

Embracing Life Initiative and App

The Embracing Life Initiative is creating hope and mobilizing northern agencies to address a problem people often don't want to talk about: suicide.

The initiative brings together agencies, tribal councils and grassroots youth mentors to promote community wellness, life promotion and suicide prevention.

The project is a call to action aligned with Saskatchewan's Pillars For Life Suicide Prevention Plan. It aims to improve mental health, well-being and self-care by leveraging the knowledge of communities and fostering strengths through health promotion.

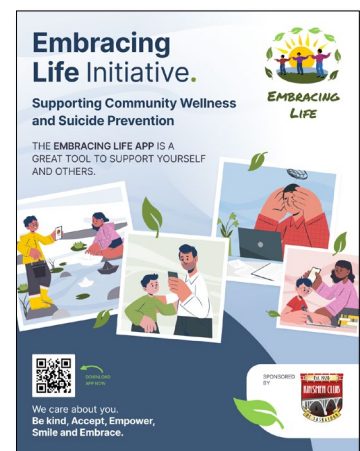
The Embracing Life Initiative can be traced back to 2013-14, when the Government of Saskatchewan invested \$221,000 in 17 community projects. The unique nature of these initiatives encouraged government and several partners to continue collaborating. This work is an incredible opportunity for northern agencies, community groups and youth to work together, learn from one another and share experiences. This collective initiative is now known as Embracing Life.

New tools launched under the initiative, Embracing Life's website and suicide prevention app, were released on World Teen Mental Wellness Day in March 2022.

The inspiration for the app development came from northern youth at a workshop in Prince Albert and their feedback about knowing how to help their friends, loved ones and family at risk. This tool was thoughtfully developed using community and culturally appropriate materials, ensuring relevance and effectiveness, particularly for Indigenous residents.

The app provides resources and information on suicide prevention, including contact information for counselling people in Saskatchewan. The app delivers two types of support: it offers tools and resources to assist others you are worried about, and it guides you to help yourself by creating a plan with positive outcomes for daily life or supporting well-being. In addition, Embracing Life is supported by SaskTel to ensure that app is available in every part of the province.

The Embracing Life app has had a far-reaching impact. As of June 1, 2023, the app has been downloaded onto nearly 2,765 devices, reaching 179 Saskatchewan communities and extending its reach to all Canadian provinces and territories. A testament to its engaging content, the average session time on the app stands at 28 minutes, significantly surpassing Google's average of five to nine minutes for other apps. Forty-four per cent of downloads are from



individuals aged 30-49, while 24 per cent fall within the age range of 13-19, demonstrating the app's broad appeal across different age groups.

Embracing Life is a collaborative effort that plays a vital role in addressing the pressing challenges of community wellness and suicide prevention. It includes representation from multiple human service government and non-government organizations including the Prince Albert Grand Council, Roots of Hope (Meadow Lake), the Children North Early Childhood Intervention Program, Indigenous Services Canada, and the ministries of Government Relations and Education. Supporters also include Lac La Ronge Indian Band, Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, Meadow Lake Tribal Council, and Buffalo Narrows Métis Local #62, Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Northern Lights School Division, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Northern Victim Services and the RCMP, provincial and federal health authorities, New North as well as the Ministry of Justice.

One of the most notable outcomes of the Embracing Life Initiative has been increased youth involvement. Training events have paved the way for greater youth engagement, leading to dedicated youth mentorship seats at the leadership table. This June, a transformative Embracing Life event in Prince Albert hosted 365 participants from 22 communities, representing front-line staff in health, social services, justice and education, non-profits, youth mentors, community leaders and advocates committed to community wellness and suicide prevention.



Delegates at the June 2023 Embracing Life event held in Prince Albert.

"The goal of Embracing Life is to make Saskatchewan residents better. It starts with people. Making sure we have amazing communities and places to live means that we must focus on mental health; when people are feeling good, communities flourish," said Brandi Bell, Secretariat of Embracing Life and Senior Policy Analyst at Northern Engagement, Indigenous and Northern Relations Ministry of Government Relations.

The commitment and dedication of the Embracing Life co-chairs, Linda Cairns and Aman Mosazghi, have been recognized and awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal for

their outstanding work in community wellness and suicide prevention, underscoring the importance and impact of their contributions.

Embracing Life is rooted in a strength-based approach, and it exemplifies the essence of partnership. By bringing together agencies, tribal councils, grassroots community youth mentors, and various stakeholders, the initiative guides toward collective action. Beyond its social need, the Embracing Life app has become a guide to a more significant call to action that embraces community, culture, and collective safety.

Suicide is a loss for an entire community – particularly when a youth's life is lost. Embracing Life is focused on reducing the risk of suicide across the north by sharing the strength of those same communities and partners.