

FACILITATOR INSIGHTS

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JUDY VOISEY

Judy is an Inuit woman working in Atlantic Canada with the Women in Resource Development Corporation. She has over 30 years experience in community advocacy, including several years' experience as an IM&M+ facilitator. With this wealth of experience, the IM&M+ program has stood out to her as offering something distinct for the Inuit women that her organization serves:

It was never, "We want you to learn our way, we want to fix you, we want you to hurry up and go to work." This was not the theme at all of IM&M+. It was a feeling of "we want you to really identify through your time in our group how amazing you are, the strengths, the skills, the interests that you have that can lead into a career or even potentially volunteering, advocating." At the time when we launched our first cohort, it wasn't even about employment. It was about individuals who wanted to take that journey into exploring more of who they are. So, what I really liked about IM&M+, it wasn't an old, sticky, colonial-style, crappy program. I think that's why it's been very successful here, and there's an opportunity for future work, specifically in northern remote communities with this, with this

program, because it's about them. It's really centered on "how can we bring out the best of who you are and for you to even get use to saying these things about yourself." It was very refreshing for me as a facilitator.

Judy particularly appreciated how the IM&M+ program permitted her clients, many of whom have multiple needs, to integrate into existing services and, eventually, employment gradually. As Judy put it,

IM&M+ cohorts are the absolute best slow introduction to easing an individual into building trust within agencies. So we identify particularly with the trauma, the impact of colonialism, all these things that you've likely heard much about. We need to do that gently, and I think that IM&M+ started that. So that was the first piece of success. ... And I love some of the themes around, nobody chooses poverty, for example. That's the first time in my working career that I heard things like that. I love the vibrancy of your preferred future, not, "oh, you should do this." They really took things on their path and I think, honestly, that's why our cohorts have been so

successful, and they have been very successful here.

Judy has observed numerous positive outcomes in community members who have completed the IM&M+ program, including an increased willingness to engage with other social service agencies within the community:

Over the last two and a half years since we had the first cohort, those individuals not only have completed a full, one full college program, but some of them are preparing for their second program. They've also improved their mental health. They've, one of them has reunited with her child. Those are very successful markers for us as people. They have also built trust with other agencies in the community that they otherwise would not have even thought of participating in.

The way that IM&M+ supported participants to access services in other agencies is particularly meaningful, in light of the participants' previous experiences:

With this particular set of cohorts that we had, they never reached out to the majority of services here because they didn't trust them. So imagine if you're navigating all these barriers and you have all this intergenerational trauma and many other things. ... when it comes to the trust building [in IM&M+], I think it was foundational. So when I saw how they had it laid out, like, you ease people in, I've been advocating for that for years.

Furthermore, over a longer span of time, many participants in the IM&M+ program also experienced positive outcomes related to employment and advocacy within their own communities:

One of those individuals actually works for us as an organizer in our new career resource center. So if that isn't success, uh, I don't know what is. And in addition to that, the other participants and the other cohorts went on to do amazing things with advocacy. One of them started a group to resume discussions around addiction support for Indigenous women and gender-diverse folks. And the majority of them became their own advocates. Certainly in terms of advocating for what they felt they needed to become more successful, and one of the primary stories is advocating for affordable transportation.

Overall, Judy's experience facilitating the IM&M+ program led her to conclude that it is among the best-fitting programs for Indigenous clients, and she expressed the hope that IM&M+ would expand to be offered in more Indigenous communities in the future, "Before I get too old, I want to hear that IM&M+ is present in Indigenous communities."

SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF THE IM&M+ PROGRAM

Judy highlighted the adaptable nature of the IM&M+ program as a key contributor to its success when implemented in the indigenous communities that the Women in Resource Development Corporation serves:

We tried to do things that did not compromise the key components of the program, but CCDF was very receptive to us saying to them that this is what's needed to build trust. The slow start, the three days per week was a great way to have them feel not overwhelmed and want to come back ... We incorporated a lot of food. Food and feasting and celebration even during

COVID was very important to us as Inuit. We thrive on our own food, and ... I felt so much strength from the group when they said, "I feel better today cause I ate some of my own food and we had a, a great sharing this morning ... So we use a lot of those traditional practices to be able to help those persons feel that "I'm gonna come back, but if you're not okay and you don't wanna come back tomorrow, you're still part of the program." They came back, the attendance was phenomenal in our cohorts. I think it comes back to the things that we did ... that Indigenized program was very much richly based on elder knowledge, food, and traditional practice sharing.

Judy also contrasted the adaptability of the IM&M+ program to the specific needs of the local community with the harms caused by other, more rigid, programs that she has facilitated before:

And really, the majority of programs in my career, they fail after probably 20, 30 hours in, they're like, "no, this is not for me. I don't like it. I don't feel safe here. I'm not having some fun. I'm not feeling like I'm learning. I feel stupid." That was one of the most horrific comments I heard as a young facilitator.

Judy also explained that the community project activity was an important component of the IM&M+ program. She shared a specific example of how the process of conducting the community project provided her participants with an opportunity to experience success in creating meaningful change in their own community, specifically in terms of advocating for improved transportation in their community:

So the second group created a community map where they did a brochure based on

all the supports that are available in the community and they wanted to share that with newcomers, with people who are moving here from rural areas cause we are more of an urban centre in Labrador. So that one turned into an e-brochure cause they didn't have the money to print it, and they haven't updated it, but they definitely created this beautiful e-document around, if you're moving here or if you're new to here, we have some information to share with you. ... They did a little Facebook group and they did a little campaign and they put it on some of the local little sites and they were so proud of themselves, and it really gave them that opportunity to shine for those few minutes. And a lot of them were like, I'm really proud that I did this. ... It started out with flip chart paper all over the venue and then listing out all kinds of different things and taping it up on the wall and then to a more concise paper brochure to the printed document. So we were like, oh, this is so wonderful.

In terms of how Judy's experience as an IM&M+ facilitator has had an impact on herself, with her long history of community advocacy work, it is perhaps not a surprise that Judy also really resonated with the community project component of IM&M+.

I have a long history of being that person who tries their best in their community. I love that the Community Impact Project is what I believed in my entire life. So, I was raised by a very well-respected Inuit elder. And my father said to me that it's our responsibility to give back to our community to do what we can to provide that loving, safe support. And when I say safe, it has to be safe for me and safe for them. And so many times when we talked about the Community Impact Project, I was like, "but that's how I've lived my life." And it

really reminded me that, as advocates, as individuals who were in professional capacities who could show that nurturing ability for a person to feel safe with us, that really reminded me of that knowledge my dad gave me all those years ago turned into more focus on community impact.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE WANTING TO DELIVER IM&M+

When implementing it in communities with high levels of historical and current trauma, such as in indigenous communities, Judy suggests that mental health supports are available to participants as they engage in activities:

For example, the stress management activity was a little bit tough in Cohort One. We learned from that and were better prepared ... we recognized we needed that onsite mental health support just in case things became difficult because we have, including me, we've all navigated a lot of intergenerational trauma ... we always set that tone of "you're in a safe space. There are great resources that can help you. You know, we will get through this by working together." But we wanted to have that complement of professional services to balance.

Also, Judy recommends that those delivering the program in Indigenous communities or those organizations who have Indigenous participants incorporate Indigenous perspectives and wisdom into the program. As Judy explains,

... honouring and paying tribute to elder knowledge ... in addition to that, particularly when implementing the program with Inuit or any Indigenous group, is being

aware of what it's like to live and be part of the community as opposed to trying to apply a Western approach.

Similarly, Judy mentioned that facilitators should have experience living in the community and being aware of all the resources that are in the community. And when implementing IM&M+ in indigenous communities, it would also be useful for the facilitator to be indigenous, "I am Indigenous myself within the community; if we can access an individual who has the same identity, it would be preferred."