

FHPAP Best Practices meeting
December 12, 2013
Bois Forte/New Moon Supportive Housing, Tower, MN

The December Quarterly Best Practices meeting for FHPAP focused on the workplan commitment to increase efforts for cultural diversity education for service providers. The community decided to start with Native American population which is disproportionately represented in Homeless Prevention services.

Attendance: Stacy R. (St. Louis County), Theresa D. (Bois Forte), Patti L. (AICHO), Anesa S. (Safe Haven Shelter), Elise S. and Dan M. (Salvation Army), Michelle L. (AEOA), Erich L. (LifeHouse), Eve U. (Legal Aid-Duluth), Heather L. (Legal Aid-Range), Val S. (Leadership Council), Virgil S. (Leadership Council).

Attended the Youth Ojibwe Bowl and had lunch with the Ojibwe Bowl participants. This was an interesting and informative event showcasing several youth student teams from around the region and their awareness and knowledge of the Ojibwe culture and history. Questions included definitions of Ojibwe language, legend, historical figures and current artwork and artist identification.

Attendees travelled to the Bois Forte New Moon Supportive Housing complex for a tour and a panel discussion regarding services and relationship building among providers and the native community.

Panelists included Muriel Deegan, New Moon Case Manager, Melissa Wright, Hearth Connection, Patti Larsen, AICHO, and Dorthea Kletscha, Bois Forte Indian Child Welfare. And was facilitated by Theresa Drift, New Moon Tenant and Project Coordinator. Theresa passed out several articles on privilege and oppression.

Panelists gave a summary of their background and current positions working with people from the Native American community.

Suggestions to improve cultural sensitivity were identified.

- Be careful with introductory questions.
 - There are over 500 tribes-not all same attributes or cultural distinctions.
- Don't assume you know their background or race-ask first to allow for response.
- Create a welcoming environment. This could include posters or artwork identifying a variety of cultures. Best would be to have multi-cultural staffing.
- Native culture is apprehensive to trust. Body language is important to build trust with client.
- Most native cultures are maternal. Women tend to be the family members that plan and interact with agency worker. As interviewer, allow time for clients to warm up to sharing information. Be respectful that males are often taught to defer to the adult female in their family.
- Do not direct client to "go back to the reservation to ask for help" rather first ask if client is enrolled in a tribe. If not, ask if they are interested in enrolling somewhere and if so work with them to connect with a specific tribe. If so, ask if they have a current id card. These can be replaced, however identify if there may be a cost involved.
- Educate staff about Reservation financial Emergency Assistance guidelines. Can initially focus on the reservations that are most represented in the area. Can get most information and contacts from Tribal websites.

- Native culture will support family at any cost...an important component of housing issues is to clearly explain tenant expectations to clients. Housing, (particularly if subsidized) limits housing to lease holder only. Educate people about the number of people allowed to live in a particular location. Be clear about the consequences. If possible, have the tenant requirements pointed out and signed by the lease holder indicating that housing may be lost if too many people are living in the dwelling.

The event provided an opportunity to ask questions both general and specific about how to be respectful of possible cultural distinctions while still holding clients accountable. Panelists agreed that Best Practices for all service providers is to not generalize; there are many different personalities within all cultures. When in doubt, ask and educate yourself. Basically treat all with dignity. Keep uniform policy for all and stick to it. Emphasize timelines and outline consequences.

Next FHPAP Best Practices meeting is set for Thursday, March 27 1:00 – 3:00 Cotton Town Hall. Legal Aid will present on Homeless Prevention.