden and Finland. From this, measurable and actionable future priorities at community, national/regional, and circumpolar levels were identified. These priorities include:

- ensuring that communities are setting the agenda by sharing what suicide prevention interventions are working and are not working at the community level;
- recognition and application of Indigenous knowledge in strategies, policies, and interventions;
- prioritizing strengths-based approaches in interventions and research including decolonization and cultural revitalization;
- strengthening networks to share best practices and resources and collaboration across organizations and communities, including at the regional, national and circumpolar levels; and,
- advocacy and awareness-raising through improved communication and dissemination, including communication at the global circumpolar level through a unified voice using tools such as social media.

The discussion paper also highlighted two areas in particular as essential to sustain and extend the gains made to date:

1) Stimulating community voice and engagement in suicide prevention, and knowledge translation of some outcomes from previous SDWG initiatives to the community level; and

2) Implementation of some outcome and evaluation measures developed through RISING SUN, including developing or applying a community-based implementation science approach to suicide prevention efforts.

These areas for further development may be understood in relation to one another. Indeed, an awareness and understanding of ongoing community initiatives and an emphasis on community knowledge and voices are two fundamental aspects in the development and application of a community-based implementation science approach. In turn, this approach and building community expertise in implementing it can serve to further support community-based endeavors and ensure their success, sustainability, and scalability.

**Rationale for the Project:**

Project CREAtE S speaks to several priorities outlined in the Sustainable Development Working Group’s strategic framework including priorities of community vitality, educational opportunities, and human health. This project also stems directly from the previous work described in the above section and responds to the need for community engagement, youth empowerment, and local voices. Community and youth are at the very core of this project. As the third project of ongoing SDWG projects that have built upon each other, Project CREAtE S contributes to a committed focus on mental health and suicide prevention. It has been designed with the intention of setting the stage and making space to develop a fourth mental health and suicide prevention project that would begin under the Icelandic chairmanship. This future project will ideally be a long-term project that advances a new phase in mental health and suicide prevention. This phase will focus on uptake of past project outcomes and be built using an implementation science approach. To preface this next phase, Project CREAtE S will provide a demonstration of a method (i.e. digital storytelling) that can promote the uptake of interventions and provide insight and qualitative data about what works from youth and community perspectives at the same time.

Furthermore, Project CREAtE S approaches research as an opportunity to strengthen links between the circumpolar level and the community level, through community based or participatory research. This is the justification behind the focus on digital storytelling as the key method for this project. As a research method, digital storytelling can fulfill multiple objectives—i.e., deepening community engagement,

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1 Implementation science is commonly defined as the study of methods and strategies to promote the uptake of interventions that have proven effective into routine practice, with the aim of improving population health. Implementation science therefore examines what works, for whom and under what circumstances, and how interventions can be adapted and scaled up in ways that are accessible and equitable. (Ref: Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases)
gathering data on a topic of relevance, and creating visual products that can be used to raise awareness of mental health and wellness issues.

However, CREATEs success in being fully implemented in diverse communities across Arctic State communities will depend on a wide variety of factors including the appropriate uptake of traditional and local knowledge. This is why a clear understanding and endorsement of the proposed methodology from the respective communities is vital to the success of CREATEs.

Activities and Outputs

The key activities to be undertaken through Project CREATEs over the next year are digital storytelling workshops, evaluation of the method, network building, knowledge dissemination, and dialogue about the next phase of SDWG mental health and suicide prevention projects.

Digital storytelling (DST) supports participants to use technology to tell their personal stories. The highly visual and engaging nature of the stories, and the fact that they are recorded, in turn allows the stories to be shared with other audiences. DST is a guided collaborative practice that is also a powerful qualitative research method that provides insights into what is important to the storytellers, and allows storytellers to intervene in areas of importance to them. In this case, DST will allow youth and community participants to engage in the arena of suicide prevention and resilience-building. (See Annex 1 for example of DST.) The DST workshops to take place will include:

1) A domestic workshop in Canada, 2018  
2) A circumpolar workshop in Finland, 2019  
3) The possibility of local workshops in other Arctic States (TBC)

The overall objective of the digital storytelling workshops will be to create stories or narratives to share experiences and ideas on building strengths and resilience in the context of suicide prevention and mental wellness in participants’ home communities. Facilitators will outline the objective of the workshop and guide participants in responding to questions to support their creation of a narrative related to the workshop themes including mental health and wellbeing, suicide prevention, resilience, and community action. Participants will learn how to transform their narrative into a digital story using Adobe Final Cut Pro. The workshop culminates in participants sharing their stories with the group. In addition to introducing participants to digital storytelling, information about the Arctic Council, SDWG, and suicide prevention activities to-date will be shared. Lastly, research ethics will be sought, and participants will be asked to consent to the use of their story for research, policy, and advocacy.

The digital storytelling workshop in Canada will involve 10-15 Indigenous youth and community members as participants, working with a skilled team of facilitators. The workshop will present participants with current understandings of what youth and community could contribute to the dialogue on suicide prevention, and what the gaps are in the global evidence base for suicide prevention. We will also highlight the importance of Indigenous and community-based knowledge. Under this umbrella curriculum, we will set the stage for participants to explore the existing field in which they then intervene with their stories. This process will also help participants to build a critical awareness of suicide prevention and the need for youth and community engagement and action for effective suicide prevention. Participant/storytellers learn through reflection on their own experiences; learn from each other; create a community through storytelling; and teach others about their perspectives and experiences. Both the screening of the stories and the sharing circle (focus group) that follows will serve to further deepen conversation about the
experience of sharing stories, suicide prevention, and next steps for action. The Canadian workshop will also contribute to providing a model and format for the subsequent circumpolar workshop in Finland.

Early Fall would be an opportunity for another interested Arctic state to host a digital storytelling workshop in their own country. This will help deepen the community participation experience and also allow for a rich circumpolar narrative for discussion at the final workshop in Finland.

A two-day workshop will take place in Finland in 2019. This workshop will include a circumpolar digital storytelling workshop with 10-15 youth and community members from Arctic States. It will also include a screening of the digital stories, facilitated discussion to assess digital storytelling as an approach for implementation science, and opportunity for in-depth conversation to define the next phase of the SDWG mental health and suicide prevention project series. The screening and discussions will include selected youth, community members, researchers, and Arctic State/Permanent Participant representatives, many of whom have been involved with the SDWG mental health and suicide prevention projects since the Sharing Hope project under the Canadian chairmanship. Discussion of the method of digital storytelling will ensure that it is fully understood and endorsed by all stakeholders.

The objective of this workshop will also include discussion on suicide prevention and mental wellness strategies from across the Arctic and their implementation. The discussions will focus on developing a comprehensive implementation framework that can provide a structure for the fourth mental wellness and suicide prevention project that could begin under the Icelandic chairmanship. The new project proposal will ensure ongoing interface between the SDWG and communities and the movement of knowledge into action. The network sustained and grown through Project CREATEs will provide the ongoing platform to continue this development.

Anticipated Outcomes

Beyond the specific deliverables described in the next section, the overarching anticipated outcomes from Project CREATEs include fostering and supporting collaboration, continuing international discussion and research on mental health and suicide prevention work, and building capacity of Arctic residents to better manage current and future mental health challenges in the circumpolar region.

Collaboration across the circumpolar Arctic was a major achievement of the RISING SUN project. Maintaining this collaboration and the important international network it has created is a logical next step. Collaboration and knowledge sharing at the international level can facilitate identification of key areas for future research at the level of population health and community level interventions. Collaboration also allows for the possibility of data pooling and synthesis, which can help regions advocate for improved or expanded surveillance.

Project CREATEs also provides an opportunity for continued international research with community engagement aspects (e.g. participatory research methods such as digital story telling) that can deepen links with communities and amplify local voices globally. As a participatory research method, a key aspect of digital storytelling is that it encompasses all aspects of the research process, from engagement of participants and community, to analysis, and action, including knowledge dissemination. It is collaborative, and allows the bridging of gaps, including the divide between researcher and participant, and also between different knowledge systems and worldviews. The CREATEs initiative will help provide researchers and frontline workers throughout Arctic states with the necessary understanding and knowledge on success factors and methodologies. Using these stories as “data” will allow us to collaboratively explore key themes
with participants, and then to develop action based on these themes. This will be an inclusive process with youth and communities to develop a ‘theory of change’— that is, identification of goals related to suicide prevention, pre-conditions that must be met for these goals to be achieved, and why these are pre-conditions. This is the foundation for effective program development and evaluation and also creates the potential for effective advocacy for needed inputs/resources. Research is also an opportunity to strengthen links between the circumpolar level and the community level through meaningful knowledge sharing from Indigenous perspectives to non-Indigenous stakeholders around challenges and successes, which also can contribute to awareness-raising efforts and advocacy.

**Deliverables:**

1) A digital library of stories: The digital stories created in the workshops will be curated into an archive that can be shared widely both within Arctic Council events and meetings as well as shared back to communities.

2) A short film: This film will describe the project and provide excerpts from the digital stories

3) Summary report on activities, outcomes, and policy recommendations: This report will provide key highlights and recommendations to support the movement into the next phase of activities focused on implementation.

**Timetable and Project Completion**

**Summer 2018**

1. **Canadian workshop:** The commencement of this project will be a 3-day digital storytelling workshop in Canada that will bring together Indigenous youth and community members, and include knowledge translation activities and follow-up focus group/sharing circle.

2. **Presentation at the International Congress on Circumpolar Health (August):** The Congress will be an opportunity to profile early findings, as well as a platform to discuss project activities and path forward leading up to the Finland workshop.

3. **Workshop(s) in other Arctic States (TBC)**

**Winter 2019**

1. **Finland-hosted circumpolar workshop:** This final project workshop will span two days and include digital storytelling with a small circumpolar group of community members and youth. The workshop will also include a screening of digital stories created under this project, assessment of the methodology, and discussion on the next SDWG mental health and suicide prevention project. These activities will involve community members, youth, researchers, and Arctic State representatives.

2. **Knowledge Dissemination:** The digital stories created in the workshops will be curated into an exhibit that can be shared widely both within Arctic Council events and meetings as well as shared back to communities. This provides an opportunity to bring community and youth voices to the Arctic Council and SDWG, and is another vehicle of knowledge translation.

3. **Ongoing and Future Directions - Community/network building:** The workshops will focus on training Indigenous youth and community members from Arctic States to create digital stories.
Participants can bring this training and knowledge back to their own communities to enable the ongoing creation of stories by more community members. The workshops will also provide a foundation to sustain the network that developed over the course of 2015 to the present through the suicide prevention activities of the SDWG. Furthermore, we will explore opportunities to continue this network virtually, such as through the Project ECHO model (see https://echo.unm.edu/ in the United States and https://camh.echoontario.ca/ in Canada).

Costs

Projected Expenditures: BUDGET

Canadian workshop
Planning, Coordination & Fees: 48,000
Translation & Interpretation (To English and Inuktut): 3,000
Workshop travel & venue: 62,630
Post-production: 10,000
Communication, Supplies & Printing: 680

Other Arctic State(s) Workshops - TBC

Finland Workshop
Expenses - TBC
Contribution from Arctic states to support travel of participants TBC

Total Projected Expenses: CDN$ 124,000*

*Note: To be confirmed

Integration of Traditional and Local Knowledge

Project CREAtE’s’ objectives reflect an understanding that Indigenous and local knowledge and the translation of this knowledge are crucial to support the suicide prevention and mental wellness efforts and initiatives of the Arctic States. The importance of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems to increase and expand knowledge and understanding of suicide and mental wellness is at the core of this project. Our chosen method, digital storytelling, is also reflective and appropriate to Indigenous ways of knowing as storytelling is recognized as an Indigenous approach for sharing knowledge, building community, and education, and has been used as a method of participatory and qualitative research (Iseke 2013). Furthermore, this initiative is an important step forward on a course of healing and reconciliation as it aims to provide the insight from Indigenous youth needed to develop policy that leads to a stronger future for Indigenous people and the Arctic more broadly.

This project is directly responding to priorities identified by Indigenous and local community members that were summarized in the Inuit Circumpolar Council’s discussion paper titled Continuing Our Unity: Advancing Indigenous Suicide Prevention in the Circumpolar Arctic. These priorities include:
- ensuring that communities are setting the agenda by sharing what suicide prevention interventions are working and are not working at the community level,
recognition and application of Indigenous knowledge in strategies, policies, and interventions
- prioritizing strengths-based approaches in interventions and research including decolonization and cultural revitalization,
- strengthening networks to share best practices and resources and collaboration across organizations and communities, including at the regional, national and circumpolar levels, and
- advocacy and awareness-raising through improved communication and dissemination, including communication at the global circumpolar level through a unified voice using tools such as social media.

This work will be co-led with Arctic Indigenous Peoples at all stages of the project to ensure that Indigenous and local knowledge is not simply integrated into the work, but rather is shaping the activities, directing the conversations, and ensuring relevant and meaningful outcomes.

**Communications**

Communication and knowledge dissemination are an important part of this project. There are several content pieces to this project including the digital stories themselves, the data that emerges from analysis of the stories, the outcomes of the process as a whole, and the impact of the experience on participants. The digital stories created in the workshops will be curated into a photo exhibit that can be shared widely both within Arctic Council events and meetings as well as shared back to communities. Furthermore, early findings will be profiled at the International Congress on Circumpolar Health in August 2018. On-going communication efforts will seek to provide opportunities for participants to share their stories and experience of the process.

**References**


ANNEX 1 – Digital Storytelling Example

An example of a digital storytelling workshop, led by Dr. Allison Crawford, illustrates the process of digital storytelling: *Inuit in Nunangat/ Inuit in the City*, was co-facilitated by Dr. Crawford (CAMH/ UofT) with Marilyn Maychuk, February 2017 in Ottawa at Tungasuvvingat Inuit. It included Inuit youth and artists from across Canada, who created stories in response to prompts around Inuit land, homeland, living in urban settings, identity and wellness.

*Homecoming*, P.K. *The Fifth Region*, J & G

*Walking Both Sides of an Invisible Border*, C.L. *Winter*, G.I.

Stories were shared among the group. The evaluation, which is ongoing, revealed story themes related to: identity; belonging; living across internal and external borders; internal/external space and place; memory; hope; meaning; intergenerational relationships; and futurity.