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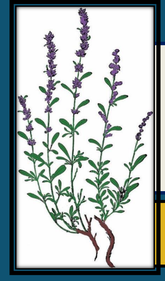

Building Capacity for Mental and Behavioral Health in Indian Country

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Social Workers Advancing through Grounded Education (SAGE)

Background

- American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people have disproportionately high incidences of trauma exposure, mental health and substance abuse related problems, self-harm and violence (Bubar, 2010).
- A lack of access to culturally-competent care exacerbates these disparities. Part of the problem lies in the shortage of culturally-competent mental/behavioral health providers.
- Research shows that poverty, distrust of outsiders, and a disparity of traditional healing methods with non-Native health practices creates serious barriers to wellness (Putsch, 1990).

Purpose

- The Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies led the design and implementation of "Social Workers Advancing through Grounded Education" (SAGE);
- Support masters-level social work students in developing the necessary skills to provide culturally-competent mental and behavioral health services to AI/AN people.

Methods

5 Phases:

- Phase 1: **Professional Development**
  - Develop authentic partnerships with tribal colleges, tribal governments, and mental and behavioral health providers.
- Phase 2: **Recruitment**
  - Increase recruitment of Native and non-Native students into the MSW and SAGE programs interested in working with AI/ANs.
- Phase 3: **Curriculum**
  - Implement effective culturally-competent, evidence-based mental and behavioral health curricula (4 total classes).
- Phase 4: **Field Training**
  - Increase the number of field sites and field training by establishing a pipeline between practicum sites and careers.
- Phase 5: **Capacity Building**
  - Build capacity in Indian Country for mental and behavioral health as a result of culturally-competent social workers trained in evidence-based mental and behavioral health interventions.

Figure 1. Map of AI/AN practicum sites established through SAGE

Results

- 27 practicum sites have been established, expanding the capacity of mental and behavior health agencies in Indian Country.
- 26 MSW students have been trained as culturally-competent mental and behavioral health providers in Indian Country.
- 16 states with AI/AN practicum sites established for future students to work in Indian Country.
- Currently in its 3rd year, the SAGE grant continuously strives to expand the scope and reach of the program.

Discussion

- Creating AI/AN partnerships will expand the capacity of health providers and social workers serving AI/AN children, youth, and families.
- AI/AN children most at-risk of violence exposure will have culturally-competent mental and behavioral providers serving them.
- This unique curriculum bridges AI/AN culture and mental/behavioral health that will ultimately lead to better health outcomes for AI/AN people.

Figure 2. SAGE recipient with children at Ponca Tribe of Nebraska

Limitations and Recommendations

- Need to continue establishing AI/AN practicum sites for future students.
- Increase diversity of SAGE recipients by recruiting more non-Native students.
- Ensure sustainability of program with continued support.

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