UCEDD Resource Center
A project of AUCD, in partnership with AIDD, to strengthen and support the network of UCEDDs

2016 UCEDD TA Institute
Enriching Cultural Efforts: What's in Your Toolbox?
March 3 - 4, 2016

Session Notes

Theme: Infrastructure

Objective: Create and promote a safe and inclusive environment in all settings (office, clinic, school, others).

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Part 1 of Session

Challenges and Responses

There's a huge need to create the space and time to do this work; how do we do this with limited time?

- There has to be the intention and a commitment, and it's extremely challenging

What does "making space" mean, practically?

- When onboarding a new staff person; the organization has a culture (e.g. unwritten rules) before that person gets there- need to be explicit about helping the new person navigate
- It's insufficient to add diversity
- Be inviting of "whoever you are"
- Be open to change
- This tends to happen more with trainees and staff than with leadership team; it needs to be okay for people to feel like they can do better
- New Mexico talks about reflective spaces to explore their work with families; it's the time and space (be intentional and regular and consistent and scheduled in) that's important, especially for building trust in groups and one-on-one – there's an "internal space" that grows for people over time so they can eventually address more challenging or deeper issues; this creates internal competency about being in spaces where you don't know everything

A lot of the Toolkit strategies are more attitudes and not easily operationalized; we don't have enough conversations about these things and just assume they're going to happen – we need to dedicate more time

Leaders need to identify when there may be sensitive, non-surface issues – these can divide people and make it challenging

It can be challenging to tell inclusion experts that we're not modeling inclusion; carving out uncomfortable moments needs to be a priority for leaders – if it's not part of the culture, it can become a problem

We are creating space and we are having difficult discussions; we're hearing from our staff that they want safe spaces without management around because people don't feel comfortable having conversations with us there – how are people creating that opportunity?
- Implementing meetings for non-directors (without their supervisors) on a monthly basis; this was done based on a request
- Indiana: We hired someone to come in and do a cultural competence assessment, individually and as a leadership team; there were a lot of "a-ha" moments and people were surprised to find that the group was all over the place, but it prompted a lot of organic discussion
- It's important to explore why they don't want the leadership there. Maybe it has to be visible to people first that these spaces can be safe.
- As long as you have the ability to bring people back together and learn how to build trust, then you can slowly but effectively mitigate those fears

What about self-disclosures that aren't in concert with the direction of the center? If something is deeply held, you want to honor that person for what they're bringing, but it can be hard.
- We've dealt with this when it comes to the CMS rule. Some parents believe that segregation (i.e. sheltered workshops) – to some extent – for their children is okay.
- You can't control what your employees believe, but there is a difference between beliefs and actions (especially if they create a hostile environment)
- Some people have re-framed this as reverse bias (e.g. "If I'm not allowed to hold my beliefs and express them, then I'm being discriminated against"). This is especially true as it relates to religion.

What about challenges that extend down to direct support and service staff, especially along racial lines?

- The university system's office of equity and diversity is largely seen as punitive.
- Currently, it's really bad conditioning for people to have conversations about these issues.
- People congregate based on interests and backgrounds but it creates voids within the center.
- Pittsburgh (PA): We've created a cultural competence committee and get together fairly regularly for discussions, trainings, and other activities.
- Oregon: We're doing some work internally and have a task force to develop a diversity action plan. We've used experiences of "failing" to identify next steps for our institute. You can have all the great intentions, but if you're not thoughtful you can mess up really bad. But it's good to have leadership in place to respond when potentially damaging incidents happen. Now we have started diversity listening sessions (re: specific communities) that involve our DD partners, the regional health authority, and our P&A. Something really important to do is to just sit and learn at first.

New Ideas

North Carolina LEND has a leadership intensive; used the Myers-Briggs, FIRO-B, and other instruments (and approaches) with a diverse group of people – would be great to do this at our centers

Other Valuable Insights

We tend to hire people who are "like" us (extroverts hiring extroverts) – there's value for organizations if the leader brings on people who aren't like them

Learning how to value everyone's strengths and gifts is also important

Part 2 of Session

Challenges and Responses

It's challenging to try and promote diversity and inclusion in places where the messaging in the context that surrounds the UCEDD (i.e. in more conservative states and/or places where religion places a significant role in the mainstream culture) is not consistent.

How do you create a context where people can talk about things when they've been conditioned to be fearful of saying something wrong? How do you explore yourself openly when historically there have been so many negative repercussions that create fear around disclosure, exploration, and discussion?

- Personal relationships are key because they can change misconceptions, hearts, and minds
- Every center has its own values, thereby creating privileged beliefs that may not be in sync with the beliefs that are privileged in the community in which that center operates; some of the people with those out of sync beliefs are contributing members of your staff, so they can't just be written off

Challenge to communicate with CAC what someone can and can't say when they wear different hats. Can they make derogatory remarks via personal social media about people from other cultures?

How do we support people in environments when some aspects of diversity are not welcomed by all? This is a universal issue we could focus on at the network level.

We do a great job serving the Hispanic community and have gone to lengths (bilingual staff, etc.) to accommodate their needs, but we are struggling to serve other minority populations – Muslims, Hasidic Jews, etc. – it's been a real wake-up call

The issue of confidentiality wasn't in the toolkit; in a safe meeting, things might get said – should that be confidential?

We all have posters about banning the "R" word, but what about other language we use (e.g. "that was crazy", "that's insane," etc.) – how do we acknowledge and address those contradictions?

People from so many different cultures work in UCEDDs and sometimes culture clash, but being open to that tension is what's important

Other Valuable Insights

These strategies feel like good basis for leadership in general

Creating an open culture where people feel comfortable is so important; people with visible and invisible disabilities need to be comfortable disclosing and staff need to represent the people they're serving

It's really hard to define what a "safe" environment looks like or what "cultural competence" really means; it speaks to the importance of having trained and skilled facilitators for these conversations

Resilience is an important word; accentuate the positive, but at another level, if you are working to make changes in communities (MCHB life course model) one of the things raising that outcome curve for populations trying to serve and focus on them, that's what's going to make a difference

It's really easy for us to create a false dichotomy ("they're bigots and we're not") because we all have biases and may not realize when, despite our best efforts, we're failing to show respect for someone's culture; we can all be the problem, not just "those people" – we have to examine day by day whether or not we're creating a safe environment

In some cultures, they discourage being forceful about your opinions and your self-worth, so when those individuals come to America they are often on the losing side because humility isn't as valued and we might be doing damage

If we don't engage people, then we can't have meaningful relationships or create safe spaces

It's important to remember that UCEDDs provide services for kids, teens, and adults with disabilities; really important when thinking about people who may not share the same principles, we can offer them something, we are experts in disabilities, and we can teach them about the value of cultural and linguistic diversity because they will be seeking us out.

<u>Part 3 of Session</u>

Discussion

If starting at ground zero, where do you start? How do you figure out what is foundational?

Self-assessment across all areas to identify priorities.

Break down silos. Programs and projects are very siloed; no opportunity to see outside of their boxes.

Healing may need to happen.

Trust/ Confidentiality. If staff confides in you about a concern that involves another staff but asks that you not approach the other party, respect the wishes of the staff who came to you. Do not lose that individual's trust. Keep eye open and check with staff on occasion that they are okay.

Staff gatherings without an agenda. Not work related.

As the center changes and grows – larger groups, varying ages, varying interests – challenge to maintain relationships and get to know people.