

Using the ABLe Change Framework to describe the process of scale-up within and across the four First Nations communities participating in Learning Circles: Local Healthy Food to School (LC:LHF2S)

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Introduction: Learning Circles: Local Health Food to School (LC:LHF2S) is a participatory initiative to build capacity within First Nation school communities to improve access to healthy, local and traditional foods. Based on an exemplar project in Haida Gwaii (HG) BC, LC:LHF2S Facilitators in HG, Hazelton/Upper Skeena BC, Ministikwan, SK and Black River, MB worked with local stakeholders to plan, implement and document food-related activities.

Objectives: Using the ABLe Change framework (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2011), we examine the process by which LC:LHF2S was scaled up within and across the four communities.

Methods: Data were triangulated from interviews with annual gathering delegates (2016-9) and key stakeholders (2019-20); project reports, minutes, food procurement and student data; coded (some in duplicate) and preliminary themes identified.

Results: Change varied within each community context according to ABLe Change ‘Above-the-Line’ factors: unique strengths and supports; relationships developed among Facilitators, local champions and stakeholders within school and food systems; engagement of leadership; values placed on local and traditional foods and interactions among system components. LC:LHF2S implementation was influenced by ‘Below-the-Line’ factors: community readiness; local capacity to respond to LC priorities, including knowledge, skills and motivation for action; and local ‘wins’ (successes achieved and obstacles addressed). ‘Wins’, whether: more local, traditional foods in school meals; a healthy community fund-raising feast; a school learning garden; or activities on the land with local knowledge keepers, facilitated further activity. Annual gatherings fostered exchange of ideas and strategies across communities.

Conclusions: Scale-up of LC:LHF2S was enabled by the inherent flexibility of the LC approach whereby the nature and pace of food system change was shaped by participants and community context.

Significance: For public health dietitians working with Indigenous communities, LC may help support community-led action towards greater food and nutrition security.

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