

APPENDIX 2

Strategy Update: Delivering Value, Creating Demand, The Brain Story in Action



ALBERTA FAMILY WELLNESS INITIATIVE

STRATEGY UPDATE: Delivering Value, Creating Demand, The Brain Story in Action

As of April 15, 2019



Alberta Family Wellness Initiative

Strategy Update:

Delivering Value, Creating Demand, The Brain

Story in Action

As of April 15, 2019

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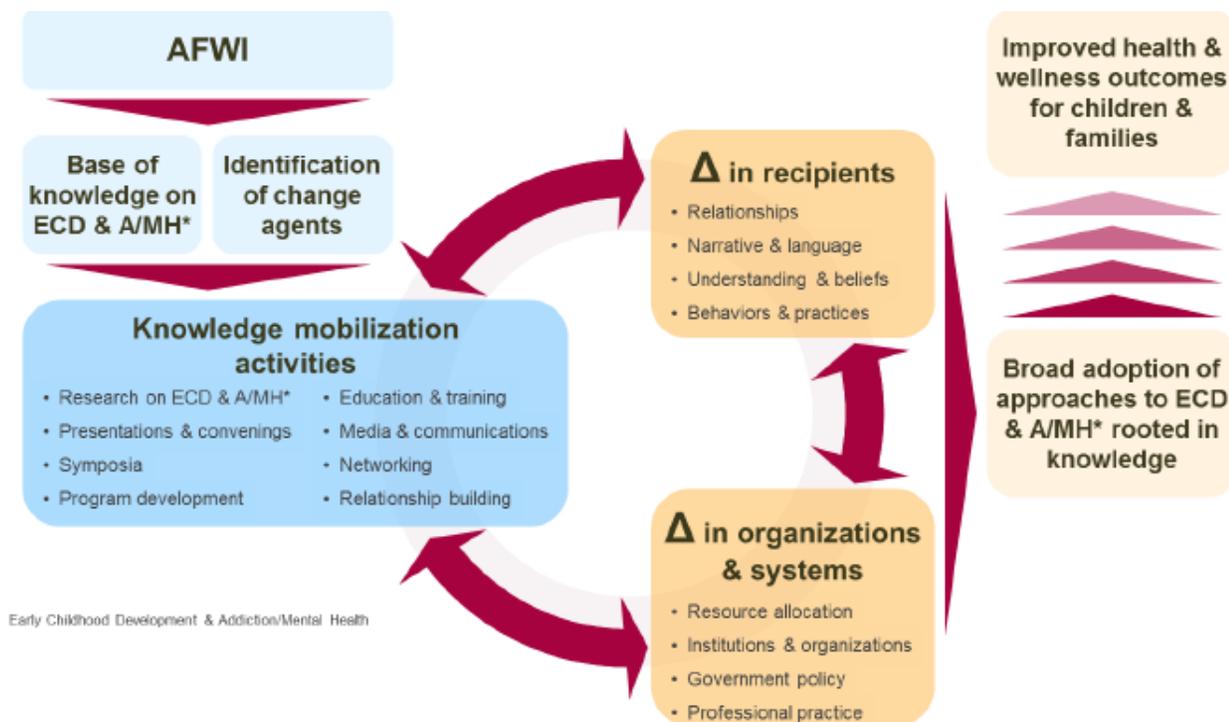
Palix Foundation

BUILDING THE ALBERTA FAMILY WELLNESS INITIATIVE (AFWI) THEORY OF CHANGE

About 12 years ago, the Palix Foundation created the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (AFWI) to use its resources to mobilize the Brain Story[1] and catalyse positive change at individual, organizational and systems levels grounded in this knowledge. Through AFWI, the Foundation engages and collaborates with a wide variety and number of change agents and leaders from across health, education, justice, human services, business, academia, and different levels of government to help improve health and well-being outcomes for all children and families, with a focus on mental health and addiction. These brain story informed change agents are the key ingredient for broader systems change. Shifting individual and collective beliefs, attitudes and behaviours across sectors based on the knowledge and a common language, is the critical first step in building leadership and enabling brain story based practice, organizational and systems change along the pathway to better outcomes. (See: [AFWI Theory of Change](#) below).

Since its inception, the Palix Foundation has invested about \$85M in the AFWI.

Illustration 1: AFWI Theory of Change



[1] Over the last decade or so, the US based National Scientific Council on the Developing Child led by the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, in collaboration with the FrameWorks Institute, created the Brain Story, which represents the synthesized and translated body of knowledge related to brain and child development, and in particular the role that experiences play in this developmental process. (See: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/>). The brain story consists of the following metaphors – brain architecture, toxic stress, serve and return, air traffic control, and the resilience scale.

While AFWI is primarily Alberta focused when it comes to change “on the ground”, interest in the initiative, learnings from the research and evaluation projects it supports (e.g. [Change in Mind](#)), and most importantly, in the brain story knowledge itself, is growing and expanding significantly, both nationally and internationally.

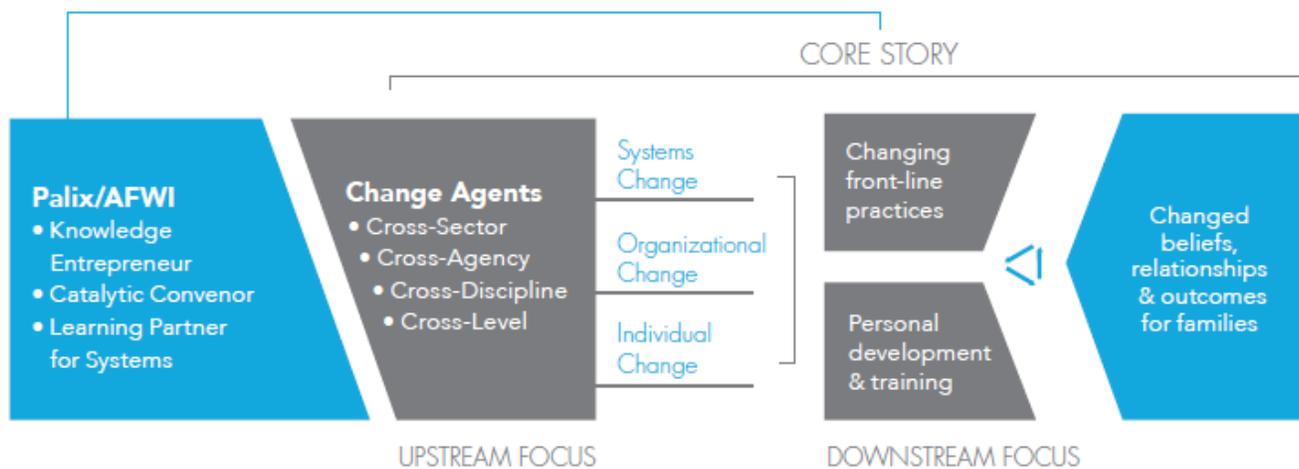
As well, over the years, funders, including government, community funders, research funders, and other philanthropists are increasingly interested in the brain story knowledge and how to shift requests for support and their investments to align with it. This is an important development since it is creating more opportunities to leverage resources and for collaboration amongst like-minded funding partners.

Overall, AFWI, as a vehicle for catalytic convening, supporting knowledge entrepreneurs (change agents) and engaging in partnerships for learning and change, has been an effective strategy for mobilizing the brain story knowledge to catalyse positive change. (See: [Theory of Philanthropy and AFWI evaluation](#)).

BRAIN STORY CERTIFICATION AS A TOOL FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Building on its success and growing momentum over the first decade (see [Can One Story Change Everything? A Ten Year Report](#)) about two years ago, with the launch of the [AFWI Embedding the Brain Story strategy \(2017-2019\)](#), the Foundation decided to focus even more effort and resources on embedding the brain story into practice and systems by building, enabling and reinforcing deeper competency in this knowledge base in the workforce on the front lines (see Illustration 2). With advice from an expert curriculum committee, it developed and launched a free and accessible [Brain Story Certification Course](#) on the AFWI website two years ago. Adding to the numerous knowledge products AFWI has created over the years (e.g. [The Brain Builders video](#)) through the course, the Foundation is accelerating, reinforcing and scaling up free access to a standard of knowledge about brain development and its link to lifespan outcomes to tens of thousands of new change agents (over 27,000 people are enrolled in the course). Feedback from those taking the course is also informing AFWI's iterative and flexible approach to adding value to processes focused on embedding the knowledge. (See attached Brain Story Course Feedback Report, April 15, 2019).

Illustration 2: AFWI focus on front-line professionals and practices



While there may be a number of courses available with similar objectives, what differentiates the Brain Story Certification Course is its purpose as a change management tool potentially creating a standard of knowledge for the global community with wide reach, use and application. The knowledge itself is an intervention that can significantly inform and catalyse new ways of conceptualizing and assessing programmatic and organizational strategies and policies, as well as new approaches to practice aimed at improving outcomes.

With the course, and an overall strategic focus on deeper knowledge embedding, AFWI's convening strategy has also evolved over the years from hosting large symposia in Alberta in the early years to holding numerous, in person local convenings in all corners of the province since 2014. (See Illustration 3). These smaller convenings held in collaboration with local change agents have increasingly focused on facilitating discussions about what the knowledge in the course means in particular contexts, sectors (and across sectors), professional groups and organizations, and how to apply it and evaluate impact.

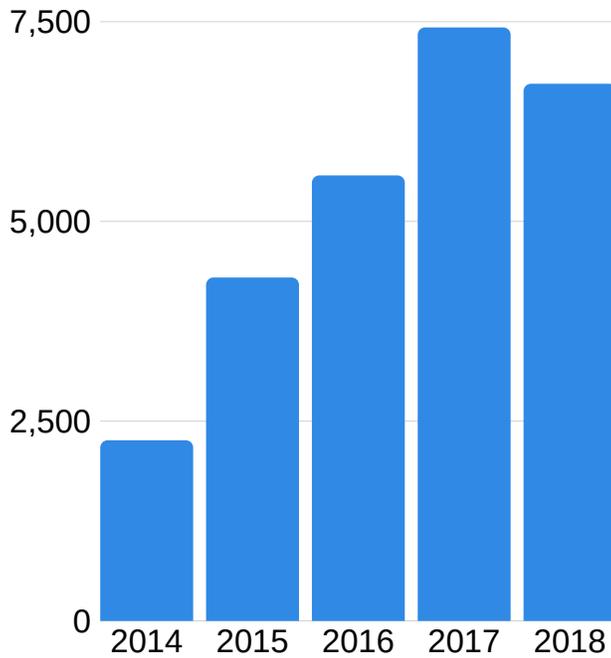
Moreover, while AFWI has initiated many of these convenings (i.e. through a "push" strategy), AFWI experts (eg. the Scientific Director, the Chair and Patron, the CEO and/or expert consultants) have been increasingly invited to events held by others both in Alberta and elsewhere too (e.g. in the US, the UK, the EU and other parts of Canada). At these events, they present about the brain story, the AFWI model and provide information about the course and its impact. Through AFWI activities more generally, and now more specifically, with the new on-line course, demand or "pull"[2] for the knowledge is increasing as change agents gain deeper knowledge competency and use their leadership to catalyze further knowledge uptake and application (egs. making the course mandatory in their organizations and workforce; requiring the course as a prerequisite in the hiring process; integrating the knowledge into programs, policy and practice). Evidence of how to systematically apply the knowledge to change practice and policy is also on the rise, most notably through the [Frontiers of Innovation initiative at the Harvard Center on the Developing Child \(FOI\)](#), Change in Mind, and several Alberta based projects.

[2] An example of a "pull" strategy informed by the brain story knowledge is Foundations of Caregiver Support, the Alberta Government's framework for assessing and supporting organizations and programs related to children's services. Through the contracting process, organization's seeking government support must demonstrate knowledge competency related to brain development, loss and grief and trauma.

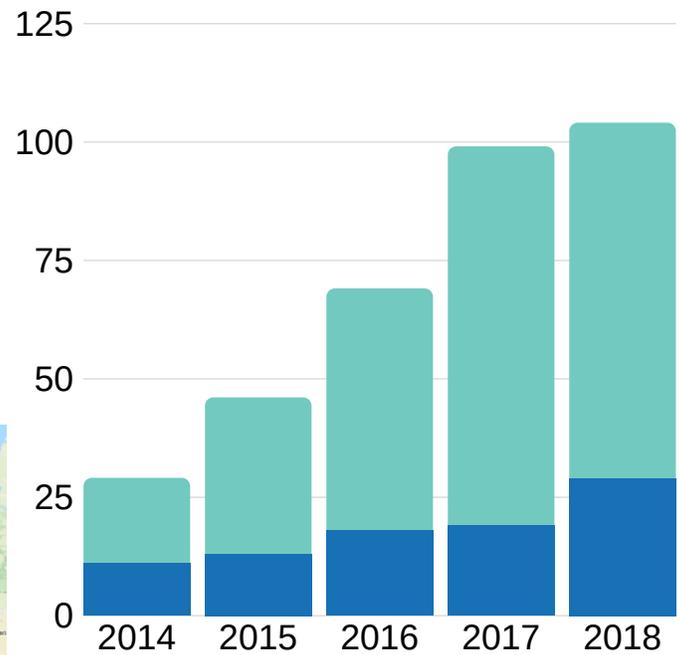
Illustration 3:

ALBERTA FAMILY WELLNESS INITIATIVE STRATEGY UPDATE Insights 2014-2018

Number of People at AFWI Events by Year



Number of Events by Year



AFWI events (push)

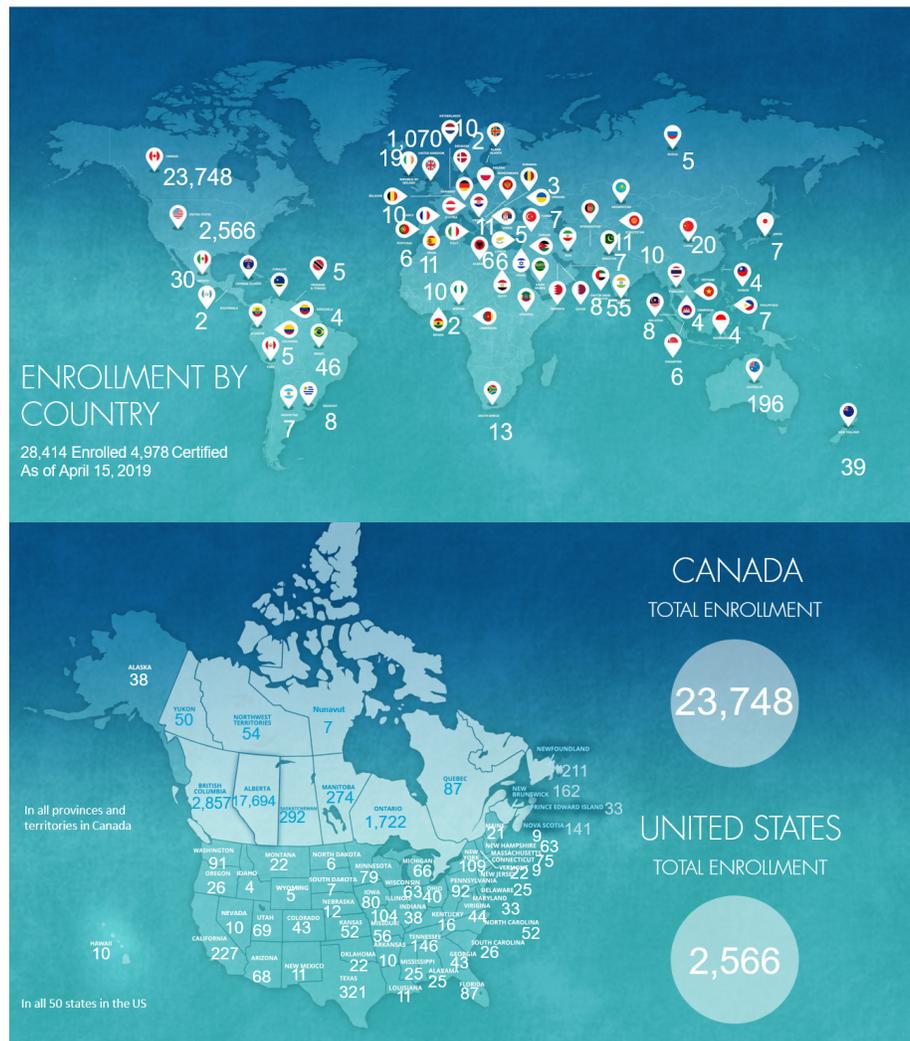


Community requested events (pull)

AFWI STRATEGY UP TO 2019: SCALING THE KNOWLEDGE AND BUILDING CAPACITY TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

Based on incremental qualitative and quantitative data gathered about the impact of the AFWI strategy over the years and more specifically about the on-line course since it was launched, it is clear that demand for the knowledge is on the rise and interest in the course as the vehicle to meet this demand is growing. (See Illustration 4). To improve user experience, iterative feedback from course participants has been incorporated into a recently revised version of the course (April 2019). Thanks to support from the [Canadian Centre for Substance Use and Addiction \(CCSA\)](#) the course is also now available in French thereby enhancing its value as a national and international resource. CCSA also requires the course for those participating in its national, multi-year [Brain Builder's Lab](#) initiative modeled after AFWI symposia processes and Change in Mind also requires it as a basic knowledge competency for organizations wishing to be part of the growing international Change in Mind network.

Illustration 4: Brain Story Certification Course Analytics



From what we are learning and observing, there are many existing and emerging policies and practices that are aligned with the brain story knowledge. Efforts to more explicitly and deliberately integrate the knowledge are also well underway. We've observed that an important first step to moving in these directions is scaling access to and deeper understanding of the knowledge itself. This is the purpose of the Brain Story Certification Course. It is filling a knowledge gap, attracting intended target audiences and catalyzing change agent driven discussion and action focused on using the knowledge to improve policy, practice and outcomes and to develop new ways to assess impact. The knowledge itself is an important antecedent to further action and change.

AFWI STRATEGY 2019 ONWARDS: INCREASING DEMAND FOR IMPROVING PRACTICE, DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION

While the course is enjoying significant early success, given the potential global audience for it and demand so far, even more effort in attracting enrollees and encouraging completion is needed. This could, in turn, increase and demonstrate the value of the course further. Catalyzing this momentum and supporting related efforts is a priority for AFWI. Moreover, with increasing leadership from change agents who are making the course mandatory in their organizations, there is an important and timely opportunity to deliberately encourage and develop more of a distributed leadership model for course uptake and knowledge application, particularly into practice. Deeper knowledge embedding and innovation in practice depends on these leaders and what they are learning. AFWI is exploring new ways to support their efforts based on iterative feedback and a number of possible strategic approaches. In particular, there are opportunities to more deeply understand and assess changes in practice and their impact on outcomes (see Illustration 5). As changes agents are becoming increasingly more sophisticated in the brain story knowledge and adjusting their practices accordingly, it is important to support them to systematically assess, understand, document and share these changes in practice, and how they contribute to improved child and family outcomes.

Frameworks[3] and concepts[4], including the resilience scale metaphor, can significantly advance a more explicit and detailed approach to understand effective practice change in different contexts and how to then more systematically evaluate such change with greater specificity and detail. FOI's growing body of brain science-based interventions is very useful in this regard[5].

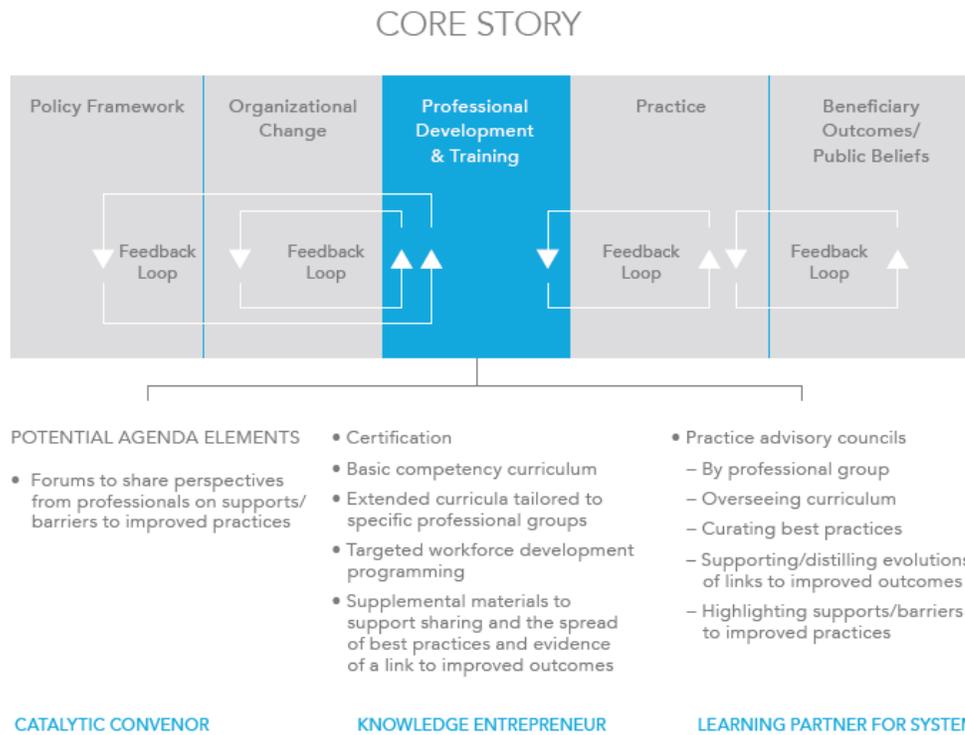
[3] See: Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families at this link:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/three-early-childhood-development-principles-improve-child-family-outcomes/>

[4] To learn more about resilience see: <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/brains-journey-to-resilience> and <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/>

[5] <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/current-frontiers-innovation-portfolio-projects/>

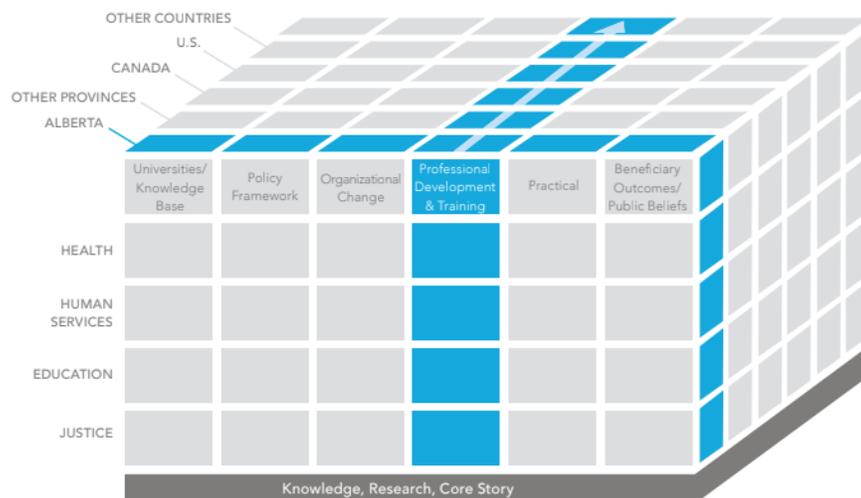
Illustration 5: Iterative feedback informs strategic directions and action to move towards improved outcomes



CONCLUSION

Given this early momentum with the course, and the potential for significantly more, over the next few years, AFWI will focus even more strategically on the Brain Story Course as a global standard of knowledge and vehicle for **delivering value, creating demand and catalyzing brain story action**. Partnership and collaboration with leaders in Alberta, including those from indigenous communities, as well as in other jurisdictions outside Alberta where impact could be significant (e.g. nationally through CCSA and the Healthy Brains for Healthy Lives Initiative at McGill University; US states, such as Texas and California, and the UK) is central to this strategy (see Illustration 6). AFWI will continue to be opportunistic and nimble within this more focused endeavour and proactively learn and adapt with partners and collaborators worldwide as the new strategy unfolds.

Illustration 6: The course is a global resource



Better health and well-being for Alberta families is within reach. By empowering change agents to understand and act upon the Brain Story, the AFWI is sharing tools to improve lifelong outcomes for physical and mental health, including addiction.



AlbertaFamilyWellness.org/Training

Palix Foundation
#540, 1100- 1st Street SE
Calgary, Alberta T2G 1B1
CANADA
Office (403) 215-4490