Hans Kai® comes to British Columbia

Hans Kai® originated many decades ago in Japan, was supported and taken into many communities by the Japanese Consumer Co-op Organization and the Japanese Health and Welfare Federation (HeW). Hans Kai® are a fundamental unit of preventive health practice in Japan. Groups are made up of 10-20 people living in the same vicinity, on the same street, in the same neighbourhood. They agree to meet for a few hours once a month on average and take part in an ongoing process of disease and accident prevention. It is estimated that there are more than 25,000 Hans groups in the HeW network.

Hans Kai® was brought to Canada by Nor’West Co-op in Winnipeg and RobertCliche Co-op in Québec, adapted for the Canadian context, translated into English and French and copyrighted.

We, at NorWest, started running Hans Kai® in the Inkster district of Winnipeg in 2010 starting with interested participants from the Get Better Together Program. The group had 10 members to start. The next HANS KAI groups were mostly seniors at the time and had 8-20 members. By the end of 2014 we were operating 12 groups with a total of 168 participants. Participants range in age from early 20s to early 90s. We expected the groups to run for a year but have found that over 70% of participants chose to remain in the program.

The University of Manitoba has been monitoring Hans Kai®. Initial results show statistically significant results. The final report will be available in October.

A number of conditions are attached to use of Hans Kai® to ensure that its integrity is maintained. These include the restriction on use of the program to co-ops that are members of the Health Care Co-op Federation of Canada, inclusion of the four core components in every session, change in any content only with approval of the NorWest and RobertCliche Co-operatives, and full acknowledgement of the copyright ownership of the program.

Wellness, Social Service and Health Co-operatives provide services to over a million Canadians; everything from ambulance and other mobile services to home care, clinical services, support for people with multiple barriers to employment, and extended care insurance to an amazingly wide range of community outreach services. In every case these services are based on the priorities of the member-owners. Because of the Canada Health Act we cannot restrict services that are funded through the provincial medical insurance to our members.

Health co-ops range in size from a handful of member-owners to thousands. In some only workers can become members, in the vast majority membership is completely open. This “general membership” ensures that both the users and the providers of the services are well represented as well as other supporters in the community.

Our member co-ops are motivated by the World Health Organization’s definition of health as “a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”