



Alberta Home Visitation
Network Association

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Message from the Director

Welcome to 2021—an interesting time to be alive!

As we continue with living during a pandemic, AHVNA is continuing to discuss hope and resiliency through our *Connections* publication. I am totally amazed with the resilience of the staff who are working with families in our province. Programs have adjusted the way they deliver services for families and are striving to maintain and develop relationships in a strengths-based manner. Even with the barriers COVID-19 and the associated restrictions have created, staff continue to connect and provide support.

Currently, when many families are under stress due to work conditions, unemployment, cabin fever, and isolation, to name a few, it is important for family support staff to continue maintaining a routine that provides ongoing service. After all, children continue growing and developing, and parents continue being parents regardless of the COVID environment. Our role as family support workers is to walk with the families as they navigate through the uncertainty, and support parents to be the best that they can be.

That means we must continue to look after ourselves, and take time to fill up our own emotional banks. If you need some inspiration, the writers of the articles have some ideas! This issue offers:

- Information for us to consider and help us to understand how and why we are feeling the way we are.
- Ideas for us to continue to be resilient throughout the year.
- Encouragement for us to flourish by asking ourselves important questions about our own well-being.
- Another program's experience of using technology while working with families during COVID.

When we take time to look after and nurture ourselves, we model that for the parents and families we work with by showing up calm and present and being able to listen.

So, as we navigate through the pandemic, carve out some “me” time. Be good to yourself! ❤️

Lavonne Roloff is the provincial director of the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association (AHVNA).

3 Habits That Help You Stay Resilient All Year Long

by Kathy Archer



2020 was a challenging year for me, and probably for you too. Sadness threatened to turn into depression. Anger morphed into rage. Loneliness and heartache became constant companions. On top of that, I met daily with others experiencing that range of emotions and more.

As a leadership coach, I hear the strains of leadership, the challenges of supervision, the desperation from lack of resources and support. What's more, I lean in when leaders embarrassedly share how they feel that they aren't enough and can't handle all that is on them. I remind them they can, and help them figure out how.

What I don't do is tell them that what they are feeling is wrong. Just like my spectrum of emotions has ebbed and flowed in the past months, everyone else's has too. That's normal, expected, and, in fact, needed to lead effectively.

To recover from any challenge is not to forget it. You cannot go through anything significant without wounds. Most often, those wounds leave lifelong scars. What each of us chooses to do with the lessons available from those scars separates those who move on and those who get stuck.

Those of us in helping professions need to figure out how to bounce back. Not to overlook, forget, or numb ourselves from all that is going on, but instead to take it in, move through it, and then move on, and then help our clients do the same! We are often hit by tragedies, difficult times, and injustices in our work world and in our personal world as well. People rely on us. People need us. We need to bounce back to be there for them. But how?

The way to take on everything you are dealing with and stay strong is to embrace “what is” with curiosity. You can do that by adding tiny daily habits that help you become aware of what's going on inside of you to help you stay composed and in emotional control when needed.

Here are three habits to build now so you can stay resilient all year long:

1) Make space for feelings

You can't ignore your feelings. You can't will emotions away. Stuffing your feelings down is definitely not a good option either. When you do this, they fester, build, and you will lose your composure at the most inopportune time!

Instead, you need to make space to experience sadness, hurt, frustration, anger, and rage.

- Take a few minutes to journal what you are feeling
- Meditation is an excellent way to allow the feelings to be
- Use exercise to release emotions physically

The key is not to wait until you fall apart but to make time in a safe environment to fall apart. Yes, you need to scream, rant, sob, and feel a deep sadness within. Often when you create this space, you will find that you cry. Tears are not a sign of weakness. Tears cleanse your soul.

2) Express gratitude for the crap

It's easy to express gratitude for the beautiful sunset, the laughter of a child, or your hot coffee. While those are important places to slow down and enjoy, gratitude has other benefits for the not-so-joyous experiences in life.

Each challenge we face allows us to grow into a better person, a stronger individual, and to define our character. When we can look at the “crap” through the lens of gratitude, it allows us to see opportunities, gifts, and lessons.

For example:

- I'm grateful for feeling lonely as it helps me better understand what some of my clients are feeling when they are isolated and alone. Leaning in and feeling what loneliness feels like in my body strengthens my empathy.
- I'm grateful for the bickering going on in my team right now. It's challenging me to be a better leader, listen more, and ask more questions, so I understand how to resolve this. I'm grateful for the opportunity to get better at conflict resolution.

3) Build out a positive memory

Somewhere, perhaps hidden in your day, was one moment that you found joy, happiness, or peace. Each day take that moment and expand it. When you do this, you create new patterns in your brain, training it to look for meaningful interactions and activities in your day.

As Shawn Achor suggests in his book, *Big Potential*, bullet point three details about a meaningful event. The details aren't the important part. It's remembering something positive that is the important part.

For example, as I walked past the park, a couple of boys were sledding on the hill.

- They were purposefully falling off their sleds and laughing.
- There was a vehicle running on the edge of the road.
- The sun was shining on the hoar frost.

That's it...voila, I've bounced back from feeling glum! I bet you have a bit too!

Create habits that help you experience feelings instead of ignoring them, find gratitude in the crap, and keep positive memories returning. When you do, you'll find you can navigate this year with more resilience! ❤️

Leadership Development Coach Kathy Archer helps women develop confidence, maintain their composure, and lead with integrity! She is the author of Mastering Confidence and hosts the Surviving to Thriving podcast. Kathy blogs for women leading in nonprofits at www.kathyarcher.com

Using Technology to Connect with Families During COVID

by Families Forward Staff

In-home visitation has put on a new hat during this time of COVID. In order to minimize the spread, our Families Forward program is using technology a lot more to connect with families. In-home visitation has always consisted of using your car as your office, eating quickly in between home visits, and driving around the city. Lately, we can be found connecting with families more on-line, pets are taking part in Zoom calls, and children are asking questions while they do online school. Oh, how times have changed!

Many families are experiencing similar challenges and adapting to a "new normal." On a positive note, many families say that they are spending more time together. The hubbub of after-school activities has come to a complete stop, and many parents are working from home, which for some means that there is more time to connect.

One strategy we offer for the parental toolbox is Daniel Siegel's "Connect before Direct." This strategy includes using some empathy before giving a direction, or spending a brief time paying attention to what the child is doing—perhaps asking about the game they are playing, or what block creation they just invented. It is key to get into the right relationship space with a child before asking them to clean up their toys or get ready for bed. This can help alleviate the counter-will that may creep up if a child is feeling bossed around.

Several parents comment on how this strategy has been very effective in lessening the battle of wills in their home. One dad commented how before the program, he sometimes yelled at his children when they were whining or being defiant. His response now comes from a gentler place and he will empathize and connect with his children before asking them to do something.

A mother of a toddler has commented many times how the strategies she has learned have been so eye-opening, giving her a perspective she never would have had without taking part in the Families Forward program. ❤️

Families Forward is a program with the YW Calgary.





Flourishing During Challenging Times

by Dr. Wayne Hammond

"Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you; they're supposed to help you discover who you are."
— Bernice J. Reagan

Most of us can successfully manage increasing demands and challenges in our professional role as a care provider occasionally. We can dig deep and draw upon a level of energy and grit required to "burn the candle at both ends" for a limited period of time. Once the sense of urgency is over, we return to a more balanced routine in our lives. But what happens when the demands of your care provider role become more like a marathon instead of the sprint you initially signed up for?

In light of the current impact of COVID-19, many care providers will be faced with the challenges of supporting clients with significant increases in the complexity and level of situational and mental health concerns. If this is the case, you must ask the following questions:

1. Do I know how to adapt in a healthy way to prolonged stress?
2. How do I recover and bounce back from a challenging situation?
3. Am I prepared to respond to the increased mental health concerns of my clients?
4. Do I know how to grow my potential as a care provider from a challenging experience?
5. Who will be part of my support network when I'm feeling overwhelmed?
6. Do I have a purposeful strategy for my own self-care?

It is not uncommon to hear care providers talk about feeling stressed, emotionally and physically tired, and overwhelmed with no time or energy to care for themselves. This phenomenon is often referred to as "caregiver burden." It occurs when someone feels an adverse effect on their emotional, social, financial, physical, and spiritual functioning, even though they are deeply committed to and value what they do. Caregiver burden is not uncommon—we all have differing levels of tolerance for prolonged and unusual demands being made of us. But it is also important to understand that you can purposefully decrease the effects of caregiver burden and flourish in successful ways.

Building the capacity to flourish embraces a strengths-based and positive psychology perspective that holds the belief that all individuals have the essential strengths, resources, and abilities to thrive when experiencing unpredictable and challenging life situations. This perspective replaces a more traditional emphasis on mitigating one's weaknesses or vulnerabilities with one that focuses on "what's right" as the starting point for positive change, performance success, and positive well-being. Moreover, this approach invites the individual to embrace challenges and change as a normal part of their own ongoing growth journey.

Definition of flourishing: A heightened state of thriving, positive well-being, and purposeful performance characterized by one's growth aptitude, resilience capacity, strengths-based competencies, and sense of purpose.

It is important to understand that the capacity to flourish is an uneven process—a person might be flourishing in one situation, but may need a higher level of support in another. Flourishing is not invulnerability to stress or the trait of a "perfect person." Flourishing reflects a growth mindset with a willingness and courage to take smart risks to grow your potential by stretching limits in purposeful ways. In doing so, you nurture the two critical components of flourishing: performance competence and personal resilience.

In light of how COVID-19 has impacted our lives, it would be easy to just pull back from your role as a care provider. The challenges of navigating the health care system, helping those who are increasingly dependent on you, and working through the increasing stressors at a personal level are all very real and overwhelming concerns. There is no "silver bullet" that will resolve these inevitable challenges and diffuse the stress of being a care provider. However, there is a way to train the brain to be more resilient and competent by approaching challenges as an opportunity to grow your potential. Flourishing does not mean you avoid stress. Rather, it is a shift from seeing your abilities as limited to seeing challenging situations as an opportunity to create new levels of insight, confidence, and empowerment.

A number of researchers have introduced the idea that the most effective way to enhance people's capacity to thrive during challenging times is to train their brains to be more resilient and competent by harnessing their stressors and using them to their advantage (Benard & Truebridge, 2013; Dweck, 2007; Southwick & Charney, 2012; Seligman, 2011). Some suggested strategies to build your capacity to flourish and experience positive well-being are as follow:

"Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful." — Joshua Marine

Cultivate a strengths-based

perspective. It is unrealistic to think that we can avoid the difficult emotions or feelings of stress that come with supporting others. But, being mindful and acknowledging your inner experience is the starting point for self-care. Attention that is focused towards worrying, fretting, anger, revenge, and sadness will rob you of the need to find that safe place and ability to comfort yourself in difficult times. Instead, focus your attention on possibilities, passions, gratitude, compassion, and growth.

Nurture your sense of empowerment.

Developing your willingness to take action in difficult and stressful situations is enhanced when you have confidence in your own capabilities, knowledge of your strengths, and the belief that you can use challenges to learn, grow, and develop. Your confidence and sense of empowerment increases as new challenges are creatively engaged and resolved with strengths-focused strategies.

Reframe your stressful experiences.

Although we cannot change our past experiences, we can learn to change how we understand and respond to them. Stressful events can be managed in a more productive way when we alter how an event is perceived and how it can be managed in a way that leads to a new awareness and ability to thrive. In many ways, it is a scaffolding process of transformation.

Know who you need in your inner

circle. We need to build strong connections with others and reach out to them when we need help. It's tough to really evaluate ourselves, so we need to have those individuals in our lives who are willing to provide honest information to us about ourselves and our efforts. When you have the right relationships, you can go well beyond the limits of your own energy and resolve issues that may seem impossible for one person to handle. Those who flourish do so, in part, because they are willing to listen to others, learn from them, and take advice.

Be clear about your priorities. Most crisis situations are filled with confusion and ambiguity. You will be most effective if you can quickly decide what is most important and tune out distractions. This allows you to conserve your energy and achieve the best outcomes.

Be creative. When you encounter an unexpected challenge, you need to figure out how you will address it. If you can stretch your brain to come up with a range of options that include new, unusual, or unexpected strategies, you have a better chance of a positive outcome. As a bonus, this strategy helps you see the humour even in dark times.

Step out of your comfort zone. Those who flourish do so not because they are “natural flourishers,” but because they are constantly finding ways to improve, develop, and grow. They do not settle for the status quo; they find out what they need to know and what they need to do and work hard to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to get them where they want to go.

Follow your moral compass. It is our guiding principles and spiritual beliefs that helps us to thrive during stressful and challenging times. There are times when the answer or required response is not always clear. But a step of faith based upon a desire to value the potential in yourself and others will always bear fruit.

Prioritize your well-being. Self-care is an important part of staying physically, spiritually, and mentally healthy. For many people, learning to take care of themselves is a process that can be challenging. For whatever reason, we are often taught that it is a virtue to put the needs of our work, families, and other people ahead of our own needs. But it's okay to focus on yourself. In fact, it's the only way that you're going to have the energy and strength to look after other people. Bettering yourself through self-care will make you healthier, happier, and wiser.

Create meaning in your personal and professional role.

Critical to someone's capacity to thrive and experience positive well-being is finding meaning and value in how they perceive themselves and their professional role. Knowing your sense of purpose creates a foundational belief that what you do is important to the well-being of others you are helping. Ralph Waldo Emerson left us a quote worthy of consideration: “The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” ❤️

A Formula for Flourishing

Author Unknown

If you change your thoughts ...
you will change your expectations.

If you change your beliefs ...
You will change your expectations.

If you change your expectations ...
you will change your attitude.

If you change your attitude ...
you will change your behaviour.

If you change your behaviour ...
you will change your performance.

If you change your performance ...
you will change your life.

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- Over the past 25 years, Dr. Wayne Hammond has worked extensively to improve the lives and coping mechanisms of complex youth and their families and is considered a leading expert on the concepts of resilience, strengths-based practice, and positive psychology. His research and understanding of humanity's need to be connected, valued, and empowered led him to create Flourishing Life. He has published several scientific articles while developing an innovative framework for evaluating and assessing resilience and potential for human flourishing. He has also been an active lecturer with regard to understanding the role of human flourishing and actively holds an adjunct status with Ambrose University and the School of Medicine at the University of Calgary in Canada.*

The Hard Work of Being Well

by Carmen Lawrence, B.ScN., MN

There is no doubt that 2020 will be a year to remember! There have been so many personal, local, and global changes. It has been challenging to befriend our new reality and to find new ways of maintaining our health. Likely, most of us have learned that—with the right supports—we can cope with these stressful events, and in many cases even thrive. Though true, stating this runs the risk of sounding simplistic. We must understand that there are normal emotional reactions that people go through in response to a disaster event. And, in the current context, finding and leaning on supports is far more difficult than it sounds. The question is how do we access the kind of health-bringing relationships during the many disruptions and losses that so many have experienced this year?

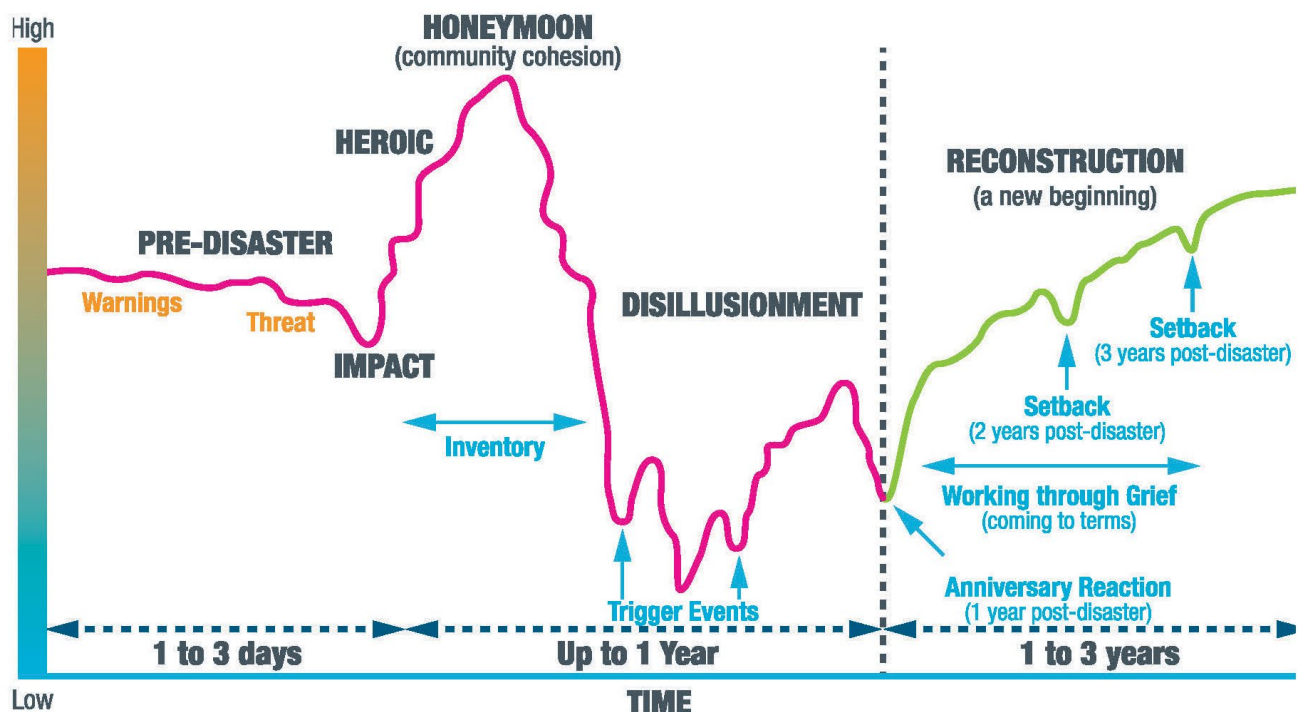
The research

Looking to some of the current research on disaster recovery offers useful insights into the normal emotional responses to a disaster or crises (like COVID-19). Research tells us that it is common for people to go through a variety of emotional phases in response to a disaster, and that those phases may occur over several years.¹ Often in the first year of a disaster event, people will typically experience initial feelings of confusion and disbelief. Their focus will be on survival, safety, and reuniting with family or loved ones. This may lead to increased optimism and participation in activities involving rescues and helping others. However, this is often followed by sinking

feelings of exhaustion, increased stress, and relational discord. Beyond year one, focus is on reconstruction and the hard work of rebuilding. People need time to come to terms with their losses and start recognizing their skills and personal strengths to cope. Often, old priorities are re-examined, and new ones established.

Current surveys have helped us gain insight into some of the impacts this last year has had on Albertan families. In a recent Alberta-based report of approximately 2,000 families surveyed on the impact of COVID-19, in over half (58 percent) of all families, at least one parent experienced job loss, loss of main income source, or reduction in employment hours. Up to 35 percent of mothers reported

It is common for people to go through a variety of emotional phases in response to a disaster.¹

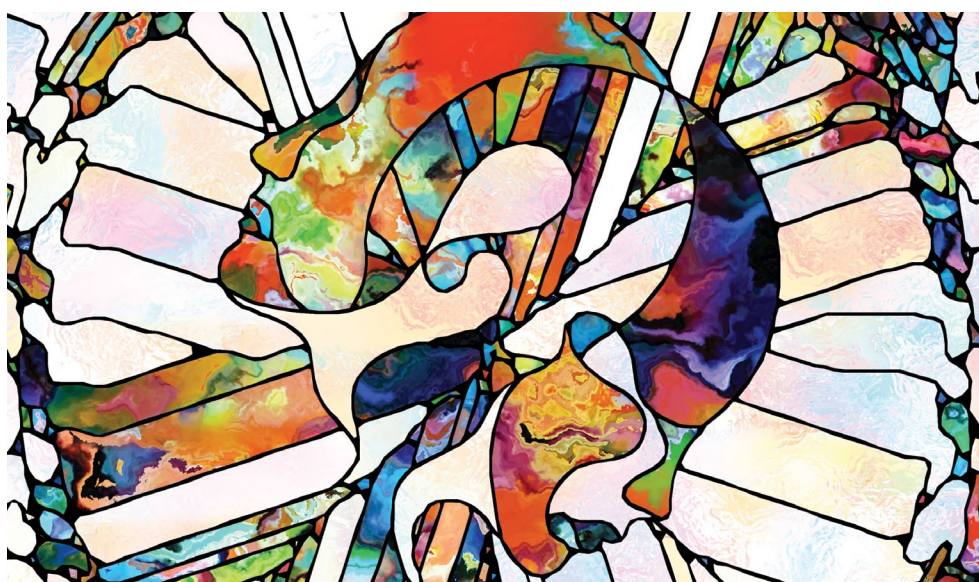
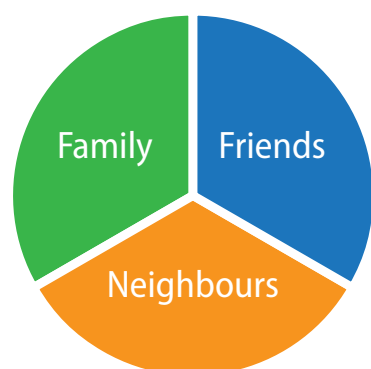


elevated stress, anxiety, and depression. Over 40 percent reported tension in their partner relationship. Almost 30 percent of mothers are concerned about their child's behaviour and mood. Families experiencing a high number of stresses may reach a "tipping point" in coping and require services and supports to minimize long-term threats to health and well-being.²

Providing support

So, how can care providers support family resilience? It will most certainly require a collective effort. We know that at the most basic level, all families require food and housing security. Others may need support in adopting well-being strategies such as sleep, physical activity, healthy diet, downtime, playtime, and connecting time, to help buffer the impact of stress. By being attentive to the mental health of caregivers, the social and emotional development of children will be strengthened, which will lead to their learning and growth. Particularly striking in this report is the recommendation to invest in approaches that "enhance natural supports and naturally supportive environments" which will improve "well-being, sense of belonging and purpose among citizens, and may alleviate stress associated with COVID-19 related restrictions on usual activities."²

Although the value of social connections to our mental health and well-being has been well documented³, according to a 2020 Angus Reid Poll, 53 percent of Canadians say that they are lonely. Interestingly, although loneliness and isolation have risen from 2019, time with immediate family and consistent socializing with neighbours appears to have "curtailed a significant increase on this measure."⁴



Be a good neighbour

Just as there are nutrients that constitute a healthy diet, so too there are relational nutrients that support healthy connections and human flourishing: family, friends, and neighbours. Family might consist of children, a partner, and extended relatives. Friends are those people with whom we share a common interest: yoga, book club, hockey, work colleagues, etc. Neighbours are those people we share "place" with. A neighbour might be a friend or family member, but mostly they are people with whom we share "weak ties"⁵: the quick wave when taking out the garbage, stopping for a brief chat while on a walk, exchanging sugar, or safeguarding the neighbour's extra house key. These neighbourly relationships are not only the number one protective factor in disaster recovery¹, but they lay the foundation for other forms of support that family and friends cannot provide. Neighbours continue to be an untapped social resource. Encouraging a rich and broad relational diet requires careful attention to the benefits and challenges that each type of relationship offers, and intentional conversations with families to ignite their imagination and share in their stories of social connection.

Hope and resilience in 2021 will be a collective effort. A range of emotional responses to the challenges we face are normal. Acknowledging the disruptions that have occurred and supporting families with evidence-based public health strategies will ensure that families experience positive mental health and well-being. ❤️

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Carmen Lawrence is a master's-prepared nurse who has worked in children's mental health for most of her career. Her positions include mental health therapist with Alberta Health Services, a lead with Alberta Education on supporting psychosocial recovery following the wildfires, and currently providing mental health consultation to The GRIT Program.

connections

Coming up

The next issue of *Connections* will focus on home visitation research and tools. If you would like to submit an article or resource for this topic, please contact the AHVNA office by May 31, 2021.

Hearing from you

Connections is published two times per year by the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association. We welcome comments, questions and feedback on this newsletter. Please direct any comments to Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA provincial director, by phone at 780.429.4787 or by email to info@ahvna.org.

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Feedback About AHVNA's Work

AHVNA strives to be an excellent resource for home visitors in Alberta, and it is always wonderful to receive feedback that tells us we're on the right track. The following was submitted by Hanna Cook from the Bridges Family Programs Association of Southeastern Alberta in Medicine Hat.

- ♥ Membership in AHVNA has been an incredible asset throughout the past year as our Home Visitation program has seen changes through the Children's Services Family Resource Network (FRN). As our program prepared for the changes that would be necessary to successfully enter the FRN as a spoke, we required some enhancement in the way we delivered service. AHVNA has provided so many beneficial training opportunities and resources for support as we've gone through these changes.
- ♥ Our program has benefitted immensely from the Great Kids Inc. (GKI) Integrated Strategies training that AHVNA hosted. Our staff have been able to develop new skills and, as we have adapted the GKI framework into our program, we have already seen so many benefits to families in the way that we provide service. We have also had our home visitation program supervisors access the GKI Supervisor Training. This training provided an enhanced knowledge of reflective supervision. By implementing this, we have received positive feedback from staff that they find supervision to have increased benefit thanks to reflective and strengths-based approaches.
- ♥ The support provided from the AHVNA staff through the process of learning and implementing the GKI Integrated Strategies (IS) has been incredibly helpful, especially as our staff have participated in the GKI Action Tool Series. The follow-up on the skills learning through GKI IS has provided an opportunity to re-evaluate how we use our Action Tools and what we believe about them. This is enhancing our ability to use them in a way that will support our families to reach their goals and develop their skills as parents.
- ♥ The AHVNA staff are easily accessible by phone and email and it is always a comfort knowing that support is close by.
- ♥ Our staff also participated in the AHVNA Family Violence Protocol training this past fall and are now implementing the protocol. This training was helpful in practicing conversations and skills to provide meaningful and thorough support to families experiencing family violence. Since adopting this protocol, our staff report having more conversation regarding healthy relationships, and many opportunities have opened up to provide education on family violence. Our team has recognized that by implementing this protocol, we have been able to better screen for family violence. We have received disclosures that would have otherwise been missed, and because of it, the support we can provide is so much greater.



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