

SDG Accord 2023 Case Study



Integration of SDGs in

- Institutional governance/strategic level
- SDGs in research
- SDGs in campus operations
- SDGs in curriculum development
- SDGs in student engagement activities
- SDGs into community activities
- SDGs at a whole-institution level

Focus on

- Goal 1 - No poverty
- Goal 2 - Zero hunger
- Goal 3 - Good health and wellbeing
- Goal 4 - Quality education
- Goal 5 - Gender equality
- Goal 6 - Clean water and sanitation
- Goal 7 - Affordable and clean energy
- Goal 8 - Decent work and economic growth
- Goal 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Goal 10 - Reduced inequalities
- Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities
- Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production
- Goal 13 - Climate action
- Goal 14 - Life below water
- Goal 15 - Life on land
- Goal 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions
- Goal 17 - Partnerships for the goals

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Summary:

In December 2022, the community of La Loche, Saskatchewan held an event with Saskatchewan Polytechnic to celebrate achievements to date on their collaborative Virtual Reality (VR) wellness initiative.

The applied research partnership, which began in 2020, focusses on addressing disparities in mental health care access and supports experienced by Indigenous youth—a group with a suicide rate of five to six times higher than non-Indigenous youth in Canada. Recognizing that the current approach to providing mental health care is not adequate, the applied research team is working closely with the community to explore innovative new ways to support Indigenous youth wellness. The project is currently in its first phase—gathering data and creating community partnerships.

The project focusses on the pillars of safety, identity and belonging and has the ultimate goal of creating a VR platform to enhance the well-being of Indigenous youth living in rural, remote and northern communities. VR technology holds the potential to expand the tools available, reduce the sense of stigma and meet the needs of Indigenous youth in a culturally responsive way.

La Loche youth, who brought forward the idea of using VR for mental wellness, have been integral to the collaboration so far. Research lead, Lindsey Boechler, has been working with them to gather data and begin creating resources. The La Loche students are the project's on-the-ground innovators and central driving force of the initiative.

Outline the 3 key benefits of integrating this theme:

- 1.*** The initiative addresses disparities in mental health care access and supports experienced by Indigenous youth—a group with a suicide rate of five to six times higher than non-Indigenous youth in Canada.
- 2.*** The program contributes to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #19: Close the gaps in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, which includes suicide and mental health.
- 3.*** Engaging youth in the co-creation of mental health supports reduces stigma in a culturally responsive way.

Outline the barriers or challenges encountered in integrating this theme and how you overcame these:

- 1.*** Research projects of this scale and scope take time. Designing the project in multiple phases allows time to consider the results of each phase before moving on to the next, ensuring that tools and supports meet emerging needs.
- 2.*** Funding projects of this scale and scope can be a challenge. Further funding is needed to continue the project into its proposed second and third years. Saskatchewan Polytechnic will continue to work with potential funding partners to ensure research can continue.

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Please outline your conclusions and recommendations to others (Max 200 words):

This project is still at an early stage, however there is already clear, qualitative, evidence of benefit to the community of La Loche. The youth have been enthusiastic in developing and guiding the project which, in turn, has strengthened their connection to the wider community and the land. The project has provided the youth with a way to share their experience with others both within and outwith their community.

In the next phases, Saskatchewan Polytechnic will work towards building the secure VR platform and will continue forming and fostering community partnerships and building local capacity surrounding the use and development of VR technology.

For more information, please see the initiative's promotional video <https://youtu.be/-54XF4fz9PQ>