

# **Arts-based evaluation of the Communities ChooseWell Program**

By

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## **Acknowledgements**

### **Land Acknowledgement**

I would like to begin this report by acknowledging that I live, work, play, and learn, on Treaty Six Territory and Metis Nation Region 4. This is sacred land and carries the footsteps of and hearts of many First Nation, Metis, and Inuit people that have been here for generations. I would like to acknowledge our relationship with Mother Earth and that we are all relations. We each have a responsibility and obligation to respect this land because it has nourished, healed, protected, and embraced us. I honour and thank the many generations of Indigenous people who have taken care of this land and continue to care for and defend these lands. From my heart and spirit to yours.

“So long as the sun shall cross the sky, so long as the rivers shall run, so long as the grass shall grow, that is how long these promises I have made to you will last” – Jim Ka-Nipitehtew

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

The ChooseWell Program has been active for ten years in Alberta and provides supports and resources to Champions to influence active living, healthy eating, and quality of life at a local level. *Communities ChooseWell* is a preventative capacity-building program in Alberta offered by the Alberta Parks and Recreation Association (ARPA). It has been funded continuously since 2011 through Alberta Health which provided an opportunity to explore the long-term changes the program influenced from the perspective of long-term ChooseWell Champions. The organization – the client - was interested in learning more about the long-term impacts the program has had in communities across Alberta.

### **Evaluation question**

What changes, if any, has *Communities ChooseWell* fostered in your community through the past 10 years?

### **Methodology**

In this evaluation, an arts-based approach – specifically visual arts - was used to gain an understanding of the impact the ChooseWell Program has had according to the Champion's experience. The intention of using an arts-based approach was to give participants an opportunity to explore the ChooseWell program in a fun and engaging way.

Participants were recruited through a video invitation sent to them by email from the ChooseWell staff. Participant recruitment took place during an intense period of the COVID-19 pandemic and many people were overwhelmed with dealing with work and family during this time. Informed participation consent was obtained between August 11, 2021 and September 10, 2021. There were 28 long-term ChooseWell Champions that were identified and invited to take part in this evaluation, 6 of them accepted to participate.

A painting kit was sent to each participant to ensure equal access to art supplies and to reduce barriers to participation. The participants had a choice between watercolour or acrylic painting. The kit that was sent to participants included a guide (Appendix C) and a community context questionnaire (Appendix D) to help them create their artwork. Once completed the participants were asked to submit their artwork, questionnaire (Appendix D), and a one-page narrative to the evaluator.

There were three steps to the evaluation:

1. Individual reflection and painting – this included filling out the community context questionnaire (Appendix D) and reflecting on the years they have been a ChooseWell Champion and writing down key words and phrases that arose. Then the Champions designed and painted their artwork.
2. Quilt design session – Participants joined the evaluator for a facilitated session to share their artwork with each other and collaboratively design the quilt. This empowered participants by having them make decisions collectively about how the final quilt would look.
3. Quilt – The evaluator took the participants ideas and created a quilt design and ultimately the final quilt (Figure 9).

## **Analysis & Findings**

The analysis is based on the following data sources:

1. Results from the Community Context Questionnaire – The responses from the questionnaire are displayed in Tables 1 and 2 (Pages 39-41) in the report. Each community had different contextual factors that influence healthy eating and active living within their community.
2. Results from the Artwork and Narrative – Each piece of art has significant meaning and the narrative that goes along with it provides the artists insight into that meaning. In the report

each piece of art is presented with a quote from the artists narrative. Both the artwork and quotes from the narratives are also displayed on the quilt.

3. Quilt Design Session – The discussion from the quilt design session has been transcribed in the report to display the findings in the participant’s voice. Each piece of art has been included in the quilt and the way the quilt was designed by the group also conveys symbolic significance.

The community context questionnaire provided some information about the communities that were represented in this evaluation. There were 3 rural, 1 urban/rural, and 1 specialized municipality that were represented. Populations of the participating communities ranged from 303 people to 98,000 people. Other questions asked Champions about the walkability of their community, what active living infrastructure is in their community and what programs and organizations serve their community.

The Champions analyzed their artwork individually through the one-page narrative and at the quilt design session when they shared their artwork and explained it to the other participants. Through the design session, Champions also collectively analyzed the artwork which is shown in the final quilt and in the quilt design session transcripts. This informed the findings of this evaluation and the presentation of the findings in the quilt.

We observed a convergence between the findings and the logic model and theory of change.

The main impacts are:

- Changes in mindsets about health and wellness in the community
- The term shift was used instead of the word change which indicates that the changes were gradual and continuous throughout the ten years with the program.
- Changes in the Champions, they became community leaders and there was increased Champion capacity.

These were confirmed by the analysis. There are findings that indicate changed champion capacity with indicators outlined in the logic model (Appendix A) including increased communication between Champions and between communities. There were also findings that indicated changes in the community environments, changed community capacity and changes in population health and wellbeing. Although these changes are presented linearly in the logic model, the findings do not indicate that they occurred linearly for participants.

ChooseWell has had a positive impact on Champion capacity in the past ten years. Participants spoke of the value of the many opportunities ChooseWell provides (which are in the Theory of Change, Figure 2). They fondly spoke about the coaching received in the past and how helpful it was. There were long-term changes noted in each domain of the theory of change from this evaluation. Participants discussed the training modules and eCourses about healthy eating options which has helped them lead change in their community spaces around healthy eating. They spoke of many projects that helped support active living infrastructure in their communities such as playgrounds and trails. Many of the changes discussed are linked to quality of life for example the mental health benefits of healthy eating and active living and the cultural opportunities provided by ChooseWell.

The participants spoke of the value ChooseWell brings to rural communities and the impact of the flexibility and variety of supports that ChooseWell offers. It provides ChooseWell Champions a choice of what supports to access based on their community context and what works for their community. The importance of cultural opportunities provided was also expressed. Participants have had opportunities through ChooseWell to learn about the truth of Canada's oppressive history and the residential school system and this has been a catalyst of change for some of the Champions.

Participants conveyed through their artwork and in the quilt design session the shift they have seen in their communities because of the ChooseWell program. In particular, they spoke

about shifts in mindset and shifts in behaviours and actions.

ChooseWell has developed community leaders and supported them in making change at the local level. This evaluation demonstrates that this process led to diverse, long-term, and impactful changes in varied community settings. The ChooseWell Champions are central to the changes that are discussed in this report. These committed and engaged individuals have been part of the ChooseWell Program for ten years or more. They have become catalysts for change in their community.

## **Conclusion**

Going back to the main objective of the ChooseWell program which is to inspire and strengthen community action to create local conditions and environments that enable all Albertans to eat well and be active. We can say that in the long term this objective was achieved and that the training and support to Champions was key to identify priority actions and processes that meet important varied needs in the communities.

This arts-based evaluation has illuminated changes the ChooseWell program has fostered in communities across Alberta. This approach allowed us to explore varied long-term impacts of the ChooseWell program in different contexts. The creative process allowed for an open approach not predetermining the nature of potential impacts. This gave space to identify what matters the most (the most important impacts) according to the ChooseWell Champions. The difficulty of using this approach is that it may not be a preferred means of expression for some participants. The participants in this evaluation spoke about feeling intimidated when physically creating the artwork. The vulnerability expressed by participants was also an indicator that they felt a sense of trust. It actually helped create a shared experience when one participant expressed how vulnerable they felt, others were quick to agree and empathize with each other about the process.

Through using an arts-based approach it provided an opportunity for participants to be  
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engaged in the evaluation process and specifically the analysis phase. It created a space for different ways of knowing and being able to create and share multiple meanings.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

*Communities ChooseWell* (referred to as ChooseWell) is a preventative capacity-building program that strives to improve nutrition and physical activity in communities across Alberta. This project intends to contribute to the evaluation of the ChooseWell program through the perspective and experiences of long-term ChooseWell Champions. ChooseWell Champions are leaders in their community seeking to lead or create change at the local level to increase healthy eating and active living and who engage with the ChooseWell program in various ways and to various degrees to access resources and support. They could be policy influencers, recreation or health professionals, or community members with a passion.

The geographic reach and size of the ChooseWell program make it challenging to understand the different needs and experiences of ChooseWell Champions. The communities across Alberta that are involved in ChooseWell vary in population size, and have different contexts, such as rural, urban, rural near an urban center and First Nation communities and Métis Settlements. These contexts impact how Champion's design ways to improve community well-being that align with the ChooseWell mission.

ChooseWell is funded through Alberta Health, currently on a three-year funding cycle, and has been continuously funded since 2011 (Communities ChooseWell, n.d.). There are several Champions that have been involved in ChooseWell since 2011, providing an opportunity to explore the long-term changes fostered by the ChooseWell program from the perspective of the long-term ChooseWell Champions.

The ChooseWell Program has hired WellQuest Consulting Ltd. to undertake a full program evaluation. Tammy Horne of WellQuest Consulting Ltd. attended the initial meetings with the Program Manager and me to ensure that the scopes were complimentary without duplicating. This project intends to offer a different perspective on the impacts of the program, not to replicate the

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work being completed by the consultant. The initial idea I had started with the desire to use arts-based approaches to complete research and evaluation. I wanted to learn more about these approaches because of my creative side, specifically my quilting capabilities. I asked for a meeting with Lisa, the ChooseWell Program Manager at the time to discuss whether this would be of interest to the program.

### **1.1 Project Client**

The Alberta Parks and Recreation Association (ARPA) is a non-profit organization in Alberta that strives to improve the quality of life of Albertans through the development and promotion of recreation and parks (ARPA, 2021). ChooseWell is an ARPA program that focuses on improving nutrition and physical activity in communities across Alberta by building the capacity of ChooseWell Champions to take action (Communities ChooseWell, n.d.). ChooseWell receives funding through Alberta Health and is a strengths-based preventative program. Members of the ChooseWell program are called ChooseWell Champions and there are over 400 Champions in Alberta.

I approached the Program Manager of ChooseWell to discuss the potential of an evaluation project. The ChooseWell Program currently has an evaluation consultant that is completing a program evaluation which led us into discussions about how my project could supplement the existing evaluation. Through using arts-based methods and focusing on long-term ChooseWell Champions, this will add another perspective to the existing evaluation and help articulate some of the changes that have been fostered by ChooseWell across the province. This will be beneficial to the program because they will be able to share the information when discussing the program with all stakeholders.

### **1.2 Project Objectives, Research Questions, and Scope**

The purpose of this project is to gain an understanding of the impact of the Communities

ChooseWell program from the perspective of the long-term ChooseWell Champions.

The research question is:

- What changes, if any, has Communities ChooseWell fostered in your community through the past 10 years?

The ChooseWell Program has been operating continuously since 2011. This provides an opportunity to evaluate long-term changes in the communities that have had active long-term ChooseWell Champions. The participants invited to take part in this evaluation were any ChooseWell Champions that had been with the program since 2011 or longer. I chose to use an arts-based approach, specifically a visual arts approach for data collection. I follow the Social Justice Sewing Academy on Instagram (@sjsacademy). This got me thinking of how quilting can be used as a medium for social change and how I might be able to incorporate quilting into my MACD project. Using art and quilting provided a way to make the project fun, engaging, and meaningful for participants and being one year into the global pandemic, I thought an engaging approach might encourage Champions to participate. I wanted to include the participants in the analysis phase and to use art to present the findings which was also built into the scope of this project.

### **1.3 Background**

The ChooseWell program began in 2006 and was cancelled in 2009<sup>1</sup> but has since been continuously funded since 2011. This program is currently on a three-year funding cycle through Alberta Health and administered by the ARPA (Communities ChooseWell, n.d.). The goal of ChooseWell is “to inspire and strengthen community action to create local conditions and environments that enable all Albertans to eat well and be active.” (Communities ChooseWell - Program Logic Model, 2020-2023, Appendix A). ChooseWell Champions are local healthy living

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<sup>1</sup> It was cancelled in 2009 due to lack of funding. Alberta Health then reinstated the funding from 2010 – 2023.  
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individuals, who hold a variety of roles within their communities such as policy influencers (like local governments and recreation sector decision makers), public sector workers and community members with a passion (Communities ChooseWell, n.d.). ChooseWell Champions are self-selected by signing up to become a Champion (Communities ChooseWell, n.d.). ChooseWell Champions receive the following benefits of being a member:

- Monthly newsletters
- Access to grant opportunities
- Learning and networking events
- Access to resources and tools
- Support from the Communities ChooseWell Staff
- Recognition for accomplishments (Communities ChooseWell, n.d.).

The Communities ChooseWell Logic Model for 2020-2023 (Appendix A) has six outcome categories with outcomes that range from short-term to long-term. These outcome categories are:

- Changed Champion Capacity
- Changed Champion Behaviour & Relationships
- Changed Community Environments
- Changed Community Capacity
- Changed Population Behaviour
- Changed Population Health and Wellbeing

The illustration below (Figure 1), which I created, shows the long-term ChooseWell Champions at the center of the study. Surrounding the ChooseWell Champions are the 6P's: Policy, Promotion, Partnerships, Places, Programs, and Participation. The 6P's is a framework the Champions can use to create change in their communities around healthy eating and active living. While completing this evaluation, the 6P's evolved into the 7P's and now include People (M.

Leung, personal communication, March 25, 2022). There are three sections that I anticipate the qualitative data to surround which are aligned with the overall goals of the ChooseWell Program: changes in healthy eating, active living, and quality of life.



Figure 1: Bubble Graph; Theory of Change Section, created by K. Hurlbut, 2021

## 2.0 Literature Review

This literature review began in February 2021 with arts-based approaches to research and evaluation. As I continued to research it became clear that to learn about arts-based approaches to evaluation, I should also consider evaluation as a subject. I started with a discussion with Dr. Sarah Wiebe about the vision for this project and seeking direction. She directed me to Barone & Eisner, and chapters within the 2020 coedited book with Dr. Leah Levac *Creating Spaces of Engagement: Policy Justice and the Practical Craft of Deliberative Democracy*. Barone & Eisner (2012) was a great starting point because it includes foundational information about arts-based research, and I was able to gain a base understanding before exploring other articles and literature. The chapters in *Creating Spaces of Engagement* provided tangible ways that arts-based approaches were used to create engaging spaces. This supplied examples and a jumping off point to think about how I want to incorporate art into this evaluation. In reading, I found more connected literature within the reference lists of each book and article. I also completed searches on the University of Victoria Library website, Google Scholar, and Google. Key searched phrases include “arts-based research”, “arts-based evaluation”, “art & evaluation”. The evaluation literature began with guidance from Dr. Astrid Brousselle and articles within ADMN 580 Qualitative Evaluation. This literature review will begin by discussing evaluation, then move into arts-based approaches to research and evaluation followed by a review of programs that are similar to ChooseWell.

### 2.1 Evaluation

There are many definitions of evaluation. One of the more concise definitions is “Evaluation is the process of determining merit, worth, or significance; an evaluation is the product of that process” (Scriven, 2007, p.1). The Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) defines evaluation as “the systematic assessment of the design, implementation, or results of an initiative for the purposes of learning or decision making” (Canadian Evaluation Society, 2014, para. 2).

The Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) defines evaluation as “the systematic collection and analysis of information about program activities, characteristics and outcomes to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness and/or inform decisions about future programming” (ARPA, 2021; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Some of the similarities in these definitions include “systematic”, and “decision”. Although only one of them uses the word “process” in the other two definitions it is implied that evaluation is a process. For this project, I will be using the ARPA’s definition of evaluation because ARPA is the organization that oversees the ChooseWell program, and it is in alignment with the literature I have reviewed. Program evaluation studies how a program works and the outcomes it creates (Patton, 2015).

ChooseWell is a program that serves all of Alberta which makes the context of the community a relevant factor in the evaluation. Each Champion is living in a different community that has different context including what is going on around them, the groups and organizations that serve the community, and the systems that are at play in the community (Patton, 2015). These contexts could impact what healthy eating and active living interventions are impactful in their communities – it may not be the same in communities across Alberta. Attention to context will be important within the data collection phase and the reporting phase (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015, p.9) states that “sensitivity to context is central in qualitative inquiry and analysis.” Context can also determine what evaluation is because it is socially constructed (Patton, 2018). This is why I chose to use the ARPA’s definition of evaluation for this project, that is the definition the organization has agreed upon using and since they are the client organization for the project, it influences the context of the project.

## **2.2 Arts-based approaches to research and evaluation**

*“Be fearless. Worry less about being “good” and focus on being engaged. Be fully present in the*

*process.”*

*Patricia Leavy (2020, p. 33)*

Arts-based approaches to research and evaluation will appear in the literature under many different terms such as art inquiry, arts-based qualitative inquiry, arts-informed research and many more (Leavy, 2020). Arts-based research is the most popular term to describe this type of practice (Leavy, 2020). Clover (2011) differentiated between arts-based research and arts-informed inquiry. “Arts-based research is defined as making or using ‘artistic expressions in all the different forms of art as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies’ (McNiff, 2008, p. 29)” (Clover, 2011, p. 13). Arts-informed inquiry is when research is “influenced by but not based in, the arts” (Clover, 2011, p. 13). Darlene Clover (2011) stated that “at the heart of arts-based research lies a fundamental belief that creative expression is as vital as rational thought”. This quote articulates why I am so drawn to creative arts approaches and ways of knowing. For the title of this project, I used the term arts-based evaluation because it more accurately describes the project by indicating to the reader that it is an evaluation project. Arts-based approaches are when creative arts are used within any stage of project/program for evaluation purposes (Simons & McCormack, 2007; Mertens, 2018; Charlton, n.d.) or can be used as the entire methodology of a study (Leavy, 2020). The creative arts provide an opportunity for participants to engage in the evaluation process (Simons & McCormack, 2007). Arts encompasses different mediums including performance arts, literary arts, and visual arts (to name a few). Although these art forms are different, they share many of the same characteristics. The arts are an approach for representation and expression and encourage different ways of knowing (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Simons & McCormack, 2007; Mertens, 2018). The engagement of participants in the arts can create a personal connection to the project (Eales & Peers, 2016, Simons & McCormack, 2007; Mertens, 2018). Art is special, it can be a powerful experience that

increases a sense of belonging, builds empathy and trust, and is rooted in feeling (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016; Monk, de Oliviera Jayme, & Salvi, 2019; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bishop, Etmanski, & Page, 2019). Barone & Eisner (2012) distinguish two dimensions of art: the process, and the object. Therefore, art can be used in two ways in one project, it can be the process used to collect the data and the way the researcher represents and presents the data (Leavy, 2020). This project will include both dimensions of art; the process will be used with the ChooseWell Champions, and there will be a quilt created and used in presenting the findings of the evaluation.

Art is connected to the human experience and is connected to feelings (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016; Leavy, 2020). It can capture a moment of lived experience and creates a connection between the artist and the viewer/audience (Ashworth, 2020). An essential part of the arts-based research process is feeling right (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016). Feeling is a way of awareness (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016; Simons & McCormack, 2007; Charlton, n.d.) and as artists we can and should trust this feeling. These feelings and emotions can bring up topics or ideas that are unexpected (Brydon-Miller, Berthoin Antal, Friedman, & Wicks, 2011). Arts-based practices can capture deeper meaning and provide deeper understanding about complex topics (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Ashworth, 2020). It allows us to view the world differently (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Simons & McCormack, 2007; Mertens, 2018; Eales & Peers, 2016; Charlton, n.d.). By using arts-based inquiry early in the evaluation process, it allows the participants to identify what values resonate with them and those values can be used as key principles of the evaluation (Simons & McCormack, 2007).

Arts-based approaches are not a linear process; they are iterative, interpretive and intersecting (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016; Bishop, Etmanski, Page, 2019). There are some key concepts explained in the literature that are used in the process of arts-based approaches. For instance, the concept of meaning-making appeared in many of the articles and books used in this

literature review. Art can engage participants in the process of meaning-making (Eales & Peers, 2016). Saarnivaara (2003) spoke of meaning-making in regard to the past and how our stories are able to be rearranged, redescribed, reinvented, and revised. It allows the participants to bring their whole selves to the evaluation process (Ashworth, 2020). Through the act of creating, participants take an active role in producing and transmitting their stories, culture, and identities (Bishop et. al., 2019).

Blumenfeld-Jones (2016) explained immersing as a core concept of arts-based research. Immersing is an internal state where the individual is fully involved in the process of what they are doing (creating art) and will be able to block out distractions to be fully immersed in the process (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016). This is linked to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of flow or optimal experiences; "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (p. 4). Creative arts were used in the initial study of optimal experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Optimal experiences or flow experiences are about creating meaning which can help an individual find purpose (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Finding meaning requires a goal or a challenge that is significant to the participant (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

A piece of art can have multiple meanings (Leavy, 2020) which is connected to the concept of meaning making. The audience's positionality will affect their perspective when viewing a work of art (Leavy, 2020). It might be worthwhile to follow-up with participants of an arts-based research or evaluation project to hear their perspective and experiences (Leavy, 2020). This will allow the participant to remain in control of the narrative and could be empowering for the participant (Leavy, 2020).

Simons & McCormack (2007) indicated that the evaluator and the data being analyzed are not separated. Julliard, Kaur Gujral, Hamil, Oswald, Smyk & Testa, (2000) also pointed out that the evaluators experience will affect how they interpret the evaluation. I would argue that this

occurs in other forms of evaluation and research as well as arts-based evaluation and can be a benefit to the evaluation. As an evaluator I am bringing my creativity, point of view, and my whole self to the project. Leavy (2020) calls it the “personal fingerprint of the artist.” (p. 294). While this can be viewed as a benefit, the challenge occurs when the evaluators voice overpowers or takes authority over the participants (Simons & McCormack, 2007). Another challenge that I may experience is being fully connected to the creative works that I present at the end of this project and having to have it critiqued (Leavy, 2020). The critique could feel more personal because of the connection I anticipate having to the artwork.

The process of creating art can be stressful or overwhelming for some who do not consider themselves artists (Searle & Shulha, 2016). The label “artist” seems to carry some weight to it. Another challenge is knowing that the art created will be displayed for others to see and interpret. Participants and the evaluator do not need to have formal art training to be able to use arts-based approaches (de Oliveira Jayme, 2020). The process of creating the art is the focus where the quality or beauty of the finished artwork is less important (Leavy, 2020; Searle & Shulha, 2016). Whether the evaluator and participants consider themselves artists or not does not impact the usefulness of using an arts-based approach to evaluation.

Using an arts-based approach can be an inclusive approach to evaluation. It provides an opportunity to include people who speak different languages or who are non-verbal (Eales & Peers, 2016). Arts-based approaches are not required to be linguistic and therefore can reach multiple audiences (Bishop, Etmanski, & Page, 2019; Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016; Searle & Shulha, 2016) and can be used to tap into wisdom that is not easily articulated (Simons & McCormack, 2007; Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016; Mertens, 2018; Eales & Peers, 2016). It also makes the evaluation or research more available to audiences that have lower reading levels or outside of an academic circle of influence (Leavy, 2020). This approach will not end with one concrete answer (Barone &

Eisner, 2012; Eales & Peers, 2016; Leavy, 2020). Instead, it will open opportunities for many questions to emerge and spark conversations (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eales & Peers, 2016; Leavy, 2020).

There are challenges associated with arts-based approaches. There are many ways of interpreting the artwork (Simons & McCormack, 2007) and it can be affected by the evaluators experience (Julliard et al., 2000). Barone & Eisner (2012) discuss one of the challenges being whether arts-based approaches are viewed as legitimate research or not. There is also a risk of the evaluator's presence or narrative overtaking the voices of the participants (Simons & McCormack, 2007).

Whether arts-based research is viewed as legitimate research or not (Barone & Eisner, 2012) is an interesting challenge to try to address because the perception of others is not necessarily within my control. There are some that are quick to dismiss or diminish the knowledge gained from the arts while others do not recognize the approach because they have never been exposed to it before (Leavy, 2020). By using an arts-based approach, I will be addressing this challenge by sharing my research and answering questions about the approach and increasing exposure to arts-based approaches to evaluation.

The other two challenges surrounding the evaluator's interpretation and voice are within my circle of influence. I can create processes to reflect throughout the project. This reflection was around the power dynamics within the project, whether my voice is overtaking the participants and continuously evaluating my positionality. Reflection can also occur in the moment (Yanow, 2009) and will be essential during the quilt design session. Self-reflection will help me identify any biases I may have and provide time to be open and examine unanticipated responses or evidence that is contrary to the expected outcomes (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Since evaluation is about making judgements, the evaluators and participants positionality plays a role in what is deemed

meaningful within the evaluation (Patton, 2015; Yanow, 2009). I will attempt to practice humility and a willingness to consider (Yanow, 2009) throughout this project to strengthen my reflexivity and how my positionality is involved in the project.

One inconsistency I noticed in the literature is whether arts-based approaches should complement other forms of evaluation or whether it should be legitimate on its own. Barone & Eisner (2012) would like to see arts-based research stand on its own. Charlton (n.d.) spoke of using arts-based practices to enhance evaluation methods but also explained that it can be used to get a well-rounded vision of the project's impacts. There were many sources that spoke about the holistic nature of arts-based inquiry (Leavy, 2020; Simons & McCormack, 2007; Charlton, n.d.). This holism shows me that arts-based practices can stand alone as a legitimate methodology for evaluation.

### **2.3 Programs like Communities ChooseWell**

My search for similar programs began with the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA). They support provincial recreation and parks associations and professionals across Canada. The CPRA website has links to each provincial recreation and parks associations, so I reviewed province by province what programs and initiatives are at the provincial level. There were some with similarities including: NS Connect, GO! PEI, and Get Active. Then I did a Google search for similar programs with the following key words:

- Public health programs
- Health promotion programs
- Community wellness programs
- Community health and wellness programs
- Primary Care Network

Some of these searches yielded interesting results. When searching 'community wellness

programs' there were some programs that intend to end domestic violence, some programs for new moms, and some that were specific to school communities. When I searched 'community health and wellness programs' many of the results were specific to corporate health and wellness programs. The search of 'Primary Care Network' had one result that will be examined called the Alberta Healthy Living Program which is through Alberta Health Services.

NS Connect is an online program through Recreation Nova Scotia and aims to provide the public with information about active living and recreation opportunities (Recreation Nova Scotia, 2021). There are five regions of Nova Scotia that opportunities can be searched in (Recreation Nova Scotia, 2021). This program differs from ChooseWell in part because ChooseWell targets both active living and healthy eating. It differs through the methods of providing information to create local change. NS Connect provides online resources and it seems like a member of the public would have to be actively seeking these opportunities out to benefit from the website. ChooseWell uses multiple methods of information and knowledge sharing for Champions which also makes it different from NS Connect. There is no indication of how this initiative is evaluated.

GO! PEI is an initiative by Recreation PEI and is funded in partnership by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Government of Prince Edward Island (GO! PEI, n.d.). The goal of this program is to promote healthy living choices in the residents of PEI (GO! PEI, n.d.). This program looks similar to ChooseWell in the way it is funded. Go! PEI does not specify whether it uses local Champions and the Community Partners link on their website is broken. I followed up with Go! PEI through both phone and email. The Program Manager got back to me on September 16, 2021. I asked how they evaluate Go! PEI and whether they had a logic model created for the program. The Program Manager, Chryshawnda, told me that the program includes several partners but does not directly deliver programs and services. They focus on oversight and support services. They evaluate through the partners reports and include information about:

- how many programs were offered
- how many sessions
- were the programs well attended
- what marketing tools were used
- what works and what did not work
- how they can improve moving forward.

Get Active is a program run by the Northwest Territories Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA). Get Active is a grant program which provides organizations up to \$1000 to provide programs that provide opportunities to be physically active (NWTRPA, n.d.). There is no information on the website about how this program is evaluated. It would be a more suitable comparison if the scope of my project focused on the ChooseWell Healthy Community Grants.

The Alberta Healthy Living Program is provided through Alberta Health Services (AHS) (AHS, 2021). It is a community-based program to help manage chronic diseases (AHS, 2021). It uses patient education, self-management techniques and supervised exercises to reach the program outcomes (AHS, 2021). This program seems to be based off a patient/expert model where ChooseWell is empowering the Champions to then empower community members. Due to the patient/expert model it could be viewed as a deficit-based program where patients are only eligible for the program if they are experiencing a chronic disease. ChooseWell does not have that type of eligibility requirement to participate as a Champion or within the communities the Champions are in. The AHS website does not indicate how this program is being evaluated. I think this would make an interesting comparison program because both AHS and ChooseWell are approaching the health of Albertans from different perspectives.

## 2.4 Theory of Change

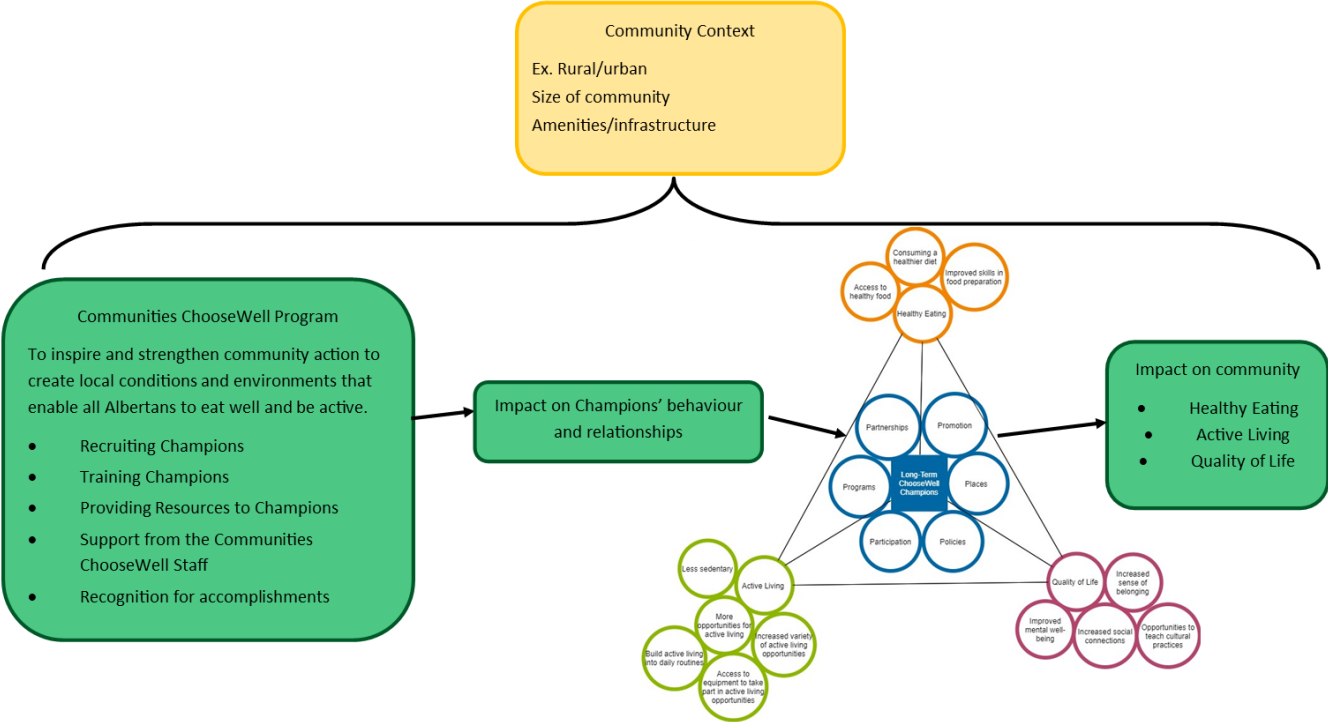


Figure 2: Theory of Change. Developed by K. Hurlbut, 2021.

The theory of change (Figure 2) shows the current components of the ChooseWell Program on the left-hand side. These components are intended to impact the ChooseWell Champions behaviours and relationships through the six P's: Policy, Programs, Participation, Promotion, Places, and Partnerships. The Champions and the 6P's are at the center of three intended outcome branches – Healthy Eating, Active Living, and Quality of Life. The support and opportunities offered through the ChooseWell Program impacts communities around Alberta through the Champions. At the top of the image, the community context is connected from the left to the right. This shows that the community context influences which opportunities are suitable for each community and how having different supports available contributes to program outcomes.

## **3.0 Methodology and Methods**

### **3.1 Evaluator's positionality**

In the literature review, I discussed using self-reflection to help mitigate some of the challenges that could arise when using an arts-based approach. Patton, (2015) discussed how the evaluators positionality could influence what is noted as important in the evaluation. Therefore, in the spirit of self-reflexivity, I acknowledge that I am a fourth-generation Canadian with settler roots (English, French, Scottish, and Polish). I am a 35-year-old, white, cis-gender, able-bodied female. I was born and raised in Vermilion, Alberta and have lived in Alberta my entire life. English is my first (and only) language and I have a Bachelor of Arts in Sport, Recreation, and Tourism. I am fortunate to be employed by the City of Spruce Grove as a Community Developer and have been part of the Community Social Development Department for just over 3 years. I have been a member of the Alberta Parks and Recreation Association (ARPA) since 2013 starting as a student member. Since then, I have attended Communities ChooseWell learning opportunities including the Healthy Community Symposium in March 2020. Since 2020, I have been a volunteer for Communities ChooseWell Grant Review Committee. This positionality statement is intended to give the reader an understanding of some of the lenses I am approaching this work through. Although I constantly attempt to be self-reflective and understand biases I hold, I can never be fully aware of how my view could be impacted by who I am and my position in the world.

### **3.2 Ethics Approval**

This project used a qualitative methodology and did require approval of the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB). The HREB approved the project proposal on July 8, 2021, and the Ethics Protocol Number is 21-0210.

### **3.3 Evaluation Strategy/Research Design**

An arts-based approach was used to evaluate the ChooseWell program and understand the changes fostered by the ChooseWell program over the last ten years across Alberta. There were three main steps in project:

1. Individual reflection and painting (September – December 2021) – I asked the participants whether they preferred acrylic or watercolor paints. I then created art kits to send out to the participants along with instructions to complete the artwork and one-page narrative (Appendix B) and a community context questionnaire (Appendix C)
2. Quilt Design Session - group discussion/analysis – (November 5, 2021) – Once participants had submitted their artwork, we met on Zoom to discuss the artwork and quilt design. I developed the Quilt Design Session Overview (Appendix D) to guide the discussion.
3. Quilt (January – March 2022) – I created the quilt based on the participant’s discussion and feedback.

Arts-based evaluation is expressive, and the intention is to give individuals the opportunity to explore the program in a fun, engaging way (Ashworth, 2020, p. 211).

### **3.4 Methods**

#### **Recruitment of participants.**

The participants of this evaluation are long-term ChooseWell Champions. They were identified by ChooseWell staff. All ChooseWell Champions in the program since the 2011- 2013 funding cycle were invited to participate. An email video invitation (Appendix E) was sent to the 28 long-term Champions. ChooseWell staff emailed the invitation to eligible participants to adhere to the Personal Information and Privacy Act (PIPA) which is legislation non-profit organizations follow in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2021). In my proposal, I anticipated the number of participants ranging from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 25. We sent out the first invitation email on

August 9, 2021 and followed-up with two subsequent emails. There were eight interested participants. One of them was uncomfortable with creating art and so after talking to me, they decided not to participate. I began the data collection with seven participants. One of them dropped out of the project due to a job loss due to COVID-19 (fourth wave). I reached out to the ChooseWell staff to see if they had other contact information for them, but they did not.

### **Data collection.**

A painting kit was sent to each participant with supplies to ensure equal access. Participants could choose between two art mediums: watercolour or acrylic painting. They also received instructions (Appendix B) to help guide them through creating their artwork. Prior to drawing, I asked participants to take some time to reflect about the context of their community through a questionnaire (Appendix C). The participants were also asked to reflect on the years they have been involved as a ChooseWell Champion through three questions:

- What projects and programs have been in your community through the years fostered by Communities ChooseWell?
- What have you learned through the years because of your involvement in Communities ChooseWell?
- What changes have you seen in your community because of Communities ChooseWell?

They were asked to write down words and phrases that come to mind as they reflect on these questions. Participants were asked to use these reflections to design and paint a picture in the style of their choosing. Participants wrote a one-page narrative to accompany the artwork. The questionnaire, artwork, and one-page narrative were sent back to the researcher via email.

The data collection was planned to take place in September and October of 2021 through both individual artwork and collaborative analysis sessions. This quickly changed with the fourth wave

of COVID-19 in Alberta and the subsequent Restrictions Exemption Program (REP). The REP came into place in September 2021 and many of the participants were impacted by it. One of the participants told me that they were the lead on implementing the REP in their Town's recreation facilities which caused a lot of stress and lack of time. The initial deadline to have the artwork and narrative submitted was September 30, 2021. I extended the deadline to October 15, 2021 and then to October 31, 2021. It reached October 31, 2021 and not all of the submissions were in. I wanted to be responsive to the participants needs. This was supposed to be fun and engaging, not stressful. I emailed them to get a sense of their commitment and let them know to get their artwork and narrative to me when they had the time, aiming for the end of 2021. The last piece of artwork was submitted on December 12, 2021.

I envisioned that the participants would also assist with designing the quilt. All participants were invited to attend a zoom session with myself and other evaluation participants. This activity was facilitated by the evaluator with the intention of including the participants voice in analyzing the findings of the evaluation. One of the objectives of this session was to empower the participants to have decision-making influence over and co-create the design of the quilt. I scheduled the first quilt design session for October 15, 2021 which was moved to November 5, 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I kept the session on October 15 but changed the intention to be a space to share their experience and ask any questions they had. Three of the seven participants attended the October 15 session. Five of the six participants attended the November 5, 2021 quilt design session. Out of those five, only four had submitted their artwork and narrative by the time the session occurred.

### **Data Analysis.**

The individual artwork was analyzed through participant internal dialogue (reflection activity and one-page narrative) and through external dialogue (quilt design session) (Leavy, 2020).

Both internal and external dialogue was completed by the participants. The participants engaged in the analysis process individually and as a group. The evaluator used the participant's analysis to inform the findings of this evaluation and in the presentation of the findings through the visual artform quilting.

The analysis of the discussion is visually represented in the quilt and will be explained further in the Findings section. Since the session was recorded with permission of the participants, the recording was transcribed.

At the end of the quilt design session, I drafted a mock-up of the quilt and sent it to the participants for feedback. I wanted the participants to see themselves and their discussion reflected in the quilt. The session also created connections between ChooseWell Champions which is in alignment with one of the short-term outcomes of the logic model. It gave Champions that had existing relationships to reconnect.

### **3.5 Establishing Credibility**

There is no agreed upon criteria for all arts-based approaches to be credible. There are suggested criteria that should be applied when appropriate (Leavy, 2020; Barone & Eisner, 2012). For an arts-based approach to be useful it should “succeed both as a work of art, and as a work of research” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 145). Leavy (2020), discusses establishing credibility in arts-based research through translation, transparency, usefulness, and trustworthiness. This section will examine the arts-based evaluation through these four criteria.

Within this arts-based evaluation, I have used a concept called translation which is referred to as “the transformation of one form of knowledge into another” (Gerber & Myers-Coffman, 2018, p. 587). One of the ways that reliability is strengthened in this evaluation is that participants submitted a text-based narrative along with their artwork that provided some context and allowed them to share what their artwork was conveying. Another way translation occurred was by

collaboratively designing the quilt as a group. This allowed the participants to take ownership of how and what they would like portrayed in the final design. It gave them a voice to explain what is important to them and why.

Transparency can be included through showing the process by which the research occurred. One of the intentions of this report is to provide the transparency. Another way I have provided it is to send out updates to the client and participants as the project progressed. Being open and available to the client and the participants has been important throughout the project. This is partially due to the COVID-19 pandemic and some of the disruptions it caused like the delay of the data collection.

Usefulness is the next criteria that helps establish credibility. Due to the collaborative nature of this project, usefulness has been included when this project was a glimmer of an idea. In January/February 2021, when I first approached ChooseWell to see if they were interested in being a client, I went with a few ideas of projects I could do. We worked together to create the scope and evaluation question for this project to ensure usefulness. Usefulness could also pertain to the participants. From the participant's perspective, it was intimidating to put a paintbrush to paper. One participant said "As adults, we are very critical of what we can't do very well and I think that this was certainly true of this project. Feeling quite vulnerable, it took me a long time to come up with the vision for the work that I ultimately created." A few participants agreed but said how good it was for them to step outside of their comfort zone. I also anticipate the participants found this evaluation useful because it allowed them space to reflect on the last ten years of being a ChooseWell Champion and how this has shaped their communities.

One of the criteria that is tied to usefulness is trustworthiness or truthfulness. This can be reflected on by thinking about whether the work resonates. The individual artwork that each participant submitted resonated with the other participants. This was made clear at the collective

quilt design session. When participants were presenting their work and explaining why they chose the images and colours that they did, it created a discussion where other participants could add in their similar experiences. They were able to share what was important to them and how they did reflect on similar words and events. For example, at one point, we spoke about an artist that attended a ChooseWell event previously to capture the event in real time through art. The participants wanted to include this on the quilt so I asked the Program Manager if they could find the artwork they were speaking about. You will see it on the bottom of the quilt. Since there are multiple meanings in each individual piece and in the final quilt, the goal is to create a sense of truthfulness or authenticity within this project and the findings.

### **3.6 Strengths and Limitations**

The scope of this project is to identify some of the most significant long-term community changes fostered by the ChooseWell Program from the perspective of the ChooseWell Champions. It is not within scope to identify all the impacts of the program.

The strength of this project is that it was an engaging and meaningful experience for participants. By including participants in creating and analyzing the data, it ensured their voice is represented in the final evaluation. Another strength is that it provided an opportunity to participate in an arts-based evaluation which may be the first time for participants. I also believe the participants provided deep insights. The quilt will be an item that the organization can use as visual representation of changes their program has fostered in communities across Alberta.

Arts-based approaches are special because they allow for the creation of multiple meanings (Leavy, 2020). This is a significant strength of this methodology. Through the creation of multiple meanings, the process allows for deeper engagement and reflection which are tied to the impact and credibility of the project (Leavy, 2020). The artwork within the final quilt has multiple meanings but with the text provided by the participants we can really see what message they

wanted to convey through their artwork.

The geographic area the ChooseWell program serves is all of Alberta. There might have been barriers created by the technology used because some rural communities do not have access to reliable internet. One participant experienced some challenges with technology, specifically zoom video, so they would turn off other devices before the session.

COVID-19 became a limitation in the data collection phase. Due to the stress of the fourth wave and organizational requirements to implement the Restrictions Exemption Program (REP) in September 2021, participants found it hard to meet the initial timeline. This was easily navigated by extending the deadline for participants and being responsive to the needs of the participants. One participant was unable to get to the mailbox to receive their art kit because they were isolating because someone in their family tested positive.

COVID-19 also could have been a reason why some people chose not to participate. With that being said, the artwork also was a limitation for some potential participants.

One unanticipated limitation emerged during the quilt design session. Many of the participants are visual thinkers and many had seen quilts before but were not sure what was possible and what wasn't possible in relation to the design. They wanted to understand the techniques I would be using to create the quilt to suggest design ideas that I would be able to implement.

This evaluation was anticipated to have between 10 and 25 participants but there were seven participants that responded to the invitation. The participation number limits the number of communities that will be represented in this project. The invitation email went out to 28 long-term ChooseWell Champions across Alberta, this is a small percentage of Champions that were able to participate.

Due to the methodology of this project, not all effects of the ChooseWell program are

collected or documented. The participants chose which effect(s) they would like to highlight in their artwork; therefore, this project emphasizes a few positive effect(s) of the Communities ChooseWell Program giving less visibility to other effects. Effects that are not documented include:

1. Impacts on participants themselves
2. Null or negative effects

## **4.0 Findings**

In this section, I will describe the findings of the evaluation. There were three pieces to this evaluation: the community context questionnaire, the artwork & the one-page narrative, and the quilt design session. The Findings section will follow this order.

There were 28 participants invited and seven responded to the invite. One participant left the project due to a change in roles. They did not submit artwork or the narrative prior to leaving and therefore they were not included in the project. Five of the six participants completed the one-page narrative. All six participants completed the community context questionnaires (Appendix C) and the artwork.

### **4.1 Community Context Questionnaire**

The community context questionnaire (Appendix C) was sent to participants with the individual artwork guidelines (Appendix B) through the mail. The individual artwork guidelines asked participants to take some time to reflect on their community by filling out the questionnaire. This questionnaire provided prompting questions to get the participants grounded in their community and reflecting on their experiences with the ChooseWell program.

From this questionnaire, there are insights about the communities that are represented in this project from the Champion's perspective. There were three rural communities, one urban/rural community and one that is classified as a specialized municipality. One participant stated their

[38]

community is urban/rural. I am making an assumption that their community encompasses both urban and rural settings but is not a specialized municipality. There are six specialized municipalities in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2022). “Specialized municipalities are unique municipal structure that can be formed without resorting to special Acts of the Legislature” (Government of Alberta, 2022, para. 6). They are often when rural and urban populations coexist in a single municipal government (Government of Alberta ,2022). Populations ranged from 303 people to 98,000 people. The questionnaire asked about how walkable their community is, what active living infrastructure is available and what organizations serve the community. The responses to the community context questionnaire are displayed in Table 1 & 2 (below). The diversity of communities is apparent when reviewing these questionnaires.

Table 1: Community Context Questionnaire Results Part 1

Question	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Is your community urban, suburban, First Nation community, or Métis Settlement?	Rural 34% seniors	Our community is a unique mix of urban centre and rural hamlets. We are classified as a specialized municipality.	Rural
What is the population of your community?	303	98,000 (2016)	I cover several municipalities so in total about 10,000 people
How walkable is your community?	It is very walkable. Only roughly 4x4 blocks. We have a near complete km long glow in the dark trail.	Our community is walkable, and not. We have amazing trails and systems in our community, but our connection from rural to urban isn't great for walkability. Winter can be a challenge as well.	The Town undertook a walkable community assessment back in 2016 and although some of the recommendations were not achievable through Town budget at that time. A Wellness Coalition was established to keep the conversation going with the Town and started a 4-year fundraising campaign to build a 3 Phase Trail Plan to connect residents to the places where they live, work, and place and promote active transportation which in a rural community is not a phrase that most understand. To date: Phase 1 is near completion. Other communities I have worked with have make huge strides already around walkability and paths and many of these came out of consultations through ChooseWell. One Community Council adopted the Charter for Walkability and proudly displays it in Council Chambers.
What active living infrastructure is available in the community? Is it free or is there a fee?	We have a hall where the seniors meet weekly for games. I teach a senior fitness class. 1-hour 2x/week and run an art class once a week. All free. There is a paid yoga class. Junior/senior playground, park, 13 pieces of ground fitness equipment, a skatepark, a paved rink and the glow in the dark trail.	Very diverse ranging from facilities to green spaces – some cost, some free.	Each community is different and in the rural context communities often share resources like arena, pool, rec facilities as they do not have the infrastructure to have their own. In some cases community worked together and in other cases they fought over the funding formula supporting recreation infrastructure. Very different funding models based on community dynamics and governance. The indoor walking path is free in some communities for those that can't afford it. Others who want to try "walking poles" for

			example, are free at all of the libraries throughout the county.
What organizations in your community actively promote active living and healthy eating?	[...], seniors club, youth group. [...] Recreation Board.	Many! From boys and girls clubs to the County itself we have a long list!	Through ChooseWell programming I would say that all communities I work with in some way support both healthy eating and active living. One community has completely revised their recreation facility menu and vending machine options. Some of these include the Town, Village or Hamlet, FCSS, Seniors facilities, adult learning and provide citizens vested in the health of their community.
Which programs in your community focus on active living and healthy eating?	[...] delivers fitness, art and cooking programs that focus on active living and healthy eating. As do the Longview Seniors.	Multiple County program, continuing education programs, PCN/AHS programs.	There is no one program that just focuses on active living and healthy eating. It has become core operations when planning in some community programs, whether or not it's a direct result of ChooseWell. I would say 50%. It has taken a generation to make small strides in mindsets and policies within organizations. It has been almost two years since I have had face-to-face contact with community partners so will need to do another scan to see where things are at.
What is special or unique about your community that you would like to share?	Glow in the dark solar powered 1km trail on west ridge. Scenery snugged up to the Rockies overlooking [...] River. Oil and gas, ranching and Indigenous history of the area. One little girl resting on the hill to see her new home said "Mom, we are going to live in a postcard!!"	We have many hidden gems in our community – trails and wetlands in neighbourhoods, green spaces and edible landscaping. We can now connect along the TransCanada trail system and riverside trail. As mentioned above, we are unique in that we have an urban centre, but also rural populations. It's a balance for programs and services – it gives us challenges, but also amazing treats and gems for space and activities.	I don't have one community to focus on but overall I would say that ChooseWell has opened doors for conversations around current environments, what small changes could be made and then the long-term vision for the community. It takes on a different look in each community depending on Champions at that level. For example, one community hosted a Try-It Triathlon which involved many players to make it happen, but showed the dedication of the community to give everyone a chance to try something they may not ever normally try or consider. ChooseWell opened doors in a fun and engaging way and helped pave the way for new relationships and conversations around possibilities that could be explored.

Table 2: Community Context Questionnaire Results Part 2

Question	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Is your community urban, suburban, First Nation community, or Métis Settlement?	Rural	Urban/Rural	First Nation Community
What is the population of your community?	1,240 (2020)	30,000	10,000+
How walkable is your community?	Our small town has a walking trail as well as sidewalks, etc. However, some areas do not have sidewalks. Walkability is good but can be improved.	It is not completely walkable but we do have up to 94 kms of pathways	There is walking path and some sidewalks.
What active living infrastructure is available in the community? Is it free or is there a fee?	*Fee Wellness Centre* Walking Trail Baseball diamonds Soccer field Arena/Curling Rink* Playgrounds with outdoor exercise equipment Tennis court Beach volleyball area Ski Hill* Basketball court Outdoor track Golf course* Pool	Pay for with options for low cost/no cost access for vulnerable residents of age groups requiring supportive programming.	We have a recreation facility that we have been closed for some time to the public, monthly weight room fees, youth are free, low income are free and other online programs available.
What organizations in your community actively promote active living and healthy eating?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AHS</li> <li>• FCSS</li> <li>• Minor Hockey/ball/soccer</li> <li>• Figure skating club</li> <li>• Dance society</li> <li>• Wellness center (gym)</li> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Seniors center</li> <li>• Town (pool/golf course)</li> <li>• Ski hill</li> <li>• Community actions for health and well-being (CAHWB)</li> </ul> Curling Club	Town McMann Schools promote active living	We would like to make one for our community, but we do have health challenges throughout the year. Maybe we can do a monthly info session for our Nation's members.

Which programs in your community focus on active living and healthy eating?	Food for thought breakfast program Mini gym Sports programs	Town provide 100's of active living programs per year for all ages.	Some programs we developed e.g. Health challenges, cooking classes, info sessions, book time to go workout weight room
What is special or unique about your community that you would like to share?	We are lucky to have a beautiful river running through out community and many opportunities to enjoy nature.		Everything. We make things happen. We provide free programs, drive thru events, community base initiative for all ages, networking, providing fun and exciting things for our community. A lot of opportunities for our youth.

## 4.2 Artwork & Narrative<sup>2</sup>



Figure 3: Artwork created by Participant 1

“Since 2005 we have been involved with ChooseWell or Healthy U back then. We applied and were part of the third round of Active Creative Engaged communities in 2009 and through coaching and guidance we focused our seed money on a healthy project based on ChooseWell values. The RECreate grant from ChooseWell has enabled us to run a number of different things on a zoom platform last year for our villagers. We were really blown away to realize we had a far bigger reach with our zoom broadcasts than we did just doing it here in the hall live. Not bad for a small rural community of 303 people.”

<sup>2</sup> The words that follow each piece of artwork are excerpts from the narratives submitted. They are the participants words. Since they are excerpts, please be aware that these are not all of their words.

There is not only one way of doing things. If it works for you or your community then it is the way for you!”

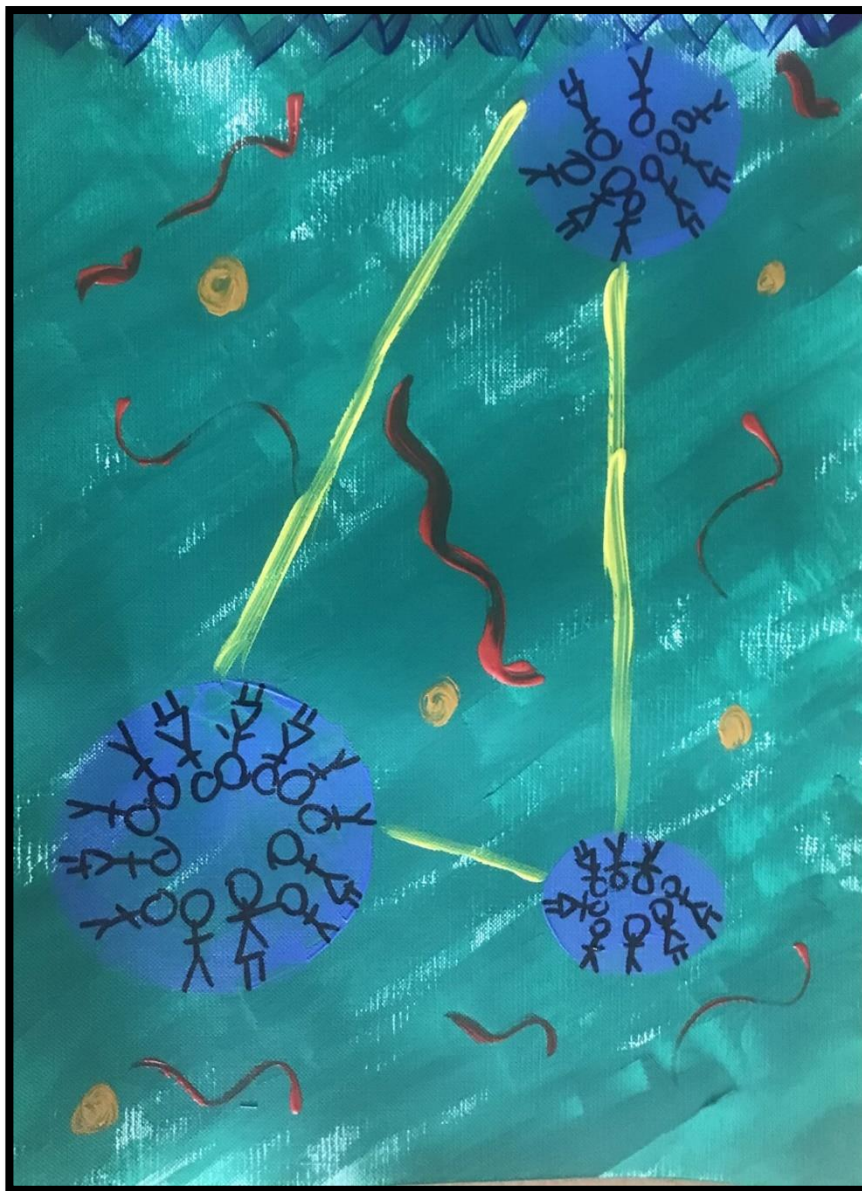


Figure 4: Artwork created by Participant 2

“Communities ChooseWell has given us the opportunity to explore and enable healthy eating and active living opportunities so that the obvious choice is the easy choice.”



*Figure 5: Artwork created by Participant 3*

“The vision and leadership from ARPA<sup>3</sup> has provided mentorship, resources and training that provided the framework to help mobilize communities in many areas of natural and built environments, active transportation, and healthy living options that many rural communities identified as lacking.”

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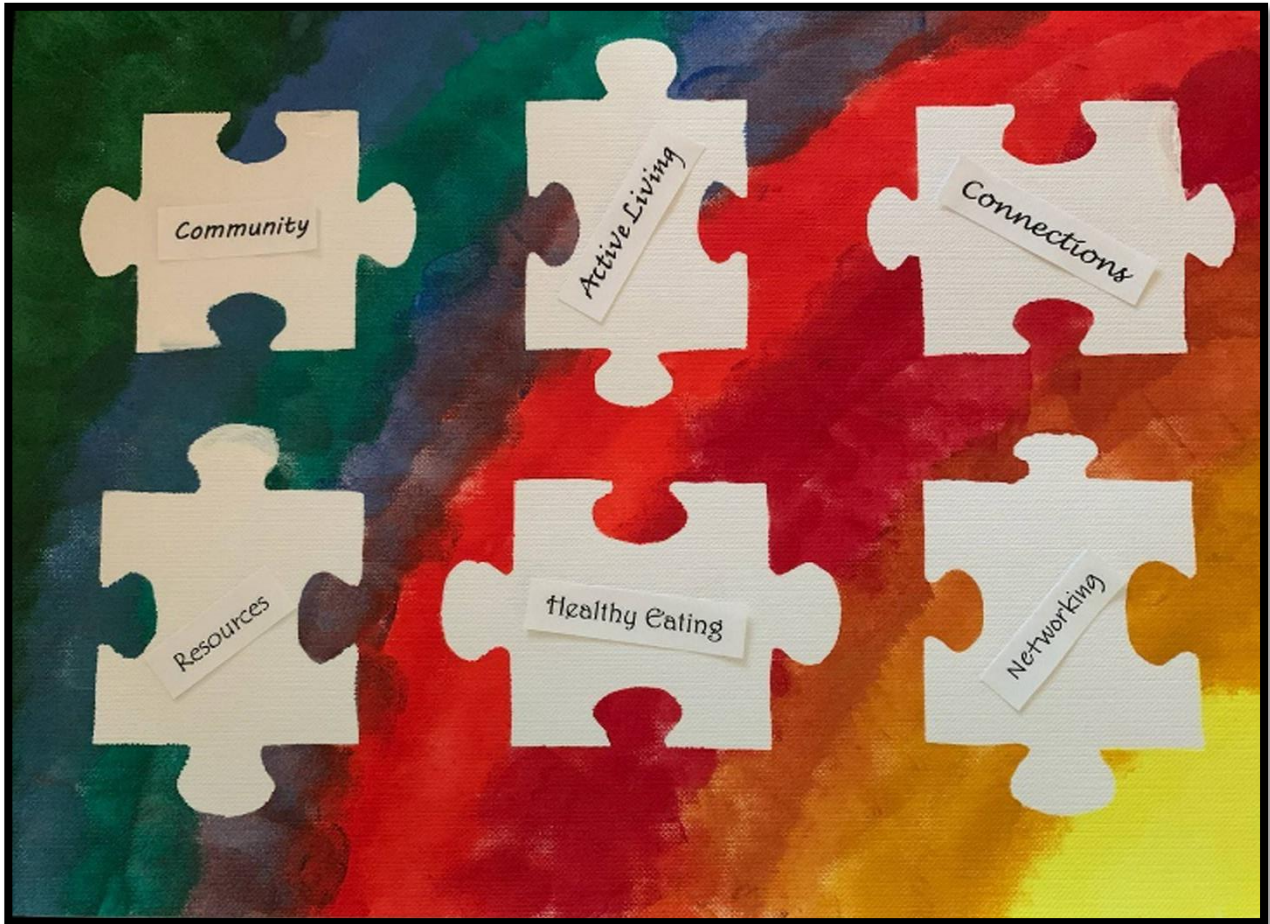
<sup>3</sup> ARPA stands for the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association.  
[46]



*Figure 6: Artwork created by Participant 4*

“In my artwork I tried to use speech and thought bubbles to depict different thoughts and conversations about health and wellness in our community over the years. At the bottom you can see that there are dark colours which represent more negative or apathetic feelings and conversations towards physical and mental health. The lighter, more vibrant colours at the top of the art signify change in how community members are talking about health and wellness. You will notice that there are some darker speech and thought bubbles near the middle and top. This

represents that we still have things we can work on.”



*Figure 7: Artwork created by Participant 5*

“My rainbow was a reflection of all the wonderful people I have met as well as the support provided to all of the communities in the province. The words reflected what programming and support that Communities ChooseWell provides community.

Everything that Communities ChooseWell does lead to COMMUNITY!”



*Figure 8: Artwork created by Participant 6*

This participant has not submitted a narrative to accompany this piece. Through my relations, I have asked a Cree Knowledge Keeper what Akameyimo means. She told me it is a beautiful word that means “keep on going”.

### **4.3 Quilt Design**

The quilt design session took place in November 2021 and 5 of the 6 participants were in attendance. The session was facilitated by the researcher and the facilitation plan can be found in Appendix E. The following transcript is quoted directly from the quilt design session when participants were asked to share their artwork with the group.

I chose to directly quote participants' words as their explanations gave additional information to further interpret their art piece and on the impacts of the Choose Well program. Such a strategy has been used by qualitative research in sociology and anthropology (Bourdieu & Accardo, 1999; Lewis, 1961).

#### **Participant 1:**

“My artwork is behind me. I am not a very good artist, so I decided to do it on the computer, so I compiled a bunch of pictures from different things that we have done with ChooseWell over the years, and I put it through a cartoon program, so it is not a regular picture. It just shows the different things we have done. The one with the children running was an event we collaborated with the senior's group, and we put on a soccer and fitness bootcamp. It was amazing, we had so many kids show up for it. They participated in it, and they just love to exercise and move. The next one is our reconciliation piece and I have been so grateful for the work that Janet has been doing with the Indigenous people. I have been really lucky to be included in a lot of the conferences and the Grandmother's circle, I have learned so much. We are trying our best here to go forward with the Truth and Reconciliation as best we can. I've learned just an amazing amount. [...] That is at the north end of the trail we have been building and so now I have to talk to Council to see if they will let me make it a permanent fixture so that we can put larger rocks around it to protect it. So that has been real important in our community. We do have a reserve just 20 km west of us, [...]so it is important that they feel welcome in my community, I feel. So, the next one if I

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duck down, that is a fitness class that I teach. In the summer we do it in the park, which is directly behind my house, so I don't have to go far and in the winter, I have made arrangements with the town to let me use the community hall for free because the class is free. So, through grants and everything we have managed to get all of this extra equipment. The last one on the top is a bunch of my seniors working on the trail, so our trail has been by 90% seniors. It is kind of amazing. The bottom left goes way back to the ACE Community project, and children were picking what equipment they wanted in their playground. This playground is over 10 years old now and it looks brand spanking new. The kids never deface anything in there because it is their playground. Where it says community, that is a picture of probably about 80 people after we finished building the playground in 2011. It was such a heartwarming event seeing people come walking up the street with shovels and rakes on their shoulder that morning. So, we had about 80 people that worked on that playground. And then, for social that is from Culture Days and we arranged to have a drumming circle so we had someone come out from Calgary with 125 drums. So, all of it is combining. The one on the end is one of the first events. That is me on some of the fitness equipment that we put around the playground. That is used constantly. I even see people over there in the winter working out. That makes me happy. I see parents over there working out while their kids play. All of this would never have happened if I didn't have the coaching or the information on where to look for grants from ChooseWell. That is what this all means to me."

**Participant 2:**

"I can share if you guys can imagine. So I sadly have not had time to actually do my art but the concept is in my head and the words I have down but to me if you imagine. I was using color, so no specific images or structures or photos or anything like that. Color to represent opportunity, leadership and connection, culture, challenge, patience, youth, all ages, lead by example. Those were some of the words that I had written down that kind of represented our community and that I

wanted to display. So for us, I see the biggest thing is opportunity and choice so whatever healthy is to each individual person is very different but if the opportunity is there and the choice is there then I think that can make a healthy community. So my image was lots of green for green spaces, different colours to represent different facilities or spaces where opportunity can happen to be active. Whether that is a trail, a park, an indoor facility, a rink whatever. And then also representing some of the challenges that we and every community face that you know how do you represent everybody, how do you give opportunity to everybody, how do you make the healthy choice the easy choice, how do you overcome challenges such as seasonal challenges, or individual perceptions. So that was the image that I had in my head for it.

We have definitely learned over the years since being involved with ChooseWell that through the opportunities that have been presented through ChooseWell has opened some doors for us. Being able to present what we have done in our community and then the recognition that we received to like senior leadership groups, to council, to the powers that be to support, to continue to support the very valuable resources that are in the community that recreation and healthy eating truly are, especially now, everyone definitely knows this, are truly an essential service. Those opportunities to be healthy, to choose healthy to have a mental or physical space to escape are very important. The channel that ChooseWell provides for us to be able to show those opportunities to those leadership teams is definitely invaluable.

So one of the things that I have also answered is what changes have you seen in your community. Who knows whether it is the pandemic or not but we have definitely seen a shift in our community for a demand. A bigger bigger demand for more so recreation than healthy eating and so being able to respond to that demand with free or no cost opportunities to be active both inside an outside all times of year so whether it is spring, summer, fall or winter, it doesn't matter. And we have definitely seen a shift in how we were able to provide those services. Something that was

never thought of or considered before has now happened. So opportunity has definitely presented itself and hopefully especially through ChooseWell if we can continue to show the support and value of doing things like that then it will just continue and continue and created a healthier community.”

**Participant 3:**

“My whole thing was about rural Alberta; we get the farm concept and really quite often what I have found through my journeys is that rural communities really don’t have the same access. The town council has never valued health as part of their budget, as part of their responsibility. They told me that straight up, like we don’t get money for health and physical activity, so we aren’t going to participate. So basically, what I have seen over the years is a shift in that mindset so that yes, we can use our natural resources and built environments, that kind of thing to build our communities and grow them. We have definitely seen that occur. So don’t take this personally, for those of you that are in the ivory towers in Edmonton and Calgary. It’s kind of where ARPA sits so that’s kind of their part of the building and just buildings in general. The government is often seen as you know that way up their kind of people and programs. And so that’s what ChooseWell did for us was they brought it down, they levelled the playing field for us and made it real. So just really trying to connect where people are in the city where the money sits and how it actually did roll out to community because the money we did receive, I know we have all done it, the one that really made the most difference was the \$10,000 seed grant from the ACE funding, I know we did, I think everyone did tripled quadrupled that money and leveraged it. I really appreciated that part.”

**Participant 4:**

“I am not an artist by any means, but I will say that doing this made me realize that I actually would like to learn more about watercolor and that sort of thing. So basically, what I was trying to do is show about the shift from kind of negative thoughts and negative feelings and maybe

feelings of apathy in regards to health and wellness both physical and mental in our community.

We are a rural small community who often is pretty stuck in their ways. So, it kind of, you know, I know lots of you have like for example the fitness centers or the arenas and that sort of thing with the food booths. It's always been thought that you have to serve all the deep-fried food and all the candies and stuff cause that's the way it has been and that's the only thing that is going to sell. So that's kind of the mentality that we had before. You know that it's not a big deal if you don't go outside for a whole day or you know if your kids watch 5 movies in a row on Saturday that's ok too. Which it is at certain times. So basically, what I started with was the thoughts and speech bubbles trying to kind of depict the different thoughts in conversations that have kind of heard about health and wellness from when it started in 2010. At the bottom there is more darker colours and that's showing those more apathetic feelings about things, like you're too busy to do things or we can't change certain things because that is the way it is and there is no point in trying to help those people who are maybe have a higher BMI because they are just not going to change and the smokers they are always going to be smokers so there is no point in trying to do anything about that. So as we went through the ChooseWell process and being a ChooseWell community with the grants. Way back when I first started I did win a few awards that did come with cash prizes so that was really great, I was able to implement a few healthy eating programs in our schools and that sort of thing. As you move up you can see lighter, more vibrant colours and that is the change. There was like a switch probably about 5 ish years ago to being more mindful of our wellness, whether it is just physical or our mental health as well. As you go up there is more vibrant lighter colours. It shows that shift and that people are making the healthy choice the easy choice. I don't know if anyone else remembers that – I don't know if it was a webinar or something we did in ChooseWell or resources but I always remember saying make the healthy choice the easy choice and so that is something that is starting to happen in our community. There's a little bit more emphasis on after

school programs that have recreation aspects to it. We have a really engaged beautification committee here is really trying to get our walking trail system up to snuff – making sure it is paved, making sure it is cleared, making sure that its safe and that the trees are weeded out a bit, so we aren't worried about bears and cougars again. Again, I am not an artist by any means but I tried my very best to show there is an evolution. There are a few darker colours in the middle there that didn't translate much on the scanned version but just to say that we do have some work to go. We will always have work ahead of us to make sure that people put their mental health and physical health first when it comes to their choices.”

**Participant 5:**

“So, this is hilarious, I have never been with a bunch of adults that have been so vulnerable, doing their paintings. This has been the hardest thing because you think about it and what you are going to do and how you are going to do it and what are other people going to think. So, kudos to everybody, it has been a challenge.

So, I took it from the side of Communities ChooseWell and how I have perceived their support over the years for the number of years that I have been involved. We have been involved right from the start. I gave thought to what they have helped each of us achieve. Not only in our own communities but connecting throughout the province. And these were all the words that resonated with me. They have worked so hard to help communities build but they have also built a community of Champions that can share resources, have conversations, take part in professional development etcetera. They have been a huge proponent of active living, again with the online coaching, other activities that they share or the information that they continue to send out.

Community and connections are very similar. Participant 1 and I live relatively close together, but it is always great to see her again because we have been connected since the Active Creative Engaged (ACE) communities. So, we always share ideas of what we have been up to. Participant 2

was involved in the healthy eating initiative that was led by Communities ChooseWell so you make these amazing connections throughout the province that you wouldn't necessarily make if you were working in isolation. They have always been able to provide resources. The one resource for me that comes to mind is the healthy eating course. It's fabulous. I don't know if anybody has been through it or perhaps shared it with their food service providers in their facilities. That is not the only resource that they have provided but it is the one that sticks out to me as being such a successful and such a valuable resource to communities. Especially when they are trying to work with food service providers in recreation centers, we try to transition to healthy eating which is the next one. We were very very fortunate that we did get a grant that we were able to work with our food service providers in the recreation center. They still are committed to those healthy food options now and it has probably been five or six years. They still don't put candies, pop in the forefront of their displays so it is that long-lasting support that comes out of the initiatives that Communities ChooseWell have started. And then there is the networking and that is also with the connections and the community. The great connections that we are able to make through networking opportunities through their events that they have put on and it just makes it more comfortable when you go to Communities ChooseWell activities when you have already connected with people over the years."

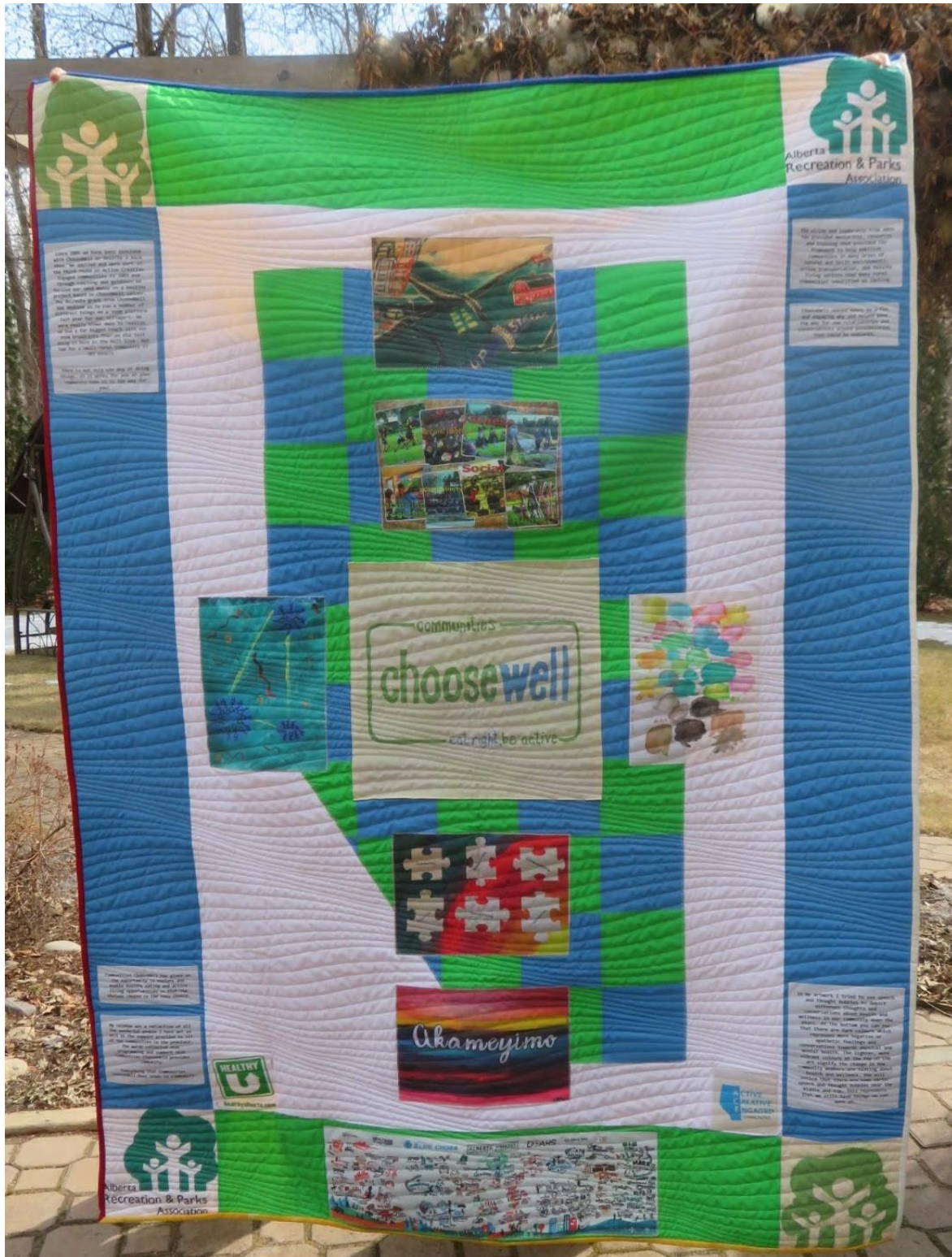


Figure 9: Completed Quilt

This quilt is intended to communicate the collective story of this evaluation. Quilts have been used in this fashion for centuries (Ball, 2002; Clover, 2011). I chose to use quilting in this [57]

evaluation because I am familiar with the artform and have been quilting for over ten years. The other reason quilting is impactful in this project is that it takes the individual artwork and creates a community story. It allowed space for both individual and the collective. It is also beneficial that a quilt will last a long time and is an interesting way for me and the ChooseWell Program to share the results of the evaluation.

Participants determined how the quilt should be designed at the quilt design session. The ChooseWell logo was placed in the middle because it is the program that everything is stemming from. It is how we are all connected. The group also wanted the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) to have a prominent placement and chose to put an ARPA logo at each corner to signify that it is the building blocks that hold it all together. In terms of accent colours, we chose to use the ChooseWell logo colours and to use solid fabric, so it didn't take away from the artwork.

We have included the ACE Communities logo and the Healthy U logo – these programs are what Communities ChooseWell evolved from. They laid the foundation for ChooseWell.

Participants expressed wanting to include the history, roots and where we came from in the quilt.

The group wanted the six pieces of artwork to be the same size. They liked the idea of an Alberta map and wanted to represent the diversity in the communities and how ChooseWell has helped every single one of them. How diverse communities come together under ChooseWell and make connections.

ChooseWell introduced the Champions to learning opportunities. The ARPA hosts an annual Conference and Energize workshop that ChooseWell Champions can attend. The Community ChooseWell Program partners with Alberta Blue Cross to host the Alberta Healthy Communities Symposium. Prior to COVID-19 it was held in person at Eau Claire Market in Calgary, AB. This symposium provides opportunities to network, build community capacity, and provide tangible tactics and tools to continue to develop your community (Communities

ChooseWell, n.d. para. 1). During the Alberta Healthy Communities Symposium, a gentleman was sketching on a board, and it showed everything that they talked about at the conference. This artwork is included on the bottom border of the quilt.

The Champions expressed how difficult it was to provide input without being able to visualize the final product. This led to the researcher taking these ideas away and creating two different mock-ups and emailing the Champions for input. From that input, the researcher created the third mock-up (Figure 10) which became the base design. It was useful for them to be able to see what is possible and visualize the final product but also have something to react to.

When discussing other ideas for the quilt one participant wanted to include an image of children with a look of hope in their eyes – that is what health and wellness and ChooseWell means to their community. The participants also discussed reconciliation and how they learned so much through ChooseWell and one participant suggested to include an image of smudge to represent these learnings. Representations for these were added after the base design with input from the Champions. The participants wanted to keep the look of the final quilt (Figure 9) clean without too much clutter. Instead of adding more images, I chose the colour yellow for the backing of the quilt to represent hope for the future. To incorporate reconciliation and the importance of it, I have used the four colours of the medicine wheel as the binding on the four sides of the quilt.

Participants talk about how ChooseWell has started them on their learning journey about Truth and Reconciliation. The Alberta Recreation & Parks Association and ChooseWell use land acknowledgements and have been building relationships with Elders and communities across Treaty, 6, 7, and 8. ARPA has created an [Oral Knowledge Hub](#) on their website that provides access to teachings about smudging, intergenerational trauma, residential schools, and more. These live webinars and recorded videos have provided Champions places to learn directly from Elders and Knowledge Keepers about the truth of Canada's history and how it is impacting the survivors

and communities now. At the 2022 Alberta Healthy Communities Symposium in March, there is a Grandmother's Circle on the power of connection. The Grandmother's Circle is a sharing circle hosted by four multi-nation Elders to discuss a specific topic.



Figure 10: Quilt base design, image by Karyn Hurlbut, 2022

## **5.0 Discussion and Analysis**

This chapter will provide insight into how the findings answer the research question. I will link the findings to the appropriate literature in arts-based evaluation, theory of change, and the logic model with identified outcomes. Then I will reflect about the process of using an arts-based approach to evaluation. I will provide some insight into how the participants felt about the process. I will discuss how this evaluation is complementary to the contracted evaluation of the ChooseWell program that was being done concurrently. Finally, I will provide reflections from my perspective as the evaluator.

### **5.1 Answering the Research Question**

The research question that is the focus of this evaluation is:

- What changes, if any, has Communities ChooseWell fostered in your community through the past ten years?

Through the artwork you can interpret some of the changes that occurred in the communities involved. In the speech bubbles (Figure 6), there is a very literal change from darker colours at the bottom to brighter more vibrant colours near the top. This represents a change in mindset about health and wellness in the community through the years. In the artwork with photographs (Figure 3), you can see eight examples of projects based in community that have occurred in the community. This artist expressed how every project to do with health and wellness in their community is linked to ChooseWell. The community is the smallest that participated (303 population) and went in depth about each project that was made possible by the supports and leadership through the ChooseWell program. Some examples include:

- Exercise promotion program at the elementary school
- Park and playground reimagining. Included junior and senior playground, fitness equipment, and a skate park

- Portable fitness equipment and providing mobile classes
- Created an Active Community Strategy with public participation
- Developing a glow in the dark trail
- Seniors' fitness class.

While these projects are visible outcomes of the ChooseWell program, there are non-visible changes as well. This same community has seen an increased understanding that social isolation is a health issue.

The word “shift” was continually used through this project in place of the word “change”. I think because we are looking back over a ten-year period, the differences are viewed as shifting through years because the change has been continual, and the communities are continually learning and growing specifically about healthy eating and active living. Many participants discussed seeing a shift in mindset, which is also depicted in the speech bubble artwork (Figure 6). Shifting was also used in how service providers in the community have been shifting in how they provide services. I think this has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to shift rapidly to provide services in a different way.

One participant spoke about the increased demand for recreation that came first, followed by an increased demand for healthy eating. I would think this started as a shift in mindset of the community followed by the shift in behaviour or action.

Change is not always easy to measure, especially with a preventative program. One participant insightfully stated that it is “difficult to measure, for example, who didn't get a chronic disease because they took part in healthy eating and active living”.

During the quilt design session, the participants spoke about past iterations of the ChooseWell program including Healthy U and Active Creative Engaged (ACE) communities. These iterations are important to the history of the program and the participants identified that they

[63]

wanted them included in the quilt. One of the supports that kept arising as beneficial and valuable was the coaching and mentoring that occurred within the Active Creative Engaged (ACE) communities' program. They really liked how the coaches would go to each community and really listen to the community leaders.

The change in communities is also evident in the narratives and the discussion that took place at the quilt design session. ChooseWell has developed community leaders and helped them make better choices. One statement that stands out is “ChooseWell has helped move our community in the right direction”. Another participant spoke about the Grandmother Circles (a sharing circle hosted by multi-nation Elders) and other cultural opportunities to learn about Truth and Reconciliation and how this was their first exposure to the truth of Canada's history and the Residential School System. ChooseWell has helped be a catalyst for change by providing opportunities for Champions to learn about the Truth can help them create meaningful change within their community and create more welcoming communities. With Champions being community leaders, they are in a unique position to support their communities learning about the residential school system and the impacts of intergenerational trauma. By learning about the truth, they have more capacity to take on actions towards reconciliation at a local level. For example, in Figure 3, one participant put the word reconciliation over an image of their painted rocks for Orange Shirt Day (September 30). They mentioned “...I have to talk to Council to see if they will let me make it a permanent fixture so that we can put larger rocks around it to protect it”. They went on to say “...it is important that they feel welcome in my community.”

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic that started impacting Alberta in March 2020, the province was already experiencing an economic downturn which was impacting communities. The pandemic exacerbated many of the issues that were already being experienced. It hit the recreation and culture sector hard where many recreation professionals lost their jobs temporarily or

permanently. Many professionals also had to pivot to implement provincial measures like the Restrictions Exemption Program (REP) and possibly while they were short-staffed. This could impact how many Champions are able to commit to the program long-term because some of the Champions are part of ChooseWell because of their title or role within the community. The health sector has also been stressed because of the pandemic with people employed by Alberta Health Services being reassigned partially or fully to support the pandemic response. This also can impact how engaged and involved the Champions can be. While the province begins to talk about recovery, this may mean reallocating human resources and financial resources and I worry about preventative programs. ChooseWell has shown that they are flexible and adaptable to the needs of the Champions to create lasting changes in their communities that positively impact healthy eating and active living.

Although we were reflecting on the past ten years for this evaluation, all participants had hinted toward looking to the future and the work that needs to continue and that there are still areas for growth within their communities. As one artist put it “Akameyimo” which means “keep on going” or “persevere”. This is consistent with the findings as all participants spoke about the future and that there is still room to grow in relation to healthy eating and active living.

## **5.2 Linking to the Logic Model**

The ChooseWell Logic Model (Appendix 1) summarizes the goal and subsequent outcomes of the program. The logic model presents the outcomes in a linear fashion from short-term to long-term outcomes. This linearity is used in this section to present the outcomes although the changes expressed by participants in this evaluation did not occur in this linear fashion. This ties into the theory of change bubble graph (Figure 1) because it centers the long-term Champions with the potential changes around them which is visually non-linear. When looking at findings it is important to see how they align with the logic model because it can help show which outcomes are

occurring and how the activities of the program have created those outcomes. While this evaluation was not intended to address all the outcomes there are clear connections between the findings of this evaluation and some of the short and long-term outcomes of the program. The outcomes from the logic model that are noticeable in the findings are:

1. Changed Champion Capacity
2. Changed Community Environments
3. Changed Community Capacity
4. Changed Population Health and Wellbeing

These outcomes are listed in order from short-term outcomes to long-term outcomes. The change in champion capacity was indicated by the increased communication between champions within and between communities. This was evident during the quilt design session when participants knew each other already and were able to share that they connect less formally as well. One participant expressed “Participant 1 and I live relatively close together, but it is always great to see her again because we have been connected since the Active Creative Engaged (ACE) communities. So, we always share ideas of what we have been up to. Participant 2 was involved in the healthy eating initiative that was led by Communities ChooseWell so you make these amazing connections throughout the province that you wouldn’t necessarily make if you were working in isolation.” Within the artwork there are also words like networking and connections expressed. (Figure 3 and 7).

Changed community environments is a mid-term outcome that is indicated by community and recreation practices, policies and environments in communities reached by ChooseWell support healthy eating and active living (Appendix 1). This was shown by multiple participants. One spoke of all of the projects their community has completed and said, “All of this would never have happened if I didn’t have the coaching or the information on where to look for grants from

ChooseWell.” Another participant spoke of their community and said “Being able to present what we have done in our community and then the recognition that we received to like senior leadership groups, to council, to the powers that be to support, to continue to support the very valuable resources that are in the community that recreation and healthy eating truly are, especially now, everyone definitely knows this, are truly an essential service.” Another participant spoke about the food service providers in their recreation facilities and said “They still are committed to those healthy food options now and it has probably been five or six years. They still don’t put candies, pop in the forefront of their displays so it is that long-lasting support that comes out of the initiatives that Communities ChooseWell have started.” These observations from the participants of their communities show that the ChooseWell program have created change in community environments that support healthy eating and active living.

The next outcome, changed community capacity, is also a mid-term outcome that is indicated by communities having increased capacity to plan, implement, evaluate and sustain healthy eating and active living actions. The speech bubble artwork (Figure 6) shows a shift in thoughts and feelings from negative and apathetic to more positive. The participant explained further but when they said “...I always remember saying make the healthy choice the easy choice and so that is something that is starting to happen in our community. There’s a little bit more emphasis on after school programs that have recreation aspects to it. We have a really engaged beautification committee here is really trying to get our walking trail system up to snuff...” it illustrated the increase community capacity and how the community is planning, implementing, and sustaining healthy eating and active living opportunities. Another quote from a participant where community capacity was increased in an example is “...where the money sits and how it actually did roll out to community because the money we did receive, I know we have all done it, the one that really made the most difference was the \$10,000 seed grant from the ACE funding, I

know we did, I think everyone did tripled quadrupled that money and leveraged it. I really appreciated that part.”

The long-term outcome that these evaluation findings can speak to is changed population health and well-being. One participant expressed how difficult this can be to measure by saying it is “difficult to measure, for example, who didn’t get a chronic disease because they took part in healthy eating and active living”. The participants were able to share examples of how the wellbeing of their community and quality of life of their community members has been improved. Quite a few of the participants spoke about a shift, or a switch of mindsets. This includes mindsets of people making decisions in their communities like town councils. One participant said, “The town council has never valued health as part of their budget, as part of their responsibility. They told me that straight up, like we don’t get money for health and physical activity, so we aren’t going to participate. So basically, what I have seen over the years is a shift in that mindset so that yes, we can use our natural resources and built environments, that kind of thing to build our communities and grow them. We have definitely seen that occur.”. In Figure 3, you can see photos of projects that positively impacted community well-being. One example from this participant is “The bottom left goes way back to the ACE Community project, and children were picking what equipment they wanted in their playground. This playground is over 10 years old now and it looks brand spanking new. The kids never deface anything in there because it is their playground.”

### **5.3 Linking to the Theory of Change**

The findings are in alignment with the theory of change (Figure 2). The theory of change has a variety of supports and opportunities in the box on the left. This was expressed by participants when they spoke of the choice and opportunities that ChooseWell provides. Coaching was an opportunity provided in the past that the Champions really valued, and the communities benefited from. People become a Champion by self-identification because of their commitment to

healthy eating and active living. Champions chose which learning and networking opportunities suited their needs, and the needs of their communities. The community context was addressed within the questionnaire (Appendix C) and out of the six participants we had representation from communities with very different contexts such as a specialized municipality, rural, and a First Nations community. There was also variation in what programs, organizations, and amenities the communities have. The Champions were able to address changes in themselves and their growth as well as changes in their communities that promote healthy eating and active living.

The Champions have grown their capacity over the years to become influential community leaders to help change perceptions about healthy eating and active living. They have used the 6P's: partnerships, promotion, programs, places, participation, and policies to create this change. Some participants spoke about going to their municipal Council and trying to get them to commit to supporting healthy eating and active living at a municipal level. There were long-term changes discussed in each overarching area: Healthy Eating, Active Living, and Quality of Life described in the theory of change. Participants spoke about the training and modules around healthy options in recreation spaces for example stocking the vending machines with healthy options and using contracts with food vendors to ensure healthy options. Active living changes included building trails and active living infrastructure and offering free or low-cost fitness and recreation programs. Quality of life was discussed indirectly by participants talking about the mental component of health and how active living and healthy eating can positively impact that. One participant said, "These opportunities to be healthy, to choose healthy, to have a mental or physical space to escape are very important." The cultural learning opportunities provided by the ARPA and ChooseWell have also expanded the Champions abilities to increase a sense of belonging and increase social connections within their communities. Being culturally responsive can help use the six P's in an inclusive way so everyone in the community can benefit.

The Champions are central to the changes that were illuminated within this evaluation. They have been committed and engaged with the program for ten years or more and have been a catalyst for change in their community because of that commitment. They have witnessed a shift in mindset around healthy eating and active living at a local level that was supported by a province-wide program. They have also witnessed changes to the ChooseWell program and what types of offerings the program has for Champions. It was valuable for the long-term Champions to connect again to discuss and reminisce about the last ten years of the program. I am curious which characteristics the long-term Champions embody are the most important to see the long-term changes that were discovered in this evaluation. I am also curious what has caused the Champions to remain Champions for ten years or more. Exploring these questions may help the ChooseWell program to have Champions that are committed long-term and for more communities to experience some of the changes that were expressed in this evaluation. Another question that arises is, what changes are experienced when Champions are with ChooseWell for 3-5 years compared to the longer-term Champions that have been part of ChooseWell for 10+ years?

#### **5.4 Reflections on Arts-based Evaluation**

The literature review provided insight into what arts-based approaches are and some of the benefits and challenges to using these approaches. The methodology of this project provided opportunity for the participants to be engaged in the evaluation process and specifically the analysis phase. Using an arts-based approach provided space for different ways of knowing and multiple meanings. I have attempted to present the findings, so the reader is able to interpret them. The participants each had an opportunity to interpret their artwork and each other's through the one-page narrative and the quilt design session. I have provided some of my interpretations within the discussion section but using the participants comments to create the links. Through scoping the evaluation question in collaboration with the ChooseWell Program Manager and attempting to

make the question broad but still focused, I think we were able to obtain deeper meaning through the artwork and it allowed participants to share what they value most. One of my key learnings about arts-based approaches is that they will not end in one final truth – there will be space for different perspectives and for conversations to emerge (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eales & Peers, 2016; Leavy, 2020). This was evident at the quilt design session as participants shared their artwork. There was lots of conversation and excitement about what each participant chose to share through their art.

I was able to mitigate some of the challenges associated with arts-based approaches through the design of this evaluation. One of the significant challenges is that the interpretation of art can be influenced by the evaluators experience and there is a risk of the evaluators voice overtaking the participants. I think I was able to mitigate these challenges by providing a collective space for participants to discuss and analyze their artwork. This minimized my voice as the evaluator. Where I did struggle with this during the quilt design session was when we got to discussing specifics around the quilt design. I had not provided the participants with enough information about the quilting process and my skills as a quilter, so they were unable to visualize and provide suggestions for what was possible or not within the quilt design. That is why we started with the base design, and I sent them mock-ups to get feedback. This is something I would do differently if I were to do this again. I would attempt to clearly explain what techniques I am familiar with and show some previous work so participants can see what is possible.

If I were to design this evaluation again, and once we are through the COVID-19 pandemic and can gather safely, I would create a space for the participants to gather and reflect and create the artwork in the same space but individually. I would plan the reflection to be done individually and then collectively and provide many mediums of different visual arts, such as collages, pastels, paints, crayons, etc. By doing the artwork together, I think the participants would still feel the

vulnerability that they felt but may not feel so alone. Another idea would be to provide fabric to allow each participant to create their own artwork out of fabric to be quilted together (Ball, 2002).

Displaying the artwork and direct quotations from the quilt design session along with excerpts from the narratives has provided the ability for myself and the audience to interpret the artwork and grasp the participants meanings. Without the text (quotes and narratives), the artwork would have been interpreted by me (the evaluator) and my perspective, positionality, and biases would have been more visible within the findings. By allowing the participants to tell the audience the meaning behind their artwork, it strengthens the credibility of this evaluation and empowered the participants to tell the story that they wanted to share about their experiences in the ChooseWell program.

Arts-based approaches can allow the participants to feel a sense of belonging, empathy, and trust (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2016; Monk et. al., 2019; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bishop et. al., 2019). In other arts-based research that I have read, I noticed that the researcher and the artists spend a lot of time together (Ball, 2002; Clover, 2011). Due to the geographical reach of the ChooseWell program and the COVID-19 pandemic, along with how the evaluation was structured, I did not spend a lot of time with the participants. Despite this, there were still signs the participants showed that indicated they felt a sense of belonging and trust. This trust was shown at the quilt design session where participants indicated feeling vulnerable but still were able to share their artwork. When one participant pointed out this vulnerability, others were quick to agree and were able to empathize with each other and have a shared experience.

This project was successful in capturing lived experience and I hope will create a connection between the artists and the audience (Ashworth, 2020). By looking at the quilt, you can visually interpret the experiences the Champions have had through the years. You can see spaces where they are similar, like gradations of color and what those represent. Each participant was able

to express the meaning of their art verbally and in text. This aligns with the literature about meaning-making, a key concept in arts-based inquiry. While the participants expressed the meaning of their art, it is still open to some interpretation which allows the audience to create a connection as well.

Another key concept discussed in the literature review is immersing or immersion. I am not sure how successful this evaluation was in getting the participants to immerse themselves in the artwork. This did not come up during our discussion. The part that makes me think this might not have occurred was the discussion we had around the difficulty in picking up the paintbrush and putting it on the canvas. One participant expressed feeling like being a child again. Another expressed second guessing themselves. This makes me think that maybe they did not feel fully immersed or in a state of flow, but this can only be confirmed by asking them.

Earlier, I spoke about some participants feeling discomfort with creating art. You may have noticed this in the Findings as well in direct participant quotes. This discomfort became clear to me when recruiting participants and I had one interested person call me and ask me some questions and they ended up declining to participate because they were uncomfortable creating art. During the quilt design session, many of the participants stated that they were not artists or that they tried their best before presenting their artwork. I really enjoyed participant 5 when they said “I have never been with a bunch of adults that have been so vulnerable, doing their paintings. This has been the hardest thing because you think about it and what you are going to do and how you are going to do it and what are other people going to think. So, kudos to everybody, it has been a challenge.” I think it was important to verbalize that vulnerability that everyone was sharing with each other, and I think it was meaningful that it came from another participant. As the evaluator that did not create any artwork to show, I was not in the same space of vulnerability as the participants were.

## **5.5 Concurrent Evaluation**

In the Introduction I spoke about another evaluation of the Communities ChooseWell program being completed at the same time. WellQuest Consulting Ltd. is contracted by Communities ChooseWell and completes ongoing, iterative evaluation that is used in the mid-term and annual report that is submitted to Alberta Health. These mid-term and annual reports are not publicly accessible documents, but ChooseWell has shared the 2021 Interim Narrative Report and the 2020-2021 Annual Report with me. Since they are not public documents they are not included as an appendix.

In the 2020-2021 Annual Report, a mixed method approach was used including an online survey, focused conversations with Champions online, mid-year process evaluation with ChooseWell staff, activity specific evaluation and tracking of program activities and outputs. Within this report there is information about the activities ChooseWell led and how many Champions were engaged in each activity. There were three themes that emerged in the qualitative data, mainly from the focused conversations with Champions. The key themes in the community capacity domain were linking with others, obtaining resources, and skills knowledge and learning. The skills, knowledge and learning theme was closely linked to the linking with others theme which was corroborated in this evaluation. These three themes are visible in the artwork and in their narratives. For example, in Figure 7 the Champion used the words, networking, connections and resources in their artwork.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Champions and how it impacted community capacity was noted within the 2020-2021 Annual Report and the 2021 Interim Report. COVID-19 impacted Champions capacity through reassignments or redeployments, and job loss. The impacts of the Restrictions Exemption Program (REP) were expressed at the quilt design session. The adaptability of the ChooseWell staff and the program is noted in the major successes of the annual report and in the key learnings section of the interim report. The variety of ways to engage with the

ChooseWell program was valuable to the Champions and allowed them to take their community context into consideration which opportunities to participate in.

The 2021 Interim Report speaks to ChooseWell's Indigenous content and programming and their commitment to walking with Indigenous communities. In the quilt design session transcript, Champions expressed the value of the Indigenous programming like the Grandmother's Circle. Participant 1 said "... I have been so grateful for the work that the ARPA staff has been doing with the Indigenous people. I have been really lucky to be included in a lot of the conferences and the Grandmother's circle, I have learned so much. We are trying our best here to go forward with the Truth and Reconciliation as best we can." This is also expressed in the artwork Champions made by using the word "reconciliation" and one participant using the Cree word "Akameyimo". The Champions expressed a desire to see Reconciliation represented in the final quilt design, that is why the borders of the quilt are the four colours of the medicine wheel.

The interim and annual report included both quantitative and qualitative data to report on the outcomes of the ChooseWell program as expressed in the Logic Model (Appendix A). This arts-based evaluation is complementary to the evaluation being completed by WellQuest Consulting Ltd. There are findings from this evaluation that express the outcomes and could be used in the next Annual Report. These two evaluations are complementary because there are certain outcomes that they both reinforce along with outcomes that are identified in one evaluation or the other. The outcomes that are not identified in both evaluations provides a fuller story of the program. They provide an opportunity to explore convergent findings and divergent findings to reveal different pieces of the participant's experience.

## **5.6 Evaluator reflections**

I attempted to be self-reflective during the entire evaluation process to ensure my voice was not going to overpower the participants and to reflect on the arts-based evaluation process as I was

experiencing it. Being self-reflective throughout this project was challenging because we have been through a number of COVID waves and the stress from everything limited my ability to be self-reflective at times. The worst months for me were August 2021 (prior to recruitment) and December 2021 (after data collection). These months were challenging because of the prolonged stress of the pandemic and the compounded stress from my employment. As I reflect now, I am glad those tough months were not during the data collection phase because it could have impacted the interactions I had with the participants. Yanow (2009) discussed being willing to let go of the sense of control over the situation and I was challenged with this in the data collection phase when the timelines I had anticipated were unable to be met. It was important for me to let go of the timelines to allow for space for participants to contribute in their own time.

I really enjoyed using an arts-based approach, I feel as the evaluator that I am a mechanism to translate the community's message to the program and organization. I think this approach lends itself to working with community and aligns well with the community development approach that I use. The community is the expert and I use an asset-based approach to gather and identify gifts or assets that can be used to work towards the vision for the community. I want to create engaging spaces for community members to choose to be involved in what type of community they will thrive in. Using an arts-based approach would help create a more engaging space and a more inclusive space. It would also show some of the gifts and abilities community members have and are willing to share. I would use an arts-based approach in a community-based participatory research project. By using arts, it can help create a sense of community (Bishop et. al., 2019) which would also indicate that it would be useful in community development projects or research. I feel a sense of pride when I think about presenting this quilt and sharing the participants voices and I hope they feel a sense of pride and ownership. I like the choice of mediums that can be used in an arts-based evaluation and how they can be used simultaneously or sequentially to find the right

design for the evaluation. For example, with this project, there was painting (watercolour or acrylic), writing (the one-page narrative), and quilting used sequentially.

When I plan another arts-based evaluation I would include the participants from the very beginning and allow them to help shape the evaluation question as well. For this project, I worked with the Program Manager of ChooseWell to create the scope and evaluation question, then I designed the evaluation with the Program Manager's feedback. I am curious how this would have changed the project if I had scoped the project with the Program Manager and then invited participants to create the evaluation question collectively. Would the evaluation question have been the same? What insights could have come from that process?

I liked using art in two areas of my project, data collection and the final presentation. I think arts-based approaches are conducive to community development programs/projects/initiatives because of the other impacts it can have such as increase trust, a sense of belonging among others. I am curious how this project would have been different if I had preexisting community relationships with the participants. For example, in my work as a Community Developer at a municipality, I work with community partners and stakeholders; would my pre-existing relationships with these people impact the outcome of the evaluation if we were to use arts-based approaches to evaluate one of our collaborative efforts, or would it strengthen it based on comfort and rapport that has been previously built.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The ChooseWell Program has been active for ten years in Alberta and provides supports and resources to Champions to influence active living, healthy eating, and quality of life at a local level. This evaluation was able to determine changes in the Champions, and their communities that have occurred throughout the ten years. The ChooseWell Program has been integral in creating changes in the Champions, the community capacity, the community environments and the general populations health and well-being. Although each community has a different context and therefore a different story, each Champion portrayed and expressed the impacts ChooseWell has had on their community over the last ten years.

The participants were involved in this project because they wanted to share the impacts of ChooseWell and know that participating in evaluations can help others understand the impacts of a program. They wanted to show the value of the program and specifically mentioned relaying this value to the province. I asked participants why they chose to participate and many of them indicated that they wanted the province and the government to understand the value of ChooseWell. Participants made the following comments in the introductions:

“...the province really needs to understand the value of the ChooseWell program and that is what I am hoping to convey”.

“...to show that this is a very valuable program”.

“...really saw eventually the changes that the program had been making in communities, just the flexibility of the program and the fun part of it”.

“...making sure the government knows exactly how important it is”.

One participant has suggested that I apply to present the results of this evaluation at the 2022 ARPA Conference in October. It is important for participants to be involved in the evaluation but to also see that the results are shared with relevant stakeholders to ensure that their voice is being

heard. That is why the final quilt will be gifted to the ChooseWell Program and I hope they are able to use it to tell the story of the changes and impacts this program has had on communities across the province. An option for ChooseWell to consider is to continue to evaluate the long-term changes fostered by the program. Being able to express the long-term changes communities have experienced because of the ChooseWell program could support long-term funding and longevity of the program. This is important because participants were able to articulate the shift in mindsets around healthy eating and active living and these changes need time to happen. I would recommend engaging Champions from around the province to explore what keeps them committed to being a ChooseWell Champion and what characteristics they have that make them exemplary community leaders. Learning more about their commitment and characteristics can inform what capacities are important to nurture in new Champions and what are essential pieces of the program that keep Champions committed over many years.

Some of the participants spoke of how important ChooseWell is in a rural setting. One participant said, “My whole thing was about rural Alberta; we get the farm concept and really quite often what I have found through my journeys is that rural communities really don’t have the same access. ... that’s what ChooseWell did for us was they brought it down, they levelled the playing field for us and made it real.” Each of the participants had different community contexts and the opportunities and choices that ChooseWell provides has “opened doors” and gave them a choice in what support to access based on their community context. With the disruption of the pandemic and the economic downturn Alberta was going through prior, it will be important to continue to listen the Champions and remaining flexible to the Champions and community’s needs. One recommendation from participants in the quilt design session was to try to contact previous community coaches and have a gathering with Champions and coaches to reconnect. This could be fun to do at an in-person event that is already occurring to add another incentive to attend.

Arts-based approaches are methodologies used to answer the evaluation question. The approach still needs to be suitable to answer the evaluation question and be useful. While it was suitable for this project, it may not be suitable for all projects. It might not be suitable for all groups of participants either. While the six participants of this evaluation were engaged and excited to be involved, there might have been other long-term Champions that chose not to participate due to the nature of the approach.

On the flip side, art can be engaging and fun for participants, but it can also be used to create connections, and gather deeper meaning. There are so many different forms of art that can be used in evaluation and that could be useful for ChooseWell such as, fiction writing, poetry, dance, or film. For example, with film, you could have participants make a TikTok video or an Instagram reel to help answer an evaluation question. Arts-based approaches can be incorporated into evaluation frameworks and can be used alone or with other methods to gather data. ChooseWell focuses on healthy eating and active living, and it would be interesting to use a medium with physical movement to perform an evaluation such as dance. I also would recommend photovoice to ChooseWell so Champions could use photographs to visually show their community and the impacts ChooseWell has had. Since ChooseWell has used visual arts in the past to summarize the learnings at the Healthy Communities Symposium, it could be used again at a symposium as part of their program evaluation. It could be something like a collective mural or quilt that Champions engage in creating at the symposium and then the findings could be explored virtually with the Champions.

This arts-based evaluation has illuminated changes the ChooseWell program has fostered in communities across Alberta. There are recommendations from the evaluator but also from participants expressed in this report but through using an arts-based approach, the ChooseWell staff can review the artwork and direct quotations to identify other recommendations from their

perspective. They could also use the artwork and quotations to delve deeper and get curious for future evaluations and using arts-based inquiry in the future.

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**Appendix B**  
**Email Invitation**

Good Morning/Afternoon,

Would you like to participate in an arts-based evaluation of the Communities ChooseWell program? You have been a Champion for many years. This project is an opportunity to show the impact of this program on your community in a fun and graphic way. No need to feel to be an artist!

<https://youtu.be/wqbFPlvdACg>

If this is of interest to you, please let me know by **Monday August 23, 2021**. I can answer any questions you may have and provide more details on consent and confidentiality.

I am looking forward to hearing from you,

Karyn Hurlbut  
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## Appendix C

### Individual Artwork Guidelines

**What:** Design and create a painting

1. Take a few minutes to reflect on the context of your community by filling out the questionnaire included in this package.
2. If you need more space, please use additional pages.
3. Take a few minutes to reflect on your time as a ChooseWell Champion.
  - What projects and programs have been in your community through the years fostered by Communities ChooseWell?
  - What have you learned through the years because of your involvement in Communities ChooseWell?
  - What changes have you seen in your community because of Communities ChooseWell?
4. Write down words and phrases that come to mind as you reflect
5. Use the words and phrases from the two reflections to design your painting
6. Create your artwork in a style of your choosing
7. Record, handwrite, or type up to one-page of text to accompany the artwork.

**Now what:** Send a copy of your questionnaire, artwork, and narrative to [karynhurlbut@gmail.com](mailto:karynhurlbut@gmail.com) before **October 1, 2021**

**What else:** In October, we will be gathering online to co-create the design of the quilt. Please participate in the doodle poll to let me know when you can participate. Continue to reflect on your experiences and what changes you have seen in your community that have been fostered by the Communities ChooseWell program.

## Appendix D

### Community Context Questionnaire

#### Tell me about your community:

1. Is your community **urban, rural, suburban, first Nation community, or Métis Settlement**?
2. What is the **population** of your community?
3. How **walkable** is your community?
4. What **active living infrastructure** is available in the community? Is it free or is there a fee?
5. What **organizations** (private, public, and non-profit) in your community actively promote active living and healthy eating?
6. Which **programs** in your community focus on active living and healthy eating?
7. What is **special** or **unique** about your community that you would like to share?



## Appendix E

### Quilt Design Session Overview

#### 1. Introductions, Consent, & Housekeeping Items

- Confidentiality
  - o Please only share what you are comfortable sharing.
  - o Because we are doing a group process, anonymity cannot be achieved so I ask that we keep information shared in this session confidential.
- Each participant will introduce themselves
  - o Where are you from?
  - o How long have you been a ChooseWell Champion?
  - o Why did you want to participate in this project?
- Facilitator will remind participants that this is voluntary and confirm that they have given verbal consent.
- Feel free to mute and take a bio break whenever you need one.
- Please stay off mute so the discussion can flow more naturally
- If you are going to use the chat, please send messages to everyone in the room. Avoid side conversations.

#### 2. Guideline Discussion

- For this to be a safe space to share; we need to create and agree to guidelines.
- What does respect look like for the group?
- It is also important to have fun.
- Facilitator will guide this discussion and use examples to reach consensus.

#### 3. Circle Share of Individual Artwork

- We will go around in a 'circle' sharing the individual artwork and explaining what changes it represents.
- Allow time for participants to ask questions of each other.

#### 4. Design the Quilt

- After we have seen and understand all the artwork we will co-create the design of the quilt.
- The two significant things about the design of the quilt are:
  - o Placement (in the center or around the outside)
  - o Size (larger or smaller)
- We will discuss what placement and size means to the significance of the change and come to consensus.
- If there are any insights that come out of the session that are not portrayed in artwork, the facilitator will try to incorporate these ideas into the final quilt.

#### 5. Closing & Next Steps

- Next steps will be explained
  - o The facilitator will now go and create the quilt.
  - o You will receive a photo of the final quilt and a copy of the final report upon completion of the project.
- Thank participants for their time and engagement in this project.