

Restoring the Sacred

Jurisdiction: Manitoba

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Level: K-12

Theme: Community-Based Practices ¹

Description of Practice:

The Student Buddy Support Service - Restoring the Sacred is a three-year pilot project to develop and deliver culturally relevant prevention and intervention programming to Aboriginal youth between the age of 15 – 21, who have relocated from northern and/or rural communities to Winnipeg to attend high school and who are considered vulnerable to gangs, sexual exploitation, prostitution, and the use of drugs and alcohol.

Restoring the Sacred provides programming that intends to support these youth to become involved in healthy activities and relationships, to increase the stability of their placement and to increase their high school retention and graduation rate.

The program operates as an after-school and weekend activity-based program that offers an orientation to urban life and resources, cultural events, homework assistance / study groups, recreational opportunities and opportunities to network with other youth in a healthy environment. When required, participants may receive help with basic needs such as phone, food, bus tickets, or child care funds.

A core component of the program is the provision of access to trained student buddies or peer mentors. The peer mentors act as “buddy supports” for the newcomers to Winnipeg who attend the program. As part of its activities the project provides a comprehensive training program for youth, to equip them with the knowledge and skills to become active peer mentors/buddies to northern and rural students residing and attending school in Winnipeg.

Participating youth have regular access to project staff members that include Youth Coaches or Facilitators who operate the program and to Elders or Traditional Teachers who are available to engage interactively and one-on-one with the youth. The project is managed by Ka Ni Kanichihk, a community based, registered charity and a not-for-profit Aboriginal human services organization.

Background:

Restoring the Sacred connects with Aboriginal youth, aged 15 – 21, who have transitioned to Winnipeg from northern and rural communities to attend high school in Winnipeg. The program intends to support these youth to become involved in healthy activities and relationships, to increase the stability of their placement and to increase their high school retention and graduation rate.

When youth transition from northern and rural communities to Winnipeg for school, they often come alone and are subject to the pressures of immersion into a sudden and unfamiliar urban environment. These youth often experience academic difficulties and loneliness from being away from home, family, friends and community networks. Often they struggle with a lack of

¹ May also be considered under the themes of a) Culture and Language and b) Transitions and Linkages.

skills and supports to deal with the transition to the Winnipeg urban environment and the impact of cultural displacement. All these factors place students at greater risk to experiences of racism, discrimination, the lure of nightlife and life on the streets. Too often the home and education placements break down, and these youth find themselves homeless, friendless and vulnerable to sexual exploitation and street gang predators.

Referrals to the project are facilitated by outreach activities by project staff and by collaboration with schools in Winnipeg. The pilot project includes four Winnipeg schools.

Development:

The Manitoba Strategy for Responding to High Risk/Vulnerable Children and Youth with a focus on Sexually Exploited Youth was announced on December 11, 2002, by the Minister of Family Services and Housing. One of the prevention initiatives identified in the strategy is the development and implementation of a student buddy support service for those youth relocating to larger urban centres from rural and northern areas.

In order to implement this recommendation provincial departments partnered with, Ka Ni Kanichihk, a community based, registered charity and a not-for-profit Aboriginal human services organization in Winnipeg.

As part of the developmental process, research was conducted by Mother of Red Nations / Ka Ni Kanichihk during the program's formative stage. This research demonstrated the large number of youth transitioning to Winnipeg and provided information on potential target communities and schools. The research also examined existing supports for youth and identified significant programming gaps. The impacts of youth transitions to Winnipeg in the absence of such supports was also examined.

Evidence:

Restoring the Sacred is a three year pilot project that is currently in its second full year of programming. There are currently 24 youth receiving programming. Approximately 50% of these youth are from "Cohort 1" (Year 1) and 50% are from "Cohort 2" (Year 2). Cohort 1 youth are mentors to Cohort 2 youth. A third cohort of youth will begin in 06/07.

Research conducted by Mother of Red Nations / Ka Ni Kanichihk during the program's formative stage has supported the need for this program. Each year there are over 400 Aboriginal Youth, age 15-21, who transition to Winnipeg for education reasons from Aboriginal, Northern and remote communities.

Ka Ni Kanichihk has completed an evaluation of work related to initial program start-up and Cohort 1. Generally the evaluation indicates positive results. The evaluation indicates that the program has been successful at helping youth complete the program; developing / implementing referral and tracking systems; establishing program partnerships; developing / implementing advisory and evaluation processes; and developing / delivering curriculum content.

Participant feedback data indicates that the program content is being well received by youth. A second evaluation is planned to begin shortly which will examine youth outcomes in more detail.

Adaptability:

Restoring the Sacred is based on Dr. Martin Brokenleg's Circle of Courage Model and the Urban Circle Training Centre's Circle of Life model. These two program models provide the basis for the design and delivery of a culturally based holistic program that is focused on prevention.

Continued success of the program will allow it to serve as a model for other jurisdictions. Three curriculum are being developed and refined through this pilot project. These include a) Aboriginal Awareness, b) Ways of Being and c) a "Mentorship Curriculum". Depending on the intended use, modifications or adaptations of these curriculum may be an option.

Those seeking to replicate this program in other jurisdictions will need to consider the need for strong partnerships, specifically with "home communities", "receiving schools" and other community-based organizations.

Further information:

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