

“Mitakuye Oyasin” (We Are All Related)

South Dakota’s Approach to Diversity Fellowships: A Collaborative Cultural-Experiential-Immersion Based Learning Experience

Whitney Jones, B.A. • Burdette Clifford, M.S. • Eric Kurtz, Ph.D.

Introduction

In 2015, the University of South Dakota Center for Disabilities (SD UCEDD/LEND) was one of 14 grantees selected to participate in the National Training Initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Community Living (ACL). This project supports diversity fellowships to help improve the recruitment and employment of underrepresented groups, increase the diversity and cultural competence, and increase the number of people from under-represented groups and disadvantage backgrounds within the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Network who benefit from ACL-supported programs.

Background

Striving toward cultural competency and the meaningful inclusion of those from underrepresented backgrounds are core values of the SD UCEDD/LEND and the DD Network. However, there remains much progress to be made in increasing the number of trainees, faculty, and staff from Native American backgrounds.

- Native Americans comprise fewer than 10% of the population in South Dakota.
- Native Americans are the largest underserved and underrepresented population in South Dakota.
- Many complicated geographic, social, cultural, and economic contributing factors.

Methods

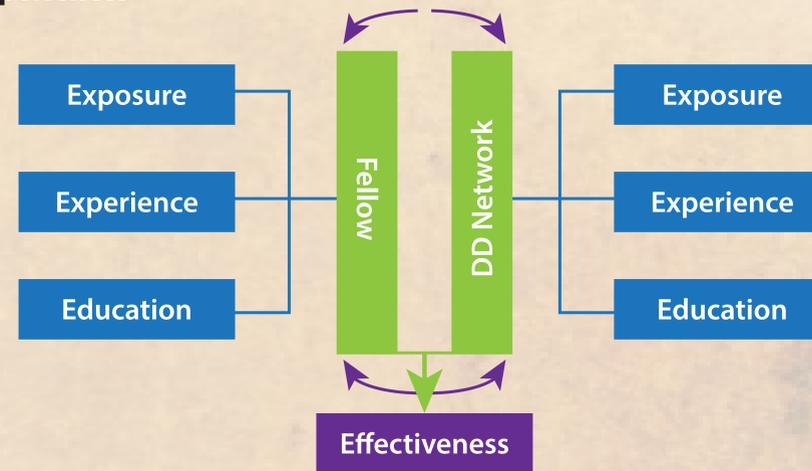
In partnership with Sinte Gleska University (SGU) on the Rosebud “Sicangu Lakota Oyate” Reservation, the SD UCEDD/LEND designed and implemented a fellowship program that engaged tribal communities and the DD Network to share and learn from one another with the goal of developing and sharing a model of recruitment and retention that will increase the collaborations diversity of trainees, staff, and stakeholders.

- Tribal elder and senior faculty member at SGU led recruitment efforts
- Two fellows were selected, who were emergent and active participants and leaders in the Native American community and completing a degree program at SGU with a career interest and commitment to working with persons with disabilities and their families in Native American communities.

A Cultural-Experiential-Immersion (CEI) based approach to learning experiences was utilized for this project. The CEI model involves a 2-way collaborative and experiential learning path employing exposure, experience and formal/informal education

- Advanced the fellow’s knowledge and understanding of SD DD Network policies, procedures, strategies and stakeholders.
- Engaged the fellow in offering recommendations and strategies for improving the cultural responsiveness of SD DD Network policies, procedures, strategies and stakeholders.

Figure 1. Cultural-Experiential-Immersion-(CEI) based Learning Experiences



Activities included:

- Participation in interdisciplinary clinics, leadership seminars, and other activities related to cultural competence and leadership;
- Participation in policy and legislative activities at the state capitol;
- Attendance at the 2016 Disability Policy Seminar in Washington, D.C.;
- SD DD Network Meetings;
- Publication in AUCD 360 Newsletter;
- Providing presentations at statewide conferences;
- Capstone project, including coursework, fieldwork, and the development of video.

Ongoing opportunities are provided for SD UCEDD and LEND faculty and trainees to experience Rosebud “Sicangu Lakota Oyate” Reservation communities through attendance of collegiate events, touring reservation communities, participating in volunteer opportunities with communities and for elders, and experiencing a sweat lodge and/or other traditional ceremonies.



Results

- 1) Two fellows developed and completed a self-directed individual learning plan and capstone project activities. These activities are driving new initiatives which have great potential for increased services within tribal communities.
- 2) Increase in persons from Native American communities engaged in various SD DD Network activities
- 3) Former fellows are now in mentoring roles with students. As fellows continue to graduate, live, and work in tribal communities, their ongoing influence will continue and sustain efforts to improve and enhance culturally responsive policies, practices and services specific to the Native American community.
- 4) Expanding from one to three Tribal Colleges on three different reservations next year.
 - Sitting Bull College on the Standing Rock Reservation
 - Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation
- 5) While the determination of effectiveness of this model has application Native American communities in SD, the framework could be adapted and applied to other communities outside of SD.



Center for Disabilities