

# Exploring the New Standard: Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace using the Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committees as the Lead

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Risk/hazard identification, reducing the risk, education,  
evaluation

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**April 2016 – March 2018**

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## **Final Report March 2018**

***The following project was funded by the Worker's Compensation Board (WCB) of Manitoba Research and Workplace Research Program (RWIP) under Training and Education.***

Project Title: Exploring the New Standard: Psychological Safety in the Workplace using the Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committees (JWH&S Comm.). Risk/Hazard identification, reducing the hazard, education, and evaluation.

This project explored the concept of the JWH&S Committee at Red River College (RRC) taking the lead in promoting Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace and used Champions/Stakeholders within the workplace to encourage ongoing development and implementation.

We will answer the following questions in the report below:

1. What role can the JWH&S Committee/s take in creating and maintaining a psychologically safe workplace?
2. Is in-house training an effective method of promoting psychological safety?
3. Did the strategies implemented make a difference in employees' perception of psychological safety?
4. What are the next steps in creating and maintaining psychological safety at RRC?

### **Executive Summary:**

The JWH&S Committee initiated the exploration of the New Standard and were involved in a lead role throughout the project. There were many challenges in maintaining a lead role including, staff changes, time management, educating different departments on the role of the Health and Safety Committee/Department, and internal changes in the structure of the Safety and Health Services (originally Environmental Health and Safety Services – EHSS) at Red River College. Inclusion of other departments was important and it was realized that the Committee should be involved but not the lead in implementing the new standard. The project did bring Health and Safety “to the table” so to speak. The role and expertise of the Health and Safety Committees and Department was a learning experience for some and, as discussed at the Advisory Committee, the importance of Health and Safety at Red River College was promoted through this project. It was noted that the groups involved in this project had never worked together on an issue before.

Education (power point with speaker notes Appendix A) was done early on in the project to explain the Standard and the project. The sessions generated great interest in Psychological Health and Safety and many wanted to be more involved with the project. More education is necessary and may be done internally once there is a CMHA certified champion in Psychological Health and Safety at RRC

Risk/Hazard identification was done via the Guarding Minds @ Work survey and small focus groups during the early education sessions. The survey proved to be an excellent assessment tool and assisted the Committee in choosing one factor to work on. It also introduced the new standard to all who completed the survey.

Strategy development and implementation is still in progress. Some strategies were completed in relation to Respect and Civility, the factor chosen, especially in the Staff Learning and Development Department. The inventory of activities (appendix C) noted that a lot is already happening and gaps were identified. The respect and civility survey was done which showed that employees did not know where to go if they felt disrespected so a “road map” was initiated and still being worked on.

An evaluation was done by survey, developed by the Research and Planning representative on the Working Group and the Advisory Committee. It was sent to the members of both JWH&S Committees involved, staff of the Safety and Health Department, Working Group and Advisory Committee members. There was a 57% response rate (27 of 46). It is attached (appendix D) and referred to several times in this report.

Champions/Stakeholders for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace were identified and will continue with the work at RRC. The project was successful in the fact that the College will continue exploring the Psychological Health and Safety Standard with the Safety and Health Services Department as the lead.

Identified benefits of the project include:

- Raised awareness about the Standard for key stakeholders
- Stakeholders who have Psychological Health and Safety in their responsibilities began collaborating more related to this topic
- Respect and Civility was revisited via the survey, and showed some gaps, areas for improvement, and what strategies would be most effective.
- Awareness of the need for RRC to place more strategic focus on Psychological Health and Safety and developed a better internal working model
- Working with external stakeholders is beneficial because they bring additional expertise and insight
- Projects in general, can provide a way for testing ideas and providing focus

Red River College staff were engaged and committed to this project. There were several staff changes during the span of the project but all participants on the Advisory Committee and the Working Group had both the project’s and the College’s best interests in mind.

## **Review of Work Completed April 5 2016 – March 31 2018**

April 2016 – July 2016:

- \* The 2 main JWH&S Committees were briefed on the project by Maureen Grace at their meetings in March.
- \* The first Advisory Committee was held April 7, 2016 and a terms of reference created.
- \* The assessment tool (risk/hazard identification), Guarding Minds @ Work survey was approved by RRC's Ethics Board.
- \* A workshop presentation (appendix A) explaining the basic concepts of the psychological health and safety in the workplace, the 13 factors, and the outline and purpose of the project was developed by Maureen Grace and 9 sessions were delivered to 75 RRC employees. Interest for "champions" was solicited with much success.
- \* The 2 JWH&S Committees were updated on the project progress at May and June meetings.
- \* A Knowledge Transfer and Exchange (KTE) plan was developed (appendix B)

August 2016 – November 2016

- \* More workshops delivered to over 75 employees with much interest generated.
- \* The second Advisory Committee was held Sept 29, 2016.
- \* The Guarding Minds @ Work survey was delivered Oct. 5, 2016 to assess the 13 factors of psychological health and safety. Over 800 employees received the survey and there was close to 40% return rate.
- \* Results of the survey were delivered by Maureen Grace to JWH&S Comm. members and managers at the College.
- \* The JWH&S Committee members chose the factor, Respect and Civility, to work on over the next year – 16 months of the project.
- \* Maureen met with the staff who indicated interest during the workshops in being "champions" to brainstorm strategies (reducing the risk/hazard) to promote Respect and Civility at RRC.
- \* The RRC project was shared at the Safe Work Conference, Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace: Make it the Standard. See more information in the KTE portion of this report.

December 2016 – March 2017

- \* The 3<sup>rd</sup> Advisory Committee was held Dec. 15, 2016.
- \* Both JWH&S Committees were briefed on the project and decided to organize a subcommittee that would include other RRC departments to address the factor chosen, Respect and Civility.
- \* A "Working Group" to focus on Respect and Civility strategies was organized which included JWH&S Committee members, some of those who indicated interest from the workshops, Staff Learning and Development, Research and Planning, Harassment Officer, Employment

Equity Coordinator, Intercultural Services, Manitoba Government Employees Union (MGEU), Environmental Health and Safety Services (EHSS) now called Safety and Health Services (S&HS), Occupational Health, and Human Resources. This group, chaired by the worker co-chair of the Notre Dame Campus JWH&S Committee, met twice in this time period focusing on a terms of reference or “charter” for the group (appendix F).

\* A draft letter outlining the results of the survey and project update was developed to put in Staff News for all employees.

#### April 2017 – July 2017

\* A Respect and Civility survey was sent out to a random group of RRC staff to help identify issues specific to the topic. This will help the Working Group to prioritize strategies.

\* The Working Group met 3 times and each member will work on an “inventory of activities” within their department that relates to Respect and Civility

\* A draft Achieving Civility self -assessment tool was developed to be worked on over the summer (appendix G).

\* Staff Learning and Development are working on a “Conflict Resolution” workshop for managers.

\* Human Resources, MGEU, and the Harassment Officer are working on a “road map” to share with staff when/if they experience disrespect to help them know where to go and who to ask for help.

\* Human Resources is working on a “Respect and Civility” policy but do not think it will be finished by the end of the project

\* Both JWH&S Committees were briefed on the project.

\* The RRC S&HS Training Co-ordinator shared the RRC experience on a panel at the QNET Conference (more in KTE)

\* A RRC representative attended 2 Community of Practice meetings to share our project.

\* Meetings with MGEU to plan a workshop at the MFL Health and Safety Conference took place.

\* Results of the survey and project update were shared at a lunch and learn during NAOSH week and 2 sessions at each campus were delivered in June.

#### August 2017 – November 2017

\* The RRC project “journey” was shared at the Safe Work Voices In Prevention Conference Sept. 29 (more in KTE)

\* The Working Group members submitted their “Inventory of Activities”(appendix C is an excel spreadsheet of submitted activities to date) , Staff Learning and Development are offering several courses that relate to Respect and Civility.

\* RRC was represented at the Community of Practice.

- \* The RRC project and the role of the JWH&S Committee was shared at the MFL Health and Safety Conference Nov. 6, 2017 (more in KTE).
- \* The RRC Health and Safety Certificate instructors were approached regarding inclusion of the new standard and the JWH&S Committee role in their program.
- \* The Advisory Committee met.
- \* Both JWH&S Committees were given a project update  
December 2017 – March 2018
- \* The Advisory Committee met January 5, 2018 and discussed the evaluation plan, future plans at RRC in regards to Psychological Health and Safety, and the possibility of meeting with WCB regarding the project and its successes in May or June.
- \* An evaluation survey was developed and delivered in February 2018 to both JWH&S Committee members, Working Group, and Advisory Committee. Results are attached as appendix E
- \* A meeting was held with RRC Health and Safety Certificate course staff regarding including the New Standard and the possible role of the JWH&S Committee in their course. They were very receptive and would gladly use a short video to promote the standard and committee role. The Creative Communications Dept. at RRC is happy to work with us on the development of a short video that can be used for training at RRC. This video could be used by any JWH&S Committee member to promote Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace and explore how the Committee can play a role. Please note it was decided not to produce this video.

## Answering our questions:

### 1. What role can the JWH&S Committee/s take in creating and maintaining a psychologically safe workplace?

*The first “learning” discussed at the Advisory Committee meeting and shared at the SafeWork Conference “Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace; making it the Standard, was the fact that many workers do not understand the role of the Health and Safety Committee or how it works. There was much discussion early on regarding the role of Health and Safety especially in the factor chosen which was Respect and Civility. The JWH&S Committee deal with hazards on a regular basis albeit some of the Psychological Health and Safety factors are new “hazards” to the Committee. The Committee most often deals with regulations and laws and the New Standard is neither, which posed some barriers. Other barriers were:*

- \* the fact that the Committee meets only 4 times/year*
- \* the members all have jobs other than workplace health and safety*
- \* there were other priority objectives that need to be focused on*
- \* other stakeholders in the organization already have this as their focus and responsibility*
- \* there was lack of expertise*
- \* the JWH&S Committee had no direct organizational responsibility at Red River College*
- \* the committee did not have decision making power in this area.*

*The project did however, unite Health and Safety with many other departments. The Working Group and the Advisory Committee had members from RRC who had never met together before. The project pointed out the need for many departments to work together on Psychological Health and Safety but it actually brought the Health and Safety Department to the table and pointed out its strengths. You will see from the evaluation survey, attached, that there is conflicting opinions regarding the role of the Committee but most respondents felt the Committee needed to be involved. Many felt more training for members was important. The evaluation suggested the following roles for the JWH&S Committee:*

- a) Advocacy*
- b) include Psychological Health and Safety in inspections*
- c) as a stakeholder as opposed to the lead/ for input and ideas only*
- d) have no role particularly since the structure is changing*

### 2. Is in-house training an effective method of promoting psychological safety?

*The initial training (appendix A) reviewed the basic concept of the new standard, focusing on the 13 factors, outlined the project steps and objectives, and shared resources related to the new standard. The participants were asked in groups to identify a factor that is a strength at RRC and one that they felt needed some work. There was much discussion around these factors and the Guarding Minds @ Work survey results were not very different from many of the strengths and concerns raised at the workshops.*

*The training sessions created much interest and solicited many who wanted to be more involved and some were invited to be on the Working Group. Follow-up with the general*



population was mostly through the Working Group and the JWH&S Committees who were regularly updated. A lunch and learn was delivered during NAOSH week sharing the survey results and project update. The evaluations shows that some found the training sessions to be very useful while others felt it was very basic (which was the intent). It is suggested that JWH&S Committee members get more training. Mandatory training was suggested as well.

### **3. Did the strategies implemented make a difference in employees' perception of psychological safety?**

The Working group was comprised of key stakeholders who have some aspect of "Respect and Civility" involved in their work and, as mentioned earlier, included JWH&S Committee members, some of those who indicated interest from the workshops, Staff Learning and Development, Research and Planning, Safety and Health Services, Occupational Health, Harassment Officer, Employment Equity Coordinator, Mental Health Coordinator, Intercultural Services, MGEU, and Human Resources. The main strategies implemented were educationally through Staff Learning and Education and most will not be offered until fall 2018. The plan is to infuse Respect and Civility into all their sessions. Each department on the Working Group was asked to develop an "inventory of activities" (appendix C) to assess what is already being done, which indicated that much is happening at RRC in this area but some gaps were noted. The Respect and Civility survey told us the issues of the general population and their suggested remedies, some of which were addressed through Staff Learning and Development and some are still being worked on. It is unknown if any of these strategies made a difference in employee's perception as most are still in the development stage.

### **4. What are the next steps in creating and maintaining psychological safety at RRC?**

Red River College plans to continue exploring the New Standard with Safety and Health Services in a lead role.

The Director of Safety and Health Services has been given the lead for implementation. The Director of SHS is taking the Canadian Mental Health Commission Certification in Psychological Health and Safety in March and will establish an Advisory Committee (this committee will have leaders that have the ability to make decisions and implement change at this committee level) that will oversee the roll out of this Standard and possible integration and collaboration on other psychological health and safety initiatives and activities. They anticipate that there will be subcommittees built based on what is discussed at the Advisory Committee level

## **Knowledge Transfer and Exchange:**

1. Safe Work Conference, Psychological Health and Safety; Make it the Standard, held November 2016. The approximately 100 participants in this conference were mostly health and safety people as well as human resources. Kerilyn Zielinski, Safety and Health Services Training Coordinator Red River College sat on a panel sharing the project thus far. Her message: "A hazard is a hazard is a hazard. When one of the 13 factors is not being met, it is a hazard. Please keep your Health and Safety Committees involved in the New Standard activities in your organization".

2. QNET Excellence Conference May 2017. The 30-40 participants in attendance were middle managers and human resource professionals. Maureen Grace, the coordinator of the project and WCB RWIP Grant recipient, hosted a panel of 3 workplaces exploring the standard. Kerilyn once again, shared our experience from the lens of the JWH&S Committee and answered the following questions:

\* Please share with us your journey thus far outlining what made your organization interested in the New Standard: Psychological Safety in the Workplace; how did you get started; who in your organization is involved; what were your first steps; and where are you at now?

\* What do you believe enabled you to get where you are at now? Were there any barriers or setbacks?

\* What resources did you use?

\* What did you learn and what would you do differently if anything.

3. The VIP Conference September 2017. The approximately 70 participants in attendance were all JWH&S Committee co-chairs. The powerpoint slides are attached (appendix E). Maureen and Kerilyn shared "Exploring the New Standard; A Committee's Journey". The participants were asked in groups to discuss the strengths of the JWH&S Committee to lead the new standard in their organizations and concerns they have in doing so.

Strengths they shared: work closely, dialogue often, long time employees, informal leaders, have experience, already doing, progressive, innovative opportunity, willing but want regulations.

Concerns shared: losing experience to retirement, getting people on board, lack management support, not enough time, stigma, need a foundation.

We were surprised how many participants knew little about the standard and wanted more information on the standard itself as opposed to sharing our experience.

4. The MFL Health and Safety Conference November 2017. The approximately 40 participants were union members, most of which were on the JWH&S Committee in their workplaces. This was a very engaged group who had many questions as we shared our project experience. This 2 day workshop was devoted to Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace so the group would receive more education as the days unfolded.

5. The Occupational Health and Safety Certificate Course will introduce the standard so all students will receive some basic education. The power point with speaker notes, used in the education sessions for staff has been shared with the coordinator of the program.

6. The College has representation on the “Community of Practice” group lead by the MFL Occupational Health Centre. This group has members who are in different stages of implementing/exploring the new standard in their organizations and share their experiences and learnings with each other.

7. The Occupational Health Nurses’ Interest Group were approached and offered a workshop on our project but did not respond.

A total of over 250 people outside RRC heard about our project and Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. This does not include students of the Occupational Health and Safety Certificate course.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committees should not be the lead in implementing Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace but can introduce the new standard, advocate, promote, and/or educate. It is recommended that a workgroup, ideally lead by Safety and Health Services Department staff (if such exists in the organization), that includes a mix of interested staff, Health & Safety Committee members, Wellness Committee members, managers, executive, union, human resources, occupational health, and others, be created to implement this new standard.
2. Training on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is required at many levels in organizations interested in pursuing the possibility of adopting the new standard.
3. Educate/inform all employees, in all departments at all levels, about the role of the Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committee and how it functions
4. The Executive of the organization must be involved and support the implementation of the new standard.
5. An assessment of the current status is important to understand where the organization is in relation to the 13 factors, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and to assist them in knowing where they want to be. This can be done by a survey (Guarding Minds @ Work is a validated, anonymous survey which is free to the public), an inventory of activities already in place related to the 13 factors to identify gaps, focus groups with different staff members, or an assessment tool developed by the organization.
6. Involve employees in the assessment and development of strategies for improvement. The work and subsequent actions of the organizing/working groups must be communicated to the general employee population.
7. Organizations exploring Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace become involved with the Community of Practice organized by the MFL Occupational Health Centre. The participants are all involved in promoting the new standard in their workplaces and share their successes and challenges.

Submitted by Maureen Grace, Hamilton Grace and Associates, RWIP recipient with input from Red River College.

