

Bridging Academia and Community: Development and Growth of the Peel Institute of Research and Training

Historically, academia and community/practice have remained highly separate. Research initiatives have long been developed and conducted outside of conversation with and involvement of communities, using community residents as objects from which knowledge can be extracted to advance theories, models, frameworks, and research knowledge. This historical practice of doing research *on*, rather than *with* communities, has supported a divide between the needs, wants, and practices of community and academic research. There has been a growing push in recent years to bridge this divide.

Scholars in critical feminist, intersectional, race, and gender studies, along with other critical perspectives, have long supported conducting research *with* direct and ongoing involvement and relationships with community members. Here, community members are the cornerstone to the research project, as they guide the development of a project, its process of data collection and analysis, and final outcomes; they become partners and co-researchers, rather than solely a sample of a larger population. Direct involvement of the community enables academics and communities to work collaboratively on a project that addresses the specific needs and wants of the community, and ensures that knowledge and practices generated come back to the community to improve their livelihoods.

Operating from an intersectional, anti-oppression, and equity framework, the Peel Institute of Research and Training (PIRT), since their inception, has continued to work to bridge

academia and community, theory and praxis. Situated in the Region of Peel since 2013, as the research arm of Family Services of Peel (FSP), PIRT serves as an example of how academic research and community organizations and members can come together to successfully facilitate research that directly addresses community needs. While not without a multitude of complex challenges, the Institute has been able to flourish as a community-based research institute. In this report, we present the history of the Institute, outlining its origin story; approach to research, training, and knowledge mobilization; major milestones and successes; structures and support; and sustainability. Throughout we note various challenges faced and end with several lessons learned over the years in developing and sustaining a community-based research institute within a non-profit social service agency. This historical overview and discussion of future goals offers an experiential outline of a unique and innovative research endeavour that can support other non-profit social service agencies looking to expand into the realm of research, as well as academics and academic institutions looking to develop stronger community engagement in doing research.

Historical Overview

The Institute was founded in 2013, initially as the Peel Institute on Violence Prevention (PIVP). In March 2013, the Peel Committee on Sexual Assault (PSCA), through funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) hosted *Cafe Scientifique: An Open Discussion of the Experiences of Immigrant and Racialized Women Survivors of Sexual Assault in Accessing Primary Health Care Services*. Bringing together women survivors of violence, service providers from social and health sectors, and academic researchers in the field of violence against women, the Café enabled open discussion on the experiences of women assault survivors in accessing health care and social services.

This event highlighted that in accessing care, women experienced several barriers, including paternalism, cultural incompetence, and crisis-focused services. An important outcome of the Café was the need to increase the focus on violence against women as a human rights issue. There was a need to enhance the understanding of the social, political, and economic forces and factors that continue to influence the ongoing oppression of women. This event marked the beginning of the Institute, as it highlighted a need for collaboration between academics, services providers, and survivors to identify issues and share ideas for moving forward. A formal proposal was submitted to establish the Peel Institute on Violence Prevention (PIVP; now PIRT) in 2013. The proposal was submitted to the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), with FSP named as the financial administrator, in collaboration with members of the PCSA. The proposal was subsequently approved, and the Peel Institute for Violence Prevention was to be developed.

Unfortunately, even before its launch, the PIVP hit its first major challenge. Around the same time that the proposal came through, the PCSA was disbanded when their funding from Ontario Trillium Health Partners was discontinued. This resulted in numerous challenges in getting the Institute up and running, as the committee's discontinuation led to the need to change how the Institute would be structured and operate. Initially, the Institute was to be run collaboratively by members of the PCSA, with FSP providing administration of funding. However, with the collapse of the PCSA, a shift was made to have FSP support the project on a larger operative scale. Due to this shift in operative structure, sign-off from members of the PCSA were required.

The process of getting prior members of the PCSA to sign off was challenging. Committee members struggled to accept a single agency as solely responsible for the Institute,

instead of a collaborative committee, as it was initially. Competition for the proposal funding and area of intellectual and advocacy focus (violence against women) arose in waves. Accordingly, FSP spent months conducting outreach on how this project differed from the current work of other organizations and committees and the need for this project to come to fruition. After several months of continuous outreach, adjusting the Institute to strengthen its research lens and differentiate it further from other initiatives, FSP got the go-ahead. However, another challenge arose; initial partners no longer wanted to engage in the project, stating various financial and time barriers, and subsequently dropped out. What was supposed to be a diverse collaborative Institute, was now in the hands of one agency. Fortunately, the executive director of FSP at the time, the Director of Counselling Services, and the manager of the Institute were highly dedicated and committed to the project and although now significantly altered from the initial operative plan, were able to launch the PIVP. The Institute was officially launched in 2014 during the 43rd Annual General Meeting of FSP.

The Institute

The Institute is an interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral collaborative initiative among agencies in the Region of Peel that addresses critical issues of the community. Guided by an equity, anti-oppression, anti-racist framework and informed by intersectionality, the Institute is a focal point for data-driven, evidence-informed practice, aiming to enhance the organization of programs and services, combining perspectives from the diverse population served, community service providers, and academia.

Initially, the Institute's focus was specifically on the area of violence, focusing on the following at-risk groups: youth, seniors, women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities,

and male victims of violence. As of 2022, the Institute expanded its focus beyond violence to enhance its ability to support the diverse and variable needs of groups across the Region. The PIVP accordingly changed its name to the Peel Institute of Research and Training (PIRT) to better reflect the scope of research being conducted. Although the Institute continues to be committed to working on violence prevention, new projects regarding social services, immigration, mental health care, and more in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and changing societal landscape, have become critical in the work of the Institute.

Institute Objectives

The objectives of the Institute have shifted over the years but remain grounded on the same principles of social justice, equity, and relationality. In 2013 the main objective was to establish a permanent institute for the eradication of all forms of violence in the Region of Peel that will be a focal point for accessible research dissemination, facilitating knowledge translation to a wider audience. This objective has been achieved with the Institute continuing to grow and flourish both in its work in violence reduction and prevention and in its currently expanding research focus to address other inequities, across the boundaries of race, age, gender, and more.

The second objective of the Institute at its start was to engage in policy analysis and participatory action research on current responses to violence and conduct studies on best practices for the treatment and prevention of violence. Third, to achieve equity in services for survivors of violence in the Region of Peel through human resources development, innovative programs and services, participatory community development, policy analysis, and evaluation methodologies. Fourth, to enhance the capacities of community-based agencies by developing program evaluation tools to ensure that survivors of violence have access to seamless,

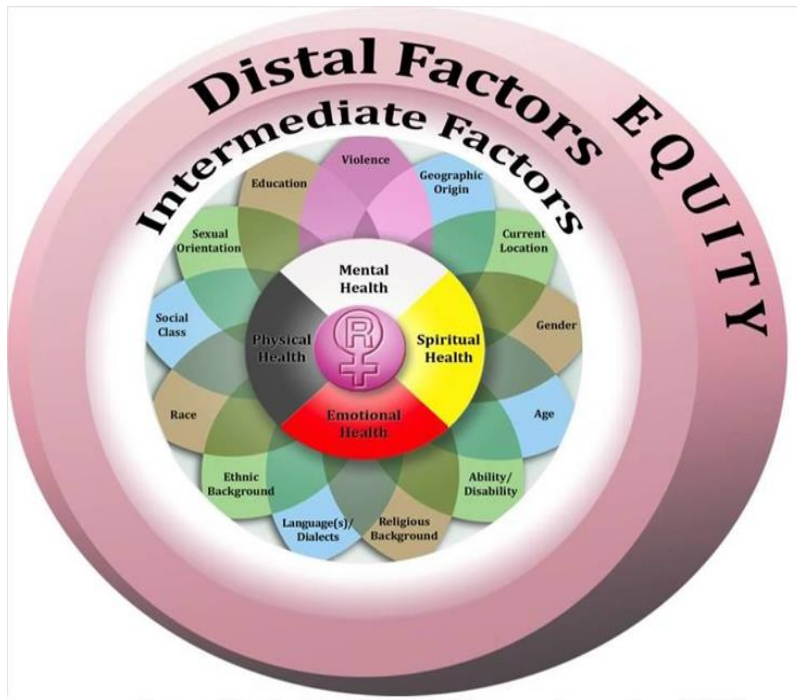
interdisciplinary services and support. As the Institute has grown and evolved these objectives continue to be a focus as PIRT continues to conduct research on specific areas of violence, promote equitable access to services and programs, develop new training materials and courses, and more to support survivors are various forms of violence.

The objectives of the Institute have expanded with a shifting focus on collaborating in research across the Region in areas outside of violence. The priority areas of the Institute now include (1) determinants of health and well-being; (2) administrative data collection, summary, and analysis; (3) trauma counselling; (4) leadership training and employment for marginalized groups; (5) violence prevention; and (6) knowledge mobilization/dissemination activities. Current objectives of the Institute focus on (a) generating evidence-based research across priority areas; (b) the development of training manuals and modules in priority areas; (c) strengthening mechanisms for knowledge mobilization, translation and exchange among researchers, policy makers, service providers, and community members; (d) influence policy and practice through research initiatives; and (5) develop evidence to support program development and implementation.

Institute Frameworks

The Institute operates from an equity, anti-oppression, and anti-racism framework (figure 1).

Figure 1: PIRT Equity, Anti-Oppression, and Anti-Racism Framework

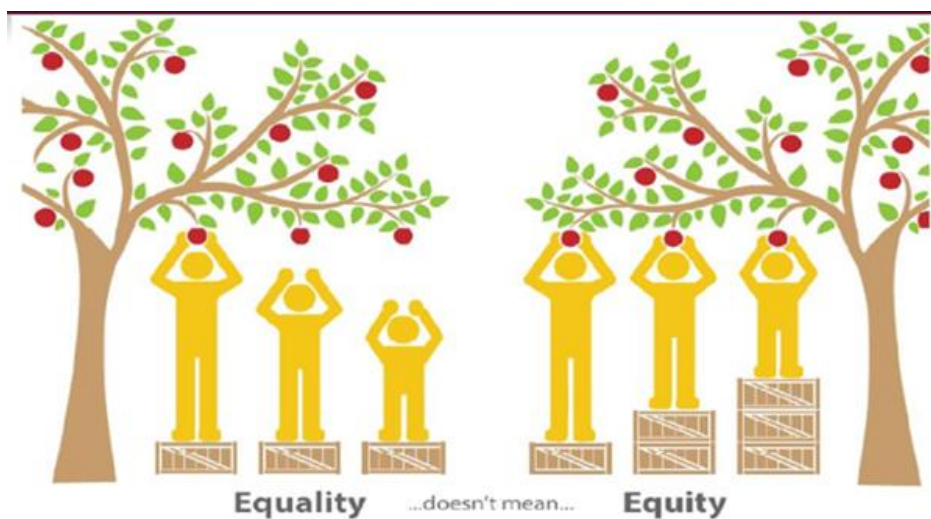


This framework was developed by the team at the Institute in 2015 and has been noted by the Board and Governance Committee as one of the largest successes of the Institute. It is critical in guiding the research conducted and training developed by the Institute. This framework is built upon the concept of equity, the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), the Indigenous Wheel of Health, and the Social Determinants of Health (SDH). The Institute recognizes that inequities continue to be present in the daily lives of many individuals living in the Region of Peel, therefore all research, training, and knowledge mobilization are taken from an intersectional lens that considers how multiple factors of discrimination/oppression intersect and in turn, affect someone's life.

Equity

Equity refers to the fair and just treatment of all individuals, regardless of their social positioning and inequalities faced. Equity in well-being is the “absence of systematic

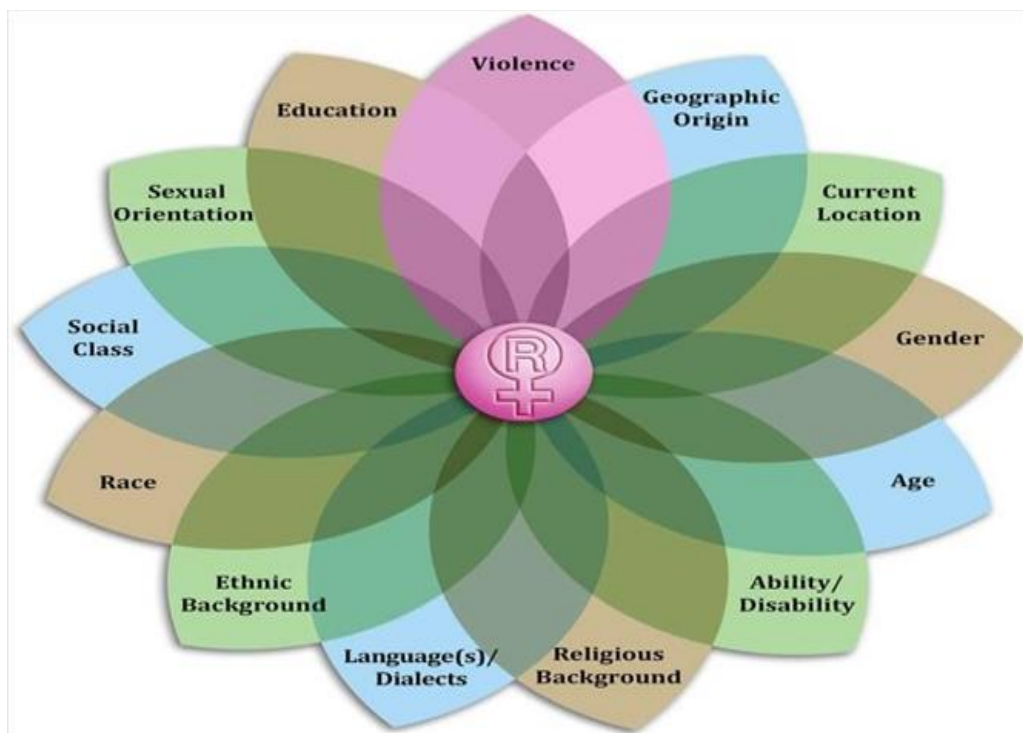
differences” across well-being (or health or mental health, etc.) status across groups or population (Starfield, 2001, p. 546). In services, equity implies that no differences exist in the provision of health services when needs are equal (horizontal equity) or that where greater health needs exist, enhanced services are provided (vertical equity; Starfield., 2001). Inequities exist across groups due to various social conditions, the unequal distribution of resources, and the uneven access to power. In taking an equity informed approach, the Institute aims to conduct research and provide training that enables all people in the community to make use of services and programs in a fair and just manner no matter the inequalities they face. The Institute continues to strive to achieve equity across the Region of Peel.



Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept and theory with origin in critical race and Black feminist studies. The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw to give a name to the complex experience that Black and other racialized women face at the intersections of race, gender, class, etc. Intersectionality involves understanding how social categories related to identity, experience, and social positioning, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, age,

immigration status, etc., are mutually shaped and intimately entangled with broader social, political, historical, and global forces (Hobbs & Rice, 2011, 2018). Operating from an intersectional lens, the Institute is able to explore and examine how these various categories, factors, and forces compound to deeply influence and affect individuals and groups privilege and inequities in society that impact service access, use, and relevancy. Intersectionality is also deeply critical to training resources developed. Given the diversity of Peel, it is critical that service providers are operating in a way that integrates an understanding of intersectionality. This facilitates recognition that needs differ across clients based on their background and social positioning, as well as that needs and experiences are always intersectional and cannot be addressed in a fragmented manner.



Family Services of Peel- Peel Institute on Violence Prevention (2015)

The Indigenous Wheel of Health

The Indigenous Wheel of Health recognizes that health and well-being are about more than just the physical. From this perspective, health and well-being involve physical health, mental health, emotional health, and spiritual health. Such an understanding of well-being is critical to the Institute, as the goal is to advance the lives of diverse community members holistically. Such a lens that recognizes health is complex, enables understanding that health is defined differently across groups and that services and programs must be developed and implemented in ways that support service providers to adapt to needs across diverse groups.



The Social Determinants of Health

According to the World Health Organization (WHO; 2021), the social determinants of health (SDH) are “the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of power, money, and resources at global, national, and local levels.” The social determinants of health and well-being can be classified as distal, immediate, and proximal.

Proximal determinants are the most immediate to an individual, including environmental and behavioural factors. Intermediate determinants include community infrastructures, systems,

resources, and capacities. Distal determinants include historic, social, political, and economic factors. As can be seen in Figure 1, the social determinants of health can influence physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The social determinants of health operate in individuals' and families' lives in complex ways, which when unaddressed, have the potential to lead to further social inequities. At the Institute, gender, race and racism, and colonialism are some of the most critical determinants of health to interact in the lives of community members to influence their health, risk of violence, and engagement with services. As a result, they take a primary place in the focus of the Institute.

Applying the Framework

The purpose of operating from this framework is to ensure that anti-oppressive and equitable practices are incorporated in all of the research and training work of the Institute and to advance the incorporation of these perspectives and practices in health and social service agencies in Peel. The goal is to reduce and, ideally, eliminate inequities experienced by the diverse communities in Peel. Oftentimes, frameworks for and systems of delivery for health and social services focus on the heteronormative White Canadian and do not always account for the diversity of experience of people in the Region. As such, the Institute focuses on breaking down dominant models built upon the normative White Canadian, to broaden the development of frameworks, models, and training to account for the vast diversity across individuals, families, and communities. It is the Institute's framework and commitment to social justice that has facilitated much of its success, as it encourages the Institute to continue to be a leader in research and service building within areas where there remains a paucity of research and appropriate models of service and treatment.

The Approach to Research

Community-Based Participatory Research

The Institute approaches research through scientific investigation, community involvement, and participatory engagement. Critical to the work of PIRT is its community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to research. CBPR enables collaborative engagement between community members, organizational stakeholders, community partners, and researchers both in and outside of academia to contribute their experience and expertise in the research process (Collins et al., 2018; Duke et al., 2020). Existing studies have demonstrated the crucial role of adopting a CBPR orientation when undertaking research endeavours aimed at addressing health inequities amongst historically marginalized groups (Collins et al., 2018; Fleming et al., 2023). This research approach has opened the possibilities to engage with populations that may not trust academic researchers.

CBPR takes an ecological perspective that understands that health and well-being are deeply influenced by individual, familial, community, and systemic forces (Collins et al., 2018). Since PIRT is embedded in the community and focuses on research that influences health and social service provision for marginalized groups, a CBPR approach is critical. By using this approach, PIRT establishes connections with the community, conducts research projects, and establishes training programs that align with the needs of various groups, sectors, and services in the Peel community.

The Institute's community-based approach is what sets it apart from the dominant approach to research. Historically, research has been conducted strictly in academic settings, where the community is only used as a source for knowledge extraction. Community members

and stakeholders would not be engaged in the entirety of the research process and oftentimes, research analyses and outcomes would not make their way back to the community. Unlike dominant historical academic approaches to doing research *on* rather than *with* communities, the Institute draws on the intersectional feminist tradition of engaging deeply with the community throughout the research process. In various ways, community members and relevant stakeholders are brought on as partners in research to support proposal development, theoretical and methodological foundations, data collection methods, and outcomes of research analyses and dissemination. Ultimately, the Institute is driven to bridge the long-standing divide between academia and community, and theory and praxis to facilitate the conduction of research that aligns directly with the needs and wants of the community it serves.

Engaging community members in research activities, conducting collaborative planning and decision-making, and ensuring ongoing communication is crucial to maintain healthy partnerships. To ensure successful implementation of the CBPR process, the Institute creates partnerships in the community with various populations of interest to build rapport. Rapport is needed to instill trust in the communities of interest who are at the centre of our research and may not be familiar with the research process itself. Relationships of trust with community leaders are critical given that the Institute works predominantly with communities who have experienced trauma, oppression, and other forms of harm. PIRT works closely with community leaders before directly engaging with community members to ensure they are prepared to engage with potentially vulnerable individuals and groups. In addition, a research advisory committee is created and implemented in all new research projects to ensure that the research is guided by people who have direct ties to the community of interest. For example, in the recent Anti-Black racism project, an advisory committee of Black youth was established to help make appropriate

research decisions and recommendations that will serve the Black population the Institute was working with. This collaboration in the community helps to ensure fair and appropriate representation of the population. This approach allows us to apply cultural humility, practice the principles of equity and benefit from mutual learning.

Further, as final outcomes, models, frameworks, etc., are being developed, a critical step for the Institute is community seminars. Here, the Institute shares preliminary findings and outcomes, and asks the community to share feedback and suggestions for further improvement, so that final outcomes are directly related to the needs, wants, and capacities of communities. This is a crucial step, as it facilitates direct community involvement in outcomes that are intended to be implemented within those communities.

While crucial to bridging the divide between academia and community, there are several challenges related to CBPR that the Institute has faced. CBPR requires developing trust and building relationships with community members. This can often be a time-consuming process. The Institute must invest time and effort in establishing rapport with communities, understanding the community's needs and priorities, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to the community's well-being. This is challenging in an environment of competitive funding, strict project timelines, and staff retention based on funding levels. To support in building trust-based relations and building a rapport within time restrictions, the Institute often works with established and well-known community leaders where relations with FSP and PIRT management have been previously formed.

In addition, maintaining the scientific rigor and quality of research in CBPR can be challenging. The Institute must navigate the tension between academic rigor and the

community's unique needs and priorities. Methodological challenges may arise when integrating different knowledge systems, data collection methods, and analysis approaches to ensure validity and reliability. The Institute partners with academic organizations such as the University of Toronto to ensure academic quality is of the highest standard.

The Research process

There are five major components involved in the Institute's research process. These include, (1) a demographic analysis of the population or region of focus; (2) a comprehensive literature review on the topic; (3) primary data collection via quantitative and qualitative research method/s; (4) data analysis; and (5) knowledge dissemination.

Each step of the research process is guided by critical thinking which includes applying, analyzing, conceptualizing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach answers or conclusions. Due to the nature of our research, we take an open-minded approach that is rational and informed by evidence. Our research incorporates concepts such as discovery, reflection, empathy, inclusion, and subjectivity. With this approach, PIRT focuses their research on wide array of topics including areas of need specific to at-risk groups such as youth and women, elder abuse, human trafficking, newcomers, refugees, people with disabilities, and sexual assault survivors. PIRT's deep community engagement creates a foundation for program development and influences the adaptation, growth, development, implementation, and maintenance of services in Peel.

Demographic analysis

Most research projects begin with a demographic analysis of the population of interest. This involves collecting secondary statistical data collected from various government and agency surveys regarding the population of interest. Data regarding age, gender, race, ethnicity, education level, income, marital status, occupation, and other relevant attributes are collected. The primary objective of conducting a demographic analysis is to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the distinctive characteristics and trends within a specific population which serves as a foundation for making informed decisions in research.

Literature Review

In all projects, the Institute conducts comprehensive literature reviews to gather all relevant and existing information about a particular research topic which allows for the identification of gaps in the research. Literature reviews are conducted using both peer-reviewed academic databases and grey literature, including government reports and policies, official organizational reports and policies, credible and reliable news sources, editorials, and commentaries. The literature review provides the background knowledge for the research project and informs the data collection process, as well as final outcomes.

Primary Data Collection

The Institute collects primary data from target participants using various quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data collection occurs primarily through the use of surveys. Qualitative data collection occurs largely through one-to-one in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. Primary data collection offers first hand insight into the experiences of community members and other stakeholders. Given that the Institute focuses on influencing service development and production, projects typically involve primary data collection from both

community members and service providers to get a well-rounded picture of the needs, wants, and capacities of Peel.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data is typically analyzed through descriptive statistics, such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, range, and frequency distributions. This enables understanding the central tendencies and dispersion of the numerical responses. Qualitative data is typically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) thematic analysis at both latent and semantic levels. Transcripts are read multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content and specific segments of the data are identified to hold meaningful information. These segments get grouped together to form themes or concepts. A narrative is then written to explain the relationship between these themes.

Knowledge Mobilization and Dissemination

Knowledge mobilization is critical at PIRT. PIRT takes what CIHR refers to as an integrated knowledge translation (iKT) approach. This is an approach to doing research that engages the principles of knowledge translation throughout the entire research process. Central to iKT is involving the community and partners equally alongside researchers from start to end to ensure that the knowledge developed is useful to knowledge users. As a community-based institute, such an approach to knowledge mobilization is crucial.

From an organizational standpoint, knowledge transfer plays a vital role in transferring knowledge within the organization, facilitating communication between individuals and teams. In the context of the Institute, knowledge transfer holds immense importance as it aligns with the

institute's mission of distributing evidence-based research knowledge and ensuring its accessibility for future users. The Institute actively organizes, creates, captures, and shares its research and data through various means such as community, national, and international training, symposiums, conferences, newsletters, seminars, and publications. Through knowledge transfer, the Institute enables empowerment and facilitates transformative change.

Over the years, the Institute has published 18 newsletters on various topics pertinent to the work of the Institute. Topics of focus have included femicide, human trafficking, international Women's Day, and the Institute's progress. Since the Institute has had a strong commitment to addressing violence against women, newsletters are disseminated annually on two days dedicated internationally to the rights and livelihoods of women: International Women's Day (March 8th), and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25th). Newsletters are disseminated not only at the Regional Level but are also shared with national and international organizations with a shared interest in the rights of women. The goal of these newsletters is to take research findings and share them in an easy to understand, user-friendly way to increase the competence of the community in relation to the important work the Institute does.

The Institute organizes seminars throughout the year to effectively disseminate research findings and encourage discussions surrounding various research projects. In the first 6 months of 2023, the Institute hosted two significant seminars. These seminars provided an opportunity for stakeholders in the community to learn about the research process, findings, and outcomes. During the first seminar, which focused on the *Building Equitable Economies for Immigrants and Refugees* project, the Institute presented a proposed Service Pathway and Family Needs Framework to stakeholders. This presentation sparked valuable discussions and gathered

feedback on the proposed ideas. The second seminar, centred around the Senior's Elder Abuse project, involved the Institute presenting a draft of an advocacy strategy to address elder abuse in the Region of Peel. Feedback and opinions from diverse stakeholders were collected regarding the proposed plan to further the development of the strategy. These seminars serve as a crucial platform for engaging in community discussions that inform the practices of the Institute. With the CBPR approach, community engagement is crucial to improve relationships and understand the impact of the research findings.

In addition to seminars, the Institute participates in conferences as a means of disseminating knowledge. The Institute is frequently invited to provincial or national research conferences to present its research findings. These conferences offer opportunities for networking with professionals in relevant fields and enable the Institute to share its findings on a broader scale. Furthermore, the Institute publishes articles in academic research journals, books, and local newspapers to further extend the reach of its research knowledge. The Institute also publishes articles internationally which disperses research findings to a larger audience

Key Milestones

Over the past 9 years since its launch, the Institute has flourished, evidenced in the continued completion of projects and growth of proposals submitted and accepted. 2013 marks the beginning stages of the Institute, with the Peel Committee on Sexual Assault (PCSA) establishing a mandate throughout the Region of Peel to promote a comprehensive and effective response to the abuse of women. They introduced the need for research initiatives in the community and subsequently submitted a proposal to the Ontario Trillium Foundation to embark on this project. While the PCSA was disbanded before the Institute was formed, the project was

granted \$224,000 from OTF to establish the Institute. In 2014, the Institute was formally established during the 43rd annual meeting of Family Services of Peel. This year, the governance and scientific committees were established, along with the development of the equity, anti-oppression, and anti-racism framework.

In 2014, the Institute published its first literature review report, *Strengthening Violence Prevention Through Increased Service Collaboration and Coordination: A Preliminary Literature Review*. This report highlighted the need for increased multi-agency, cross-sectoral collaboration and service coordination and outlined the barriers and challenges to achieving this. Later that year, the Institute held its first symposium where a retrospective case review of 117 case files from five programs at Family Services of Peel related to violence was presented. The findings displayed a wide range regarding the quality and breadth of documentation, as well limited demographic data and follow-up.

In 2015, the Institute produced its first newsletter, focusing on the history of the Institute, its accomplishments, and an explanation of the framework developed to guide projects. This newsletter and all future ones are shared with local organizations in the Region of Peel, as well as various national and global organizations. In 2015, the Institute also developed a Trauma Screening Tool Training which teaches service providers how to effectively use trauma screening tools for assessment and was part of the Seamless Services for Mental Health, Addiction, Trauma (SSMHAT) initiative.

In 2016, the Institute held its first major conference, the *Global Symposium on Violence Prevention*. This conference was held from June 22-24 at the University of Toronto - Mississauga and invited leaders in the violence prevention field as keynote speakers. This

symposium is viewed as a landmark success of the Institute as it brought together leaders in the field to spread awareness of violence prevention and push for changes. During 2016, the Institute presented at two conferences in Spain and Brazil. Later in 2016, the institute developed a manual for its policies and procedures regarding the approach to research. 2016 also marks the year that the Institute became a site for undergraduate and graduate students from various post-secondary institutions located in Southern Ontario. It has since become a hub for placement students on an annual basis.

In 2017, a second grant three-year from the Ontario Trillium Foundation was secured to reduce the impact of trauma in the community by further improving the pathways of care and services in the Region of Peel. This grant was built upon the success of the Institute trauma screening and training tool. The Institute also launched a three-year project focused on Human Sex Trafficking in the Region, a significantly under researched area at the time. For this project, a critical partnership was formed with Rising Angels, a human sex trafficking survivor support organization that continues to work with PIRT and FSP in 2023.

Building on the trauma training, in 2018 the first Trauma Screening: Train the Trainers Program was established to educate Peel's services providers to offer trauma-screening services with a social justice and anti-oppressive perspective. The training program was geared towards service providers who can learn to provide training on trauma screening to other service providers in their organization. In 2018, the Institute also presented at two international conferences, one in Salamanca, Spain, and one in Sao Paulo, Brazil, as well as provided a presentation to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In 2019, the Institute completed a human trafficking needs assessment, a key component of the larger human trafficking project. This needs assessment explores why services fail to address the needs of survivors and provides suggestions on strategies for improving services and legislation with direct input from survivors and their families. This year the Institute also attended the Global Conference on Human Trafficking and Trauma, another landmark event and the first of its kind in the Region of Peel. This event marked the Institute as the leading organization tackling human trafficking in the Region of Peel

Despite the challenges faced by the pandemic, 2020 was a fruitful year for the Institute. The Institute created a resource guide on trauma training and services in Peel Region and identified fifteen services for trauma in Peel, and eight organizations offering trauma training or workshops in Peel. Further, the Institute's Trauma Screening Training was launched internationally as a virtual course that clinicians from across the globe could access for a fee. In addition, a grant was secured to develop and implement a Mobile Sex Trafficking Prevention and Counseling Services Clinic in Peel, which was provided by the Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE). In addition, Indus Community Services contracted the Institute to support the evaluation of their services. 2020 was also the year that the mother-daughter study was completed, which explored value transmission regarding gender, sexuality, and culture between immigrant mothers and their daughters. As a highly under-researched area, this project was viewed by Institute staff as highly innovative and important.

In 2021, Ontario Trillium Foundation funded a grant to develop a Hybrid Model at Family Services of Peel to transition the workplace from in-person to virtual and hybrid services. Later that year, the Institute, in collaboration with FSP counseling, began another innovative project that aimed to develop a manual to support training clinicians working with men who use

abuse about trauma-specific services that can aid in violence reduction. The end of 2021 was marked by the development and implementation of three seniors' social tables. Three culture-specific groups for the Chinese, Spanish, and Caribbean populations were developed that enabled seniors to meet regularly in a virtual space to reduce social isolation magnified for seniors by the pandemic.

In 2022, the Institute underwent a name change and became the Peel Institute for Research and Training. In 2022, the mobile Human Sex Trafficking Support Clinic was launched. This year the Institute had a proposal approved by the Tamarack foundation for a one-year collaborative project with the University of Toronto called Building Equitable Economies for Immigrants and Refugees in Peel.. This project was accompanied by a conference, a seminar, focus groups, a wide-scale survey and two articles in preparation for publication. In 2022, the Institute completed a Train the Trainer Manual regarding trauma-specific services for men who use abuse. Finally, 2022 marked the beginning of the Skilled Trades Apprenticeship Program, a multi-million dollar government funded project that the Institute supported in securing.

As 2023 began, the Institute was immersed in several project, marking one of its busiest years. The Tamarack project was completed, with two manuscripts drafted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. The Institute started and completed a highly successful Anti-Black Racism project that led to the development of training and has opened doors for further work. The Institute also delved into a collaborative project with the Peel Elder Abuse Prevention Network (PEAPN) to address the growing concerns regarding elder abuse and the related needs of older adults in Peel.

Organizational and Community Support

Embedded within FSP, the Institute is organizationally supported by the agency. Upon its inception, the Institute was attached to FSP, but not governed by FSP's board of directors, and accordingly not included within FSP's strategic plan. At this time, the Institute was supported by several committees that were established within 2014 and 2015. These included an Executive Committee, Governance Committee, Scientific Advisory Committee, Seamless Committee, and the Community Partnership Committee. However, within a few years of the inception of the six committees, the decision was made to disband all except the Governance Committee, which continues to exist today.

The Governance Committee is formed by a combination of leaders from academia, service providers, and community organizations from the public and private sectors. They provide advice, guidance, and support for research on scientific and clinical matters related to the area of focus and training development. The support and role of each member of the committee varies based on their background and knowledge about topics, training, and research initiatives. Members also promote the Institute within their networks and in their communities. They meet three or four times a year to discuss the progress of the Institute on various projects, and directions for future work. The Governance Committee has been a tremendous support for the Institute, formed by longstanding, dedicated members who have used their vast and diverse knowledge and expertise to guide and support the Institute in continuing to grow and establish itself within the Region of Peel.

While the Institute is supported by the Governance Committee, it remains overseen by the Institute Director, who reports to the Executive Director of FSP. Since the proposal stages, the Executive Directors of FSP have offered great levels of support for the development, implementation, and growth of the Institute. While the Executive Director and Governance

Committees have always supported the Institute, pushing it in new and innovative directions with the goal of supporting the community, bridging the divide between community practice and academic research among internal FSP service providers and external community organizations has, at times, been a challenging feat.

Longstanding divides between community and academia have created mistrust and misunderstanding between those in community and those in academia. Many community service providers, at times, struggle to understand how research may actually explicitly benefit them and the community, beyond advancing academic theorizing and frameworks. Both internal and external community service providers have at times struggled to recognize the use of the Institute to strengthen their own knowledge, programs, services, and larger organizational policies. This has made it challenging for the Institute to integrate seamlessly into the community and build its reputation as an influencer for policies, programs, and services both internally in FSP and externally, within the broader community.

As a result, the Institute has had to operate in creative and innovative ways to find space within the community where they can effectively engage in research. While these endeavours stemmed from lack of active and open trust from internal and external providers, it has enabled PIRT to advance work in various under-researched areas, such as value transmission in mother and daughter relationships and human sex trafficking. However, when barriers exist to creating close and trust-based relationships within FSP and the broader community, it has been challenging to move some projects from the theoretical and conceptual research realm into the implementation stage of research. This is again due to the struggle to fully integrate into the community as a core source of support, influence, and benefit. Instead, there continues to be a divide that the Institute continues to strive to bridge.

Why this divide continues is not always apparent, but is likely to be connected to historical influences of research extracting from communities rather than engaging deeply with them in a co-creative, collaborative, and relational way. It is a systemic issue, not an individual issue, influenced by the historical process of doing research and is also related to and complicated by a competitive capitalist and neoliberal environment that creates competition for funding, resources, and influence.

It takes time to break long-standing divides and silos, however, with willingness to learn, engage, and build together from both FSP and external communities and the Institute, strong partnerships can be formed and programs and services can be transformed in ways that can effectively meet the needs of communities. This is evidenced in the various community partnerships the Institute has formed over the years and collaborated with in various projects. Strong community relationships have been built with Catholic CrossCultural Community Services, Elizabeth Fry Society, Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services, and more. These partnerships have been integral for the Institute to build its reputation within the community.

Currently, the Institute is not integrated into FSP's strategic plan, however there are plans to include the Insitute as the official research arm of FSP within the next few years.

Financial and Infrastructure Support

The financial support and infrastructure of the Institute remains precarious. It has been the area of continued challenge. PIRT operates based on funding from research and project grants. There is no core funding structure for the Institute, which has resulted in moments of precarity and strain for resources. Despite continued funding strains, and relying strictly on

grants to sustain, the Institute has grown significantly. To obtain funds, the Institute submits numerous proposals throughout the year in collaboration with various programs and services within and outside of FSP, as well as, at times, with University partners. These proposals take variable forms, with some aiming at research and development, and others on program implementation and evaluation. Since 2014, the number of proposals submitted and accepted annually has significantly grown. Yearly, the institute submits around 20-30 proposals, securing 1-2 successful funding projects.

The lack of core funding presents the Institute with many challenges to conducting research and long-term sustainability. Without core, consistent funding, the Institute struggles to attract and retain skilled staff and students. It has also resulted in high reliance on placement students, who offer unpaid labour, to support projects. While these placement opportunities are beneficial to students and the Institute, they remain short-term, with students leaving after 3 to 8 months. Paid staff is hired on a part-time, contract, project-to-project basis, which leads to high staff turnover, loss of skilled staff overtime, lack of ongoing support, increases time spent recruiting and training, and increases the workload for the Director. The Institute Director remains the one ongoing staff member. However, on a long-term basis, it is not sustainable to have one core staff that oversees all proposals and projects, especially as the Institute continues to grow. With a single core staff, it is difficult for the Institute to plan for the long-term, develop strategic initiatives, or build partnerships with stakeholders in the community due to the constant need to prioritize securing funding. This creates an environment of uncertainty and raises issues for the sustainability of the Institute.

However, despite these challenges, the Institute continues to grow in funding, securing several major funding opportunities a year that allow for the addition of new staff and the

undertaking of research. In the next three to five years, a goal is to build a financial structure that will enable the sustainability of the Institute, and allow for the hiring of another core staff member with a doctorate on a full-time basis to support research initiatives.

Staff Knowledge Building

The Institute is staffed with research assistants, placement students, and volunteers. There are continuous opportunities for knowledge building and skill training for these staff. Every new staff member undergoes diversity and equity training to learn about the framework the Institute operates under and approach all projects from a diverse and equitable lens. This training explores determinants of health, including, distal and proximal factors. It also teaches trainees about the roots of racism and colonialism concerning modern-day society, while exploring the patriarchy and differences of gender. To further develop an understanding of gender issues, research staff are required to complete a Gender-Based Violence and Analysis course. This course prepares staff for research with diverse groups by teaching how to recognize identity and social factors that affect different people, and how to enhance the effectiveness of research projects with this in mind.

Along with this course, the TCPS 2: CORE research ethics course is a mandatory learning initiative to familiarize staff with the ethical considerations needed for conducting high-quality research. Staff take these courses in their own time and complete them for a certificate. Each course provides transferable skills which aid in the preparation of all research-related activities in the Institute. In addition to these courses, training will be held as needed when staff require knowledge in a particular skill or field. For example, before conducting focus groups, which is one of the Institute's practices for qualitative research, staff were given formal training

on how to effectively host a focus group. All training is accompanied by practice, with staff participating in activities to evaluate their knowledge.

Continuity and Sustainability

The Institute is dependent on the acceptance of research grants to remain sustainable as there is no core funding. Going from one grant to another allows the Institute to hire new short-term staff and continue working on projects, however it becomes difficult to find quality staff who can join the team on a short-notice. There is one core staff member, the director Monica Riutort, that remains in the Institute on a long-term basis, however this is not sustainable. The funding is intermittent meaning that plans often change and the Institute cannot always structure projects or research the way it wishes.

The students that work with the Institute have tremendously helped keep it sustainable and aided in the continuity. Annually, several students from local universities and colleges are brought into the Institute for placements. This fosters collaboration with bright individuals and helps students kickstart their careers in research and academia. These students become exposed to working in research by learning to conduct literature reviews, hold interviews, run focus groups, recruit participants, and write articles. The only way the Institute has been able to continue producing high quality research is through the work of students who complete their practicum, volunteer or find employment opportunities. These students come equipped with theory and research knowledge acquired from their undergrad degrees and put those skills to use, working on a variety of research endeavours. They are able to learn quickly and adapt to the fast-paced environment of research. These students are passionate for social services and fit well into the team, however they work on short contracts and their talents are not kept long-term.]

The Institute has a longstanding partnership with the University of Toronto (UofT). In recent projects, the Institute has collaborated with Dr. Soo Min Toh and her CRAWL Lab from the Department of Management at the University of Toronto Mississauga. Working alongside this academic institution strengthens the research of the Institute by allowing the Research Ethics Board at UofT to approve studies. With board approval of ethics, the Institute is allowed to recruit participants safely and collect their data to later use for the publication of articles. The guidance of Dr. Toh helps to structure research projects and carry out all deliverables.

The executive director of FSP, Sandra Rupnarain, plays an important role for the sustainability of the Institute due to constant advocacy and commitment in helping collaborate on grants and contribute to proposals. Sandra seeks out research opportunities for the Institute and heavily supports the work that is being done.

Future Strategic Planning

The Institute has several goals for future directions including expanding research, building community partnerships, and raising awareness. To expand the current nature of research, the Institute plans to publish articles in high-impact journals. In addition, the Institute wants to enhance the collaborations with universities to have consistent access to Research Ethics Boards (REB) to help bolster the credibility, image and reputation of the Institutes work. FSP aims to raise awareness of the work done at the Institute in the community to enhance the funding support from private donors and spread this research provincially and nationally. The goal is to expand the reach of the Insitute to build stronger relationships with other social service organizations across the province and country.

Due to some concerns in sustainability due to a lack of consistent funding, the Institute plans to devise methods of additional funding and monetary support with the ultimate goal of becoming self-sustainable. Currently, the Institute helps create training manuals for counsellors working with trauma, apprentices, anti-racism and more. These trainings can be monetized for large organizations who wish to train their staff and this will provide some revenue for the Institute which can be used to hire core staff. A goal of the Institute is to have a core research team including a statistician, research assistant and administrative assistant who will work under the research director.

In addition, the Institute has done work with outcome measure previously to address trauma screening and how it has been improved in the region. The Institute is in a good position to expand this work and devise additional outcome measurement tools and assist with data collection to conduct evaluations of various programs held in the region to determine the effectiveness of services. This can open opportunities to help other organizations perform program evaluations of their services. The Institute is interested in conducting longitudinal studies focusing on program outcomes and evaluation which ties in with the proposed expansion to outcome measurement of services. The Institute has decades of experience conducting research which can further be used by other smaller organizations that are interested in expanding into research. The Institute can provide support, education and guidance for other organizations in conducting their own research.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the Institute's journey, a multitude of vital insights have been gained, shaping the blueprint for the future. The creation of a community-based research institute with a non-

profit agency has posed challenges in terms of comprehension and acceptance within the community. Both the general public and FSP's internal community could greatly benefit from a clearer comprehension of the Institute's offerings, the mechanisms for fostering collaborations, and the ways the Institute can bolster their project pursuits. Establishing certain connections has proven to be intricate due to the intricate systems and structures embedded in community practice. A noticeable lack of cross-sector collaboration exists, demanding patience, creativity, and adaptability to navigate the internal and external obstacles involved in integrating a research institute into the community. The Institute has recognized the need to share more information, teach the community about research and continue to foster connections that will aid in the expansion of research.

The Institute has developed insights into the essence of operating an effective community-based research endeavor. This involves forming partnerships with academics who contribute to steering the research trajectory and upholding ethical standards. In addition, support from internal staff is key as they can collaborate with the Institute to enhance their proficiency in assessing and executing successful programs.

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