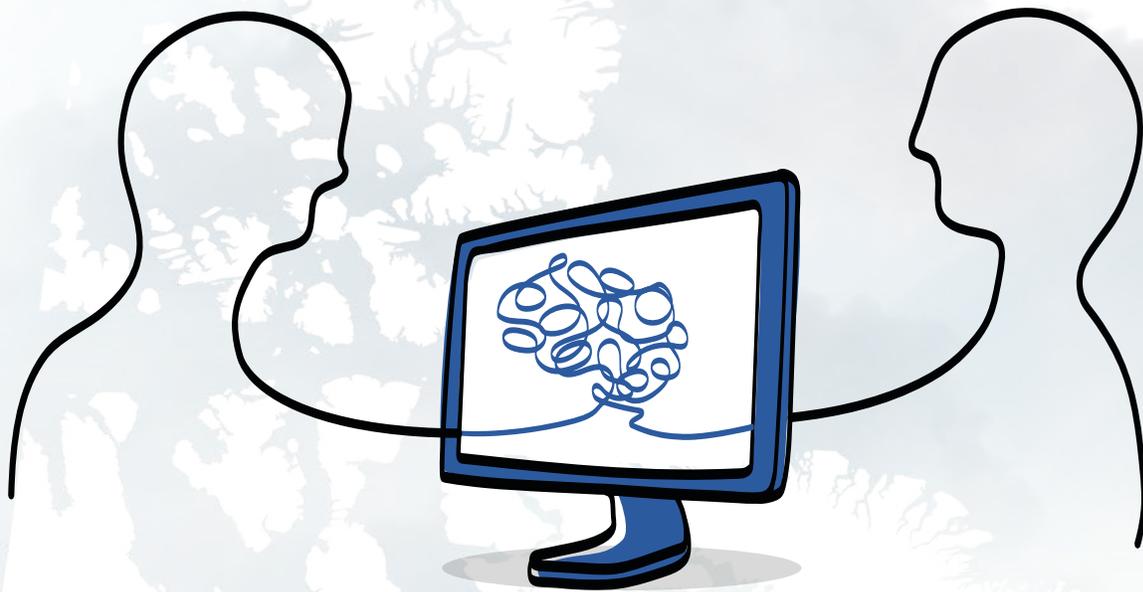




# Telemedicine in Mental Health

## Project Evaluation Report



## EXTERNAL EVALUATION DONE BY



François Fortin Consultant

CP 6003, Iqaluit, Nunavut, X0A 0H0 – francois@ffortin.ca

## EVALUATION REPORT SUBMITTED TO:

Jérémie Roberge

*Executive Director*

*Réseau Santé en français au Nunavut (RÉSEFAN)*

P.O. Box 1516, Iqaluit NU X0A 0H0

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## CONTACT US:



[www.resefan.ca](http://www.resefan.ca)



[info@resefan.ca](mailto:info@resefan.ca)



867-222-2107



@resefan



@ResefanNunavut

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# 1

## “TELEMEDICINE IN MENTAL HEALTH” PROJECT CONTEXT

### **PROJECT INTENTION:**

For Francophones to be provided with access to mental health services in their language.

### **PROJECT OBJECTIVE:**

To promote access to public and private mental health services for Nunavut Francophones, including youth, and to offer training in mental health for the Franco-Nunavummiut community.

1. Form agreements with public care providers to facilitate access for Francophones to mental health services via telemedicine.
2. Form agreements with private sector psychotherapy and counselling providers who offer services via videoconferencing.
3. Offer mental health training to health care professionals and community members.

### **PROJECT DURATION:**

3 years (April 2018-June 2021).

### **INITIATIVES AND BENEFITS FOR OUR COMMUNITY:**

- Access to mental health services using telemedicine or videoconferencing through the public health care system
- Access to psychotherapy and counselling services using videoconferencing through the private sector
- Dissemination of available services after implementation
- Mental health issues training offered for the community and health care professionals



## **PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTORS:**

- Government of Nunavut Department of Health, Mental Health Division
- Familio and the Montreal Therapy Centre
- Embrace Life Council
- Commission scolaire francophone du Nunavut (CSFN)

## **ACHIEVEMENTS:**

- Worked on an ongoing basis with the Department of Health Mental Health Division to identify a service provider and implement public mental health and counselling services through videoconferences.
- Implemented a private psychotherapy and counselling service via videoconferencing through Familio and the Montreal Therapy Centre.
- Worked with Embrace Life Council to organize training for the community in French as well as for professionals.
- Worked with Guillaume Vermette, a humanitarian clown, to hold lectures on persistence in school with young people and workshops with the community. – Cancelled due to COVID-19
- Implemented a communications strategy to promote new private virtual mental health services: promotional posters and inserts, ads on CRFT radio, editorial advertising in the newspaper Le Nunavoix, email via Mailchimp and press release.

# 2

## METHODOLOGY

RÉSEFAN contracted the independent services of François Fortin Consultant to evaluate the “Telemedicine in mental health” project.

The evaluation was performed in the winter and spring of 2021. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person and by telephone. They lasted from 40 to 80 minutes. In addition to consulting the bibliographic material, this evaluation included meetings with four individuals:

- A mental health program manager of the Nunavut Department of Health;
- A director of the Commission scolaire francophone du Nunavut (CSFN);
- A manager and employee of RÉSEFAN;
- Analysis of the bibliographic and video documents.

# 3

## PROJECT SUCCESS FACTORS

Through this project, RÉSEFAN was able to achieve goals set on many different levels. Furthermore, it should be noted that the context of the pandemic was conducive to RÉSEFAN's project as it facilitated virtual support methods, which have become more commonly accepted and widely used.

### PUBLIC

- A positive and promising partnership has been formed between RÉSEFAN and the Government of Nunavut's mental health program. The relationships are positive and productive. The managers are receptive and eager to offer services in French.
- The mental health program manager with the Nunavut Department of Health is very invested in offering services via videoconferencing. These initiatives were non-existent<sup>1</sup> prior to the implementation of RÉSEFAN's project. RÉSEFAN's efforts seem to have directly resulted in the development of the public offering of mental health services via videoconferencing in English. In March 2020, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed by the Department of Health and St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton in Ontario to offer this new public service. The service should be available as of July 2021.
- RÉSEFAN's work with Nunavut's mental health program also seems to have directly resulted in a call for proposals to enable the remote offering of mental health services in Nunavut (*SOA – Remotely Delivered Mental Health and Wellness Programs*). This call for proposals will close on July 30, 2021. This initiative will help to improve and diversify the remote offering of mental health services.
- According to the Government of Nunavut's website, the Homewood Health Centre will be submitting a service proposal in response to this call for proposals. This centre offers bilingual services, in English and in French. If this establishment or another bilingual applicant is accepted, it will guarantee the offering of services in French, upon request.
- Once this service is available in French, the Department seems to feel positively about RÉSEFAN helping to promote the service among the public.

<sup>1</sup> GN and federal government employees have access to French-language psychological counselling services via telephone free of charge. These services are not available to the general public.

- CSFN is working with participants from Saskatchewan who have a great deal of experience with remote support, are generally bilingual and often work with Indigenous individuals (they must teach about treaties, for example). To address the lack of access to computers and stable internet, CSFN lent internet-enabled computers to families to allow them to use the parental support services.

## PRIVATE

- Following a rigorous selection process (one 15th of the identified potential partners were considered), RÉSEFAN and its partners chose two providers from Quebec to provide remote psychotherapy and counselling services: Familio Saguenay Inc. and the Montreal Therapy Centre. RÉSEFAN's initiative generated interest among these service providers to work in Nunavut and allowed the organization to guide the providers through Nunavut's accreditation process.
- The Montreal Therapy Centre offers various approaches, which means it can serve a variety of clients and respond to diverse needs: cognitive behavioural therapy is the predominant approach, but the Centre also offers art therapy and drama therapy.
- The Montreal Therapy Centre also works with providers from several cultural communities, ensuring a culturally diverse service offering adapted to the new realities of immigration in Nunavut.
- These providers offer services in French as well as in other languages, such as English, Spanish, Farsi, Arabic and others, which allows them to offer services to a larger clientele, and could potentially help ensure continuity of the service in Nunavut.
- Familio Saguenay Inc. also provides intervention plans for children and adolescents having difficulties. Familio provides specialized services for adolescents and their families. As such, these services meet RÉSEFAN's objective to serve youth.
- Remote meetings are taking place via the secure and user-friendly video chat platform Vsee. Participants can also use Skype or Zoom to communicate with their patients. If there are problems with the internet connection or patients are suddenly overwhelmed by emotion, it is also possible to continue the meeting by telephone or text.

## TRAINING

- RÉSEFAN successfully organized three mental health training activities: a training session on trauma-informed practice (October 2020); REACH OUT suicide prevention training (February and March 2021) in collaboration with the Embrace Life Council; and a webinar with Embrace Life Council on what parents should know about social media and online safety (April 2021). These three activities were provided in French and were available to professionals and the general public. They all had an excellent participation rate; the in-person events reached the pandemic capacity limit.
- RÉSEFAN had the documents for the REACH OUT training session on suicide prevention translated into French, which will allow this training to be accessible to the Francophone community for years to come.
- These training sessions were offered to CSFN employees and individuals. These three training sessions were very popular and reached maximum capacity. As a result of the pandemic restrictions, not all interested individuals were able to participate in the training.
- RÉSEFAN's objective was met: more Iqalumiut are now better equipped to identify mental health needs and to provide mental health support.
- Familio offers a wide variety of services, including training, conferences and workshops, namely in early childhood, which could benefit participants in Nunavut.
- CSFN appreciates RÉSEFAN's work and the positive impacts of the mental health training sessions it has initiated. CSFN would like this type of training to be offered on a recurring basis each year.





## COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

- Throughout the project, we believe RÉSEFAN has succeeded in designing and implementing a coherent and effective communication strategy to reach its objectives, namely to promote the remote offering of mental health services and to broaden the training offering for participants and the general public.
- RÉSEFAN organized a virtual launch event for the new private service on June 16, 2021. The event had a favourable participation rate and, most importantly, the participants were highly engaged, asking many relevant questions that enriched the presentation. After this event, there were many requests to access the services, which shows that the project and the launch event were a success.
- After the launch event, the Government of Nunavut's Culture and Heritage department contacted RÉSEFAN to learn more, which could potentially lead to future partnerships and/or funding.
- As evidence of the effectiveness of the promotional approach of these three training sessions, it should be noted that they all reached capacity and additional requests for registration had to be denied. Although the capacity was limited due to health restrictions, the participation rate was still very good for the Iqaluit context.
- RÉSEFAN will make this year's webinars and videos, including the launch of services with Familio and the Montreal Therapy Centre, available on its website and YouTube channel, which will provide visibility for the service and help to increase awareness on the types of mental health support services that are available.
- The Government of Nunavut Department of Health seems to be willing to support the promotion of these French-language services when they will be available.

# 4

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### PUBLIC

- Developing partnerships takes time. For example, RÉSEFAN began its efforts with the Government of Nunavut's mental health program in 2018. Although these efforts were impactful and positive, accessibility to mental health services via videoconferencing is still not available in French. Additionally, the agreement signed in March 2020 by the Department of Health and St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, due in large part to RÉSEFAN's work, was still not in effect in June 2020, although the process was underway.
- Although this new mental health service via videoconferencing is in large part a result of RÉSEFAN's efforts, it will not be offered in French because the partnership was signed with an institution that does not have any French-speaking professionals on staff.
- It seems that mental health counselling and psychology services are not a priority of the Government of Nunavut. Program funding has been significantly reduced and the mental health team, which comprised of 25 workers just a few years ago, was down to four workers in 2020. While these were not official cuts, positions that became vacant were not filled. These positions became vacant due to retirement, moving, dissatisfaction due to difficulties acquiring permanent status and lack of housing (18-month wait list). The new virtual services offered in partnership with St. Joseph's will not be able to bridge this significant gap.
- According to a participant contacted through this evaluation process, the Department of Health does not seem to be willing to promote mental health counselling and psychology services either. Additionally, there is either a small communications campaign or none at all to promote accessibility to these services, and the website for the Government of Nunavut's mental health programs does not clearly indicate how to access them.
- This lack of accessibility and visibility of mental health resources in English and Inuktitut, which is the priority of the Department of Health, is delaying efforts to develop this service offering in French.

## PRIVATE

- The first challenge identified by the project leads is the accreditation process for private providers or professionals seeking to offer psychotherapy services in Nunavut. While the process is not very complicated in theory, it still presents some challenges. The system is not digitized and an exam is not required, but the application verification process by the health authorities takes quite some time, according to information received during the evaluation. Furthermore, the information is only available in English. The first partner identified by RÉSEFAN in the context of this project, Meetual, has never succeeded in obtaining accreditation for an individual in Nunavut. While other factors contributed to the difficulties preventing a partnership with Meetual, bureaucratic roadblocks were a contributing factor.
- To access virtual services with Familio and the Montreal Therapy Centre, patients must have access to a computer or mobile device and one of the required applications (e.g. Zoom or Skype). While this would not be a problem for the majority of Franco-Nunavummiut, it could be a challenge for those with financial limitations, such as youth, or those who are less familiar with technology.
- Patients must also have access to a stable internet connection, which is not easy to find or guaranteed in Nunavut.
- Lastly, patients must have access to a private space, which can also be a challenge in Nunavut due to a critical lack of space and housing.
- Despite the proven advantages and benefits of virtual services, a great deal of information and nuance can be lost in videoconferencing, and even more so by telephone, which doesn't allow for body language to be taken into account. This type of communication also requires more effort and concentration from both the provider and the patient.



## TRAINING

- Despite a very good participation rate, not all interested individuals were able to participate in the training sessions organized by RÉSEFAN, as a result of the pandemic restrictions.

## PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN AND DISSEMINATION OF AVAILABLE SERVICES

- Once these public services are available in French, the Government of Nunavut Department of Health will require help promoting the service.
- In addition to the communications strategy implemented by RÉSEFAN, it could be beneficial to provide occasional promotional support to Familio and the Montreal Therapy Centre. They currently seem to be relying on word-of-mouth, but it's possible that this will not be sufficient in a small community with a high turnover rate. École des Trois-Soleils and Les Petits Nanooks daycare could help with this.

# 5

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### PUBLIC

- 1 Within the context of two programs wrapping up in 2023, the national program by the Société Santé en français (SSF), RÉSEFAN's main funder, as well as the Action Plan for Official Languages, Uqausivut 2.0, RÉSEFAN needs to find the funding necessary to continue to train and develop the partnership with the Government of Nunavut's programs in mental health office with the goal of supporting accessibility to quality mental health services in French. RÉSEFAN's financing for these initiatives ends in 2021, which leaves a two-year shortfall. This evaluation clearly shows the advantages of RÉSEFAN's initiatives, as well as the activities that can still be undertaken to improve the situation. Additionally, it has become clear through discussions with the Department of Health that it is important to have funding for specific projects in order to collaborate with the department. The content of the report should serve as RÉSEFAN's business case and as a tool to reach out to funders in order to fill the funding gap.
- 2 It seems that a virtual service offering could increase stability in terms of providers. Nunavut's mental health program has seen a great deal of instability with a high turnover rate among providers (two years maximum, often less), which negatively impacts the quality of the service. RÉSEFAN should check in with the program directors annually to confirm this assumption. This annual check-in could also be an opportunity to see whether the service is being offered in French, whether it's accessible and being delivered adequately, to check how long the wait time is to access the service, etc.
- 3 RÉSEFAN should invite other Francophone or bilingual businesses to respond to the call for proposals by the Government of Nunavut Department of Health (SOA – *Remotely Delivered Mental Health and Wellness Programs*).
- 4 Given the gaps in the Department of Health's communication strategy and the lack of priority regarding a French service offering, RÉSEFAN should promote the service among the Francophone community once it is available in French.



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**5** RÉSEFAN could help promote the parental support services offered virtually by CSFN.

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**6** RÉSEFAN could explore the possibility of collaborating with the Akausisarvik treatment centre, which offers counselling services to youth on an appointment or drop-in basis. They occasionally offer services in French and have shown they are open to collaborating with French organizations. It could be wise to develop a virtual service offering.

## PRIVATE

**7** RÉSEFAN could assess the possibility of loaning computers, with internet connection, upon request to increase accessibility. CSFN already provides this option, but it could be applied to the new services through Familio and the Montreal Therapy Centre. RÉSEFAN would need to find a partner to manage these loans if it's not prepared to manage this on its own.

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**8** RÉSEFAN could further explore the possibility of finding a space for private mental health consultations. CSFN has shown it would be open to this possibility. A paid space could be put in place, as a pilot project to start, funded by a donor and/or the users. The municipality or the Government of Nunavut could also be consulted as part of this exploration process. Apex's community room or another space could be rented one day per month to accommodate the appointments, for example.

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**9** RÉSEFAN could also further explore the option of facilitating occasional visits to Nunavut by the certified professional from Familio if he or she works with an established minimum number of families.

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**10** The new services through Familio and the Montreal Therapy Centre must be used a certain amount in order for the offering to be sustainable. RÉSEFAN should follow up with stakeholders to keep abreast of the successes and challenges while establishing the services and it should support the actions necessary to ensure the sustainability of the services.

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These providers offer services in French as well as in other languages, such as English, Spanish, Farsi, Arabic and others, which allows them to offer services to a larger clientele, and could potentially help ensure continuity of the service in Nunavut. With this in mind, RÉSEFAN should also encourage and support the efforts of the Montreal Therapy Centre and Familio to raise awareness of their services among the majority community.

## TRAINING

12

Familio offers a wide variety of services, including training, conferences and workshops, namely in early childhood, which could benefit participants in Nunavut. Promoting and organizing training sessions and workshops could also help to ensure continuity of the service. RÉSEFAN could support Familio in this area.

13

CSFN appreciates RÉSEFAN's work and the positive impacts of the mental health training sessions it organizes. CSFN would like this type of training to be offered on an annual basis. RÉSEFAN should work toward offering this type of mental health training annually. CSFN feels that training sessions could be offered during professional development week.

## PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN AND DISSEMINATION OF AVAILABLE SERVICES

14

Once these public services are available in French, the Government of Nunavut Department of Health will require help promoting the service.

15

In addition to the communications strategy implemented by RÉSEFAN, it could be beneficial to provide occasional promotional support to Familio and the Montreal Therapy Centre. They currently seem to be relying on word-of-mouth, but it's possible that this will not be sufficient in a small community with a high turnover rate. RÉSEFAN should encourage and support efforts to promote its services, including by sharing the service launch video. École des Trois-Soleils and Les Petits Nanooks daycare could also help with this.

# 6

## ARGUMENTS



Many individuals who wish to receive mental health support are unable to access the professional support or treatment that they need. Even in a developed country such as Canada, accessing services can be difficult and it depends on the region and the availability of professionals and resources. Even when service is available, the time from the onset of symptoms to the patient receiving professional help is often too long.

Telemedicine in mental health provides unique possibilities throughout the country, but especially in Nunavut's sociogeographical context, marked by remoteness and isolation. In certain cases, this delivery method may even be the only option for accessing services.

Since 2018, RÉSEFAN has been a pioneer in engaging the community to work toward virtual support services. RÉSEFAN's 2016 report on the mental health service offering in Nunavut clearly highlighted the lack of services. Additionally, in a survey conducted by RÉSEFAN in 2018, FrancoNunavummiut clearly indicated a desire and a need to receive mental health services in French. Lastly, as demonstrated in the 2021 evaluation of RÉSEFAN's initiatives (2018-2021), the approach to virtual mental health services was very well received according to providers, administrators and the community. This type of approach is expected to become more common and it has many real advantages. Furthermore, it should be noted that the context of the pandemic was conducive to the development and use of telemedicine in mental health services. Prior to the pandemic, this type of service was in its infancy and people were hesitant to use it. However, for over a year now, people have become accustomed to virtual communication, which is now commonly accepted and widely used.

This technology has transformed the services and provides exciting and innovative health care solutions. Thanks to smartphones, social media and games, patients are able to make informed decisions regarding their own health and service providers can provide innovative and cost-effective care at a significant distance.

If properly integrated, telemedicine in mental health services has proven to be as effective as face-to-face services (E-Mental Health in Canada, report by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2014), and the technology is constantly improving. According to this report, "Not only will this [e-mental health] result in more people getting help, but it will also improve the quality of care we deliver, reduce costs, and overcome challenges that are present in our current health care system." These new virtual approaches will undoubtedly help to improve the mental health of Nunavummiut.

## OVERVIEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF TELEMEDICINE IN MENTAL HEALTH:

- All of the advantages of face-to-face therapy (a helping relationship, providing different perspectives, overcoming trauma, repairing relationships, quitting unhealthy habits and creating healthier ones, self-exploration, etc.).
- Increased accessibility for those in remote regions and for people with disabilities, as well as increased access to more specialized services.
- More consistency from providers in remote areas.
- Elimination of travel time for patients.
- Reduced cost (elimination of travel and accommodation expenses for professionals).
- Helpful to individuals with social anxiety, as it seems to be easier for them to open up emotionally online.



