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Promoting System-Wide Cultural Competence for Serving Aboriginal Families and Children in a Midsized Canadian City

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This article describes the work of the Circle of Courage, a cross-cultural group committed to improving the cultural competence of organizations providing services to Aboriginal populations in a midsized city in Canada. Rather than concentrating on individuals' cultural competence, the Circle targets mainstream organizations. Many of its activities, therefore, require organizations to examine themselves and make systemic changes. Providing support to Aboriginal staff of mainstream organizations is a significant element of the Circle's initiatives. After an analysis of cultural proficiency—particularly at the organizational and

The authors wish to express their appreciation to the other members of the Circle of Courage and the consulting elders who have supported us and the work of the Circle.

Comment: The authors recognize that no one is mono-cultural. Each of us is an amalgam of class, education, religion, country, community, sexuality, family, etc. To work effectively, it is necessary to sort out the meaning of each of these experiences that contribute to our individuality. However, given the demographics of the area we serve, the Circle of Courage has focused on understanding the many varieties of cultural experience of the First Nations of the plains, Métis, and other aboriginal communities.

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systemic levels—the history of the Circle, its internal functioning, and its specific activities are described. The impact of the Circle's attempts to make systemic change is summarized.

KEYWORDS *cultural proficiency, systemic change, organizational change, organizational cultural competence, aboriginal*

INTRODUCTION

The Circle of Courage, formed in 1998, is a cross-cultural group of human service professionals who came together with the express intent to improve the cultural competence of the social, health, and educational systems in a midsized, mid-Western, Canadian city. The city's population has one of the largest urban aboriginal populations in Canada. When the Circle of Courage was formed, the city had very few aboriginal-led organizations serving aboriginal children and families. Most indigenous families received services from mainstream organizations in the health and social services fields.

In 1998, Dr. Martin Brokenleg conducted a workshop in the city, where he introduced a culturally appropriate model for "reclaiming" aboriginal youths at risk. Many of those who attended Dr. Brokenleg's workshop were very enthusiastic about bringing this approach to their work with children, youths, and families. However, the workshop organizers realized that one workshop was not likely going to change the long-held beliefs and practices of service providers in a significant manner, and that, without major systemic change in the employing organizations, the individual workshop participants would have great difficulty implementing different practices in their agencies. Therefore the workshop organizers decided to establish a network named the Circle of Courage, in tribute to Dr. Brokenleg's seminal presentation.

CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A Call for Systemic Change

Canada's history of the relationship between its European and First Nations peoples is well-documented. In particular, government-sanctioned removal of aboriginal children from their families during the past century has been extensively described (e.g., Johnston, 1983). In Manitoba, the killing of Native leader J. J. Harper by city police in March 1988; a mismanaged trial of the alleged killers of a young aboriginal woman, Betty Helen Osborne, in 1987; and a growing unrest in the aboriginal community in general, provided the impetus for the Manitoba government calling for a provincial inquiry in 1988. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Report (Hamilton &

Sinclair, 1991) led to the government's commitment to establish services for, managed by, aboriginal people. This has resulted in the overhaul and reshaping of provincial child welfare services. Over time, although Canada has seen some overall growth in "aboriginal-controlled" organizations, most human services delivered to aboriginal people continue to be offered by mainstream and long-established organizations. There has been a gradual acceptance by some of these mainstream agencies, fueled by pressure from the aboriginal community, that existing services have been largely ineffective and culturally insensitive, and that they require significant change. These realities have met with a range of responses from mainstream organizations, including outright refusal to change, skeptical consideration, and expressed confusion about how to proceed. Many turned to the professional literature for guidance about how to conduct this change. This literature can be divided into three categories of change: *micro*—change at the individual staff member, *macro*—change at the organization level, and *meta*—change at the government, policy, or system level (i.e., change as a whole). Each of these levels of change will be discussed below.

Change at the Micro Level: The Individual Staff Person

Traditionally there had been little emphasis on cultural competence in human service professions (O'Hagan, 2001). As the need to become more culturally sensitive emerged, the literature on cultural practice focused on change at the micro or individual practitioner level (Arredondo et al., 1996; Lecca, Quervalu, Nunes, & Gonzales, 1998; Lynch, 1998). Practitioners were urged to understand their own, often ethnocentric attitudes and values, and to learn about their own and other cultures. At the present time, those who work with people from culturally diverse backgrounds can access much information on how to form relationships, empower, assess, develop treatment plans and programs, conduct training, and evaluate the effectiveness of their own culturally competent practice (Brave Heart, 2001; Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Brown & Gunderson, 2001; Bruyere, 2001; Goode, 1999; Lynch, 1998; Mollen, Ridley, & Hill, 2003; Morrisette, McKenzie, & Morrisette, 1993; Waldegrave, 1990; Williams & Ellison, 1996).

Sue (2006) states that although workers must develop appropriate intervention strategies and techniques on an individual basis, ultimately, they must also understand the organizational and institutional forces that both support and enhance, and negate, cultural competence. Because of the history of colonialism and aboriginal peoples, a worker in a mainstream human services organization must foremost recognize and acknowledge the power differential in the historical relationship between the two cultures (Morrisette et al., 1993). At minimum, developing knowledge of such issues as oppression, domination, and colonization are critical to the understanding of the historical and present-day relationship between the two cultures

in Canada (Morrissette et al., 1993). Moreover, it is well-accepted, both in theory and in practice, that the recognition of the fundamental difference in worldviews between mainstream and aboriginal cultures is critical to the development of an individual worker's cultural competence.

Some fundamental differences exist between the traditional aboriginal approach to healing and the mainstream or dominant Canadian cultural healing paradigm. As many authors (e.g., Flette, 1995; Hart, 2002; Longclaws, 1994) have summarized the highlights of an aboriginal approach to healing, it is not the intent of this article to provide an overview. Fundamentally, the aboriginal approach to healing is based upon the ideas of wholeness, harmony, and restoring mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional balance. The circle and the Medicine Wheel are central symbols of this approach (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1985; Hart, 2002). Examples of aboriginal helping principles include

- acceptance of change or destiny versus controlled or planned change;
- respect versus expertise;
- spirituality versus secular approaches; and
- validating life experiences through storytelling versus logical problem analysis.

Change at the Macro Level: The Agency

Many workers readily acknowledge the justice and the imperative of working differently and welcome the opportunity to practice more effectively. These workers are already engaged in the pursuit of cultural competence. However, perhaps an important question is "How does an organization both support the individual worker to become culturally proficient as well as to achieve cultural competence itself?"

The continuum of cultural competence developed by Cross (1988) is a tool that can help agencies, as well as individuals, assess where they are in their journey toward cultural competence. Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989) state that the most negative stage, *cultural destructiveness*, is marked by "attitudes, policies and practices which are destructive to the culture and individuals within the culture" (p. 14). *Culturally competent* agencies are characterized by "acceptance of and respect for difference and employ a variety of service models in order to better meet the needs of minority populations" (p. 2). Few agencies today would claim *advanced cultural competence* or *proficiency*. Cross and colleagues (1989) conclude that "attitudes, policies and practice are three major areas in which development must occur if an agency is to move towards cultural competence" (p. 17).

In addition to attending to organizational structure and culture, Gutierrez (2001) advises that organizations must recognize and deal effectively with power relations at the personal, interpersonal, and political levels

and with the way they interact with their environment, including the way the community affects the inner working of the organization and the way the agency reflects the community it serves.

Some writers believe that in addition to a service accurately reflecting the values and life experience of their clients, it must also contribute to social justice for and empowerment of the people with whom the agencies work (Morrisette et al., 1993; Waldegrave, 1990).

Change at the Meta Level: Policies and Systemic Change

For culturally competent practice to succeed, support and sanction at the meta level are needed. Governments, professional associations, and funders must write and enforce legislation, policy, and practice directives that mandate culturally competent practice and organization. This has begun in some areas such as Minnesota, Wisconsin (Aronson & Holloway, 1999), and British Columbia, Canada (Government of British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families, 2006). Minnesota, in particular, has produced an extensive document (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2004) and is beginning to assess the outcomes of their guidelines for culturally competent organizations. Despite the documented government efforts, the authors found no references in the literature to successful grassroots attempts of changing the system from within.

THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE

Experiences of the Circle of Courage

The concepts of cultural (in-)competence at a macro level are evidenced by the experiences of agency staff in our city. At the workshops the Circle has sponsored, two significant themes were identified by the aboriginal participants. First, the frustration felt by aboriginal human service providers working in mainstream agencies was often identified as a serious source of stress. These service providers usually find themselves in positions such as cultural liaison worker or regular staff member in the mainstream human service agency. They express concern over the level of responsibility they feel to not only provide service to their clients as per their job description in their agency, but also to provide expertise in response to any questions or concerns non-aboriginal service providers may have. In effect, they are placed in a position of having to be the representative of, and expert on, all aboriginal groups and cultures in the city.

A second source of frustration that aboriginal service providers working in mainstream agencies have identified is the fundamental difference in approaches to helping and healing between the two cultures (i.e., the dominant culture and aboriginal cultures).

Mainstream providers experience frustration of a different nature. As the agencies they work for make changes in an attempt to improve their ability to serve diverse groups and to incorporate aboriginal staff, the usual ways of working require change. Issues frequently encountered by agencies familiar to the Circle include the following:

1. Letting go of usual ways of doing business,
2. obtaining legislative and regulatory sanction to change,
3. being able to hire and retain sufficient staff in all capacities (especially at upper- and middle-management levels) who mirror the many diverse cultures in this city,
4. supporting ethnic staff to obtain professional credentials,
5. providing cross-cultural training for staff,
6. counteracting stereotyping and racism,
7. developing appropriate conflict resolution mechanisms,
8. recognizing and validating of cultural skills, knowledge, and values in hiring and performance review processes,
9. developing the organization's relationships with and accountability to the communities it serves, and
10. developing a management structure that models culturally competent practice.

These agencies cover a range of models, which include the following:

1. Service provision by mainstream agencies with no attention to cultural issues,
2. provision by a mainstream agency with some cultural awareness and programming,
3. active outreach to, and service of, minority groups by either sensitive mainstream workers or members of the minority group being served, and
4. agency control or monitoring of provision of service by the minority group.

From these observations it can be concluded that the quest for cultural competence is an arduous and essential journey for agencies and their managers. It requires courage on the part of those who are in authority. Managers who begin this journey are struggling with the same personal and professional issues as are their staff, and they are often isolated from others. They, too, require support.

The Circle is familiar with many agencies that are wishing to become more culturally competent but are struggling. Without clear direction at a meta level, without adequate and stable financing and human resources, and without tangible evidence that cultural competence does result in favorable

client outcomes, these agencies are often observed abandoning their commitment to serve minority groups competently. Over the past eight years, the Circle, has worked to encourage agencies to stay the course and continue on the path to cultural competence, recognizing that without the strength of funding and policy, the journey is at times disheartening.

Activities and Functions of the Circle of Courage

The Circle defines its vision and mission statement in the following way: "To advocate for, and support cultural proficiency in organizations and agencies that work with people of Aboriginal ancestry." This mission clearly focused on organizations first and foremost. Whereas the network began with a focus on the social services system in the city, its mandate now includes the health and education systems as well.

The Circle endeavors to adhere to the values identified by Brendtro and colleagues (1990) on traditional aboriginal values of belonging, generosity, mastery, and independence. To those ends, the Circle has provided a place and sense of belonging to its aboriginal and non-aboriginal members. It is a safe, nonjudgmental place to express fears, frustrations, and failures, to learn from one another and celebrate successes. It is in the Circle that knowledge, experience, opinions, resources, and differing views are respectfully and generously shared, so each member can grow. Thus, the Circle's second—but unwritten—mission is the support of its own members as they try to increase their own cultural competence and bring about change in their respective organizations.

The Circle's internal processes very much mirror its stated objectives and use a number of traditional aboriginal practices. Attempts are made to keep its membership at approximately half aboriginal and half non-aboriginal. Decisions are made by consensus. Disagreements are discussed until they are resolved to the satisfaction of all involved. There is no (paid) staff. There are no executive members. Instead, the host of a meeting takes the leadership role for that session. Smudging (a traditional ritual involving cleansing with smoke from sacred medicines) often begins meetings. When important matters are discussed, each individual is given an opportunity to speak, going around the circle in the traditional clockwise fashion. Members have gone to a sweat-lodge ceremony to envision future direction for the works of the Circle. Elders are asked for direction in all its consultations and are seen as leaders and teachers in its sessions. Each member's personal goals include becoming more knowledgeable in the various aboriginal cultures in the city.

Some of the Circle members have used the Circle as a springboard to independently carry their experience to workplaces and other contexts. Using this basis, the Circle has encouraged managers in health, education, child care, and child and family welfare agencies to join them on their journey toward cultural competence.

Despite its systemic focus, the Circle uses a concentric model for change that starts with the individual in the center. This is based on the belief that any change at the macro or meta levels must start with a change in the values and attitudes of the individual, or micro, level. These changes then radiate to the members of the immediate group, followed by changes in the individual's organization, and finally within the service system as a whole. It is also understood that changes in the outer circles facilitate changes in the individual, in an ongoing circular positive feedback loop.

In order to affect systemic change, the Circle has organized numerous workshops and other gatherings. Planning for these always starts with a (largely informal) assessment of the current needs of the system, based on feedback from previous events and the knowledge of Circle members of what is currently being experienced in service organizations. These needs, summarized above, are typically addressed in various combinations. For example, recruitment, retention, and training of aboriginal staff are viewed in the context of the service delivery models (healing versus helping) and organizational culture (letting go of the old ways, counteracting racism, and developing relationships with the communities served). This needs assessment is followed by a discussion on the strategic approach.

Thus, sessions have targeted managers of programs, non-aboriginal service providers, and aboriginal service providers. The former have been invited to strategic planning sessions (see example below) addressing organizational systemic issues, such as human resource management (the recruitment and retention of aboriginal staff) and changing longstanding corporate culture (e.g., modeling culturally competent practices and accountability to the communities served).

Non-aboriginal line workers were offered sessions on increasing cultural competence and understanding of aboriginal cultures. Sessions were also offered on how to make change in one's organization from the frontlines up. Aboriginal staff working in mainstream organizations received support group sessions to share frustrations with their work environment and find ways to accomplish change from within.

All sessions include traditional aboriginal practices that the Circle tries to follow throughout. For example, most sessions start with a prayer by the Circle's supporting Elder, and allow for smudging, and participants are seated in a circle (the traditional format for gatherings in aboriginal communities). Audiences are generally mixed aboriginal and non-aboriginal. Based on the traditional belief that everyone is teacher and learner both, the Circle plans for substantial interaction between the workshop participants. Aboriginal participants are encouraged to share their views and experiences as an opportunity for non-aboriginal colleagues to obtain frank and firsthand information on the lived experiences of aboriginal families and frontline workers. Registration cost is kept to a minimum, and food

provided during daylong sessions tends to be of a traditional nature (e.g., bannock—a traditional bread, stew, and blueberries).

An example of the gatherings includes sharing circles. These are group sessions with no more than 15 to 20 participants seated in a circle. The session may start with a smudge, and participants take turns speaking, moving in a clockwise direction. Themes for sharing circles have included discussion on the experiences of non-aboriginal frontline staff to try to become more culturally competent in an environment that is not conducive, and aboriginal staff working in mainstream organizations. While these themes were suggested, the traditional rules of sharing circles dictate that anyone whose turn it is can speak on any topic for any length of time. No one is to interrupt and feedback is only provided to the speaker if one of the subsequent speakers refers to a previous participant's statements. As a result, sharing circles, at times, become more therapeutic sessions for a broader range of issues. Meeting this apparent need of human services workers also has enriched the Circle's mandate.

One important theme that has been addressed in many sessions is the colonization of the aboriginal peoples in Canada. This theme returns repeatedly in conversations with various groups and individuals. Generally, the message the Circle has received is that non-aboriginal professionals must understand and take into consideration in their work this important part of history. In brief, the theme of colonization continues to be especially alive in the community, resulting from the residential school system and the 1960s' baby scoop (Fournier & Grey, 1997; Johnston, 1983).

The effects of both injustices are very much alive, even in subsequent generations with no direct exposure to them. Together with the general history of postcolonial contact and the current poor socioeconomic situation of many aboriginal families, this background is not conducive to positive interactions with mainstream organizations that are not willing to accommodate the unique histories, cultures, and traditions of aboriginal clients and families. As a result, the Circle endeavors to help mainstream organizations develop a better understanding of this history.

Another example of the Circle's approach is a series of four sessions, over a six-month span, convening the senior managers of major service and educational organizations. The intent was to review and plan specific improvements in their agencies' cultural competence. Letters of invitation were sent to all chief operating officers and presidents of their boards with invitations to send a team to the workshops. Twenty-one organizations registered for the series. Sessions were spaced approximately six to eight weeks apart.

During Session 1, participants received an overview of the history of interaction between aboriginal peoples and European settlers in Canada. This day had as its main objective to raise the awareness of how this history

continues to influence current relationships between aboriginal people on the one hand and, on the other hand, mainstream society in general and its institutions in particular. Homework consisted of discussion on how each team's own organization supported cultural competence.

During Session 2, teams, which now sat around their own tables, were familiarized with the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Instrument (Child Welfare League of America, 1993). This instrument measures the cultural competence of an organization as a whole. It is primarily a vehicle for discussion internal to an organization. Each team began a guided discussion on its own organization. For homework each team was asked to complete the instrument, relative to aboriginal clients, families, and students. Teams were asked to return a copy of the completed instrument to the Day 2 workshop facilitators. Care was taken to assure each organization's confidentiality throughout the following sessions and with regard to the completed surveys. The facilitators only distributed selected aggregate data at the next session.

At Session 3 the themes that emerged from the aggregate data were presented. Obstacles to cultural competence for organizations were discussed. Each team was then asked to start preliminary discussions on a workable plan for greater cultural competence of the agency. They also were to develop a project to improve one specific item they had identified in their plan and, as homework, implement the project before the final session. The project needed to be such that success would be virtually guaranteed.

Session 4 focused on presentations of the various organizations on the successful implementation of their homework and any aspects of their larger plans for cultural competence of their agencies they felt comfortable in divulging. The series ended with a celebration of successes and networking.

After this series, the Circle continued to deliver a number of freestanding events. However, feedback was received that mainstream organizations in the city continued to need more than single events to sustain their quest for cultural competence. Particularly, the recruitment, support, and retention of aboriginal staff in mainstream organizations appeared to be a recurrent struggle for many services. To assess their needs, the Circle conducted three focus groups of, respectively, heads of organizations that took part in the original series of workshops, senior managers of organizations that did not take part earlier, and aboriginal staff of both these groups of mainstream agencies. Given these groups' feedback, it was decided to offer another series of four sessions for agency teams. The sessions occurred in approximate equal intervals from April to November 2006. Attended by more than 100 individuals representing 18 organizations, the objective was once again to help the organizations examine their corporate culture and practices. One of the main themes this time was to support organizations to become better places for aboriginal staff, in addition to becoming better equipped to

provide services to aboriginal communities. Many of the challenges identified above for both mainstream service providers and aboriginal staff were thus addressed.

The four sessions included panel presentations, assignments between sessions, an organizational self-assessment of cultural proficiency (using an adapted version of the tool developed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2004; with permission), and regular sharing circles or break-off groups. In between the sessions the Circle custom-tailored the next session based on evaluation forms completed by participants. The series ended with a traditional feast and giveaway.

Throughout its existence, the Circle has realized the importance of community consultation with various aboriginal groups. Besides consultation with the Circle's elders and informal contacts with various representatives of First Nations and Métis communities, in March 2002 the Circle invited a number of aboriginal leaders to provide input into its work. At this meeting the Circle received a mandate of seven more years to continue its activities.

Similar consultations also led to something the Circle consciously did not do. Members are often asked for, and identified themselves a need for, a resource guide to elders, cultural trainers, and teachers from the province's aboriginal communities. Developing such a list of resources was considered on several occasions. In the end, the Circle decided not to go ahead with this. The reason was twofold: First, community members who were consulted indicated that it would be difficult to be inclusive as far as including appropriate individuals. In other words, significant omissions would be considered inappropriate in certain communities. Second, and more important, it was concluded that a resource list is really a mainstream society concept. Aboriginal communities typically rely on word-of-mouth recommendations to access resources. Thus the process is as important as the outcome. In light of this, the Circle put on a resource fair with the explicit aim of placing mainstream organizations in contact with aboriginal resources.

IMPACT OF THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE

When one attempts an intervention on a city- and systems-wide basis, one naturally wonders if the effort has made a difference. Ideally, outcome research should show the magnitude of the results and assign a causal effect to the intervention. However, while the Circle members considered doing outcome research, the sheer volume of uncontrollable variables made the likelihood of any conclusive inferences improbable. Moreover, it was felt that, in order to stay true to the local aboriginal approach to knowledge development, the Circle needed to use an oral and personal, formative

or iterative, and qualitative approach to evaluation. This has resulted in frequent consultations and feedback sessions, but rarely in a structured survey. Nevertheless, ample anecdotal evidence suggests that the Circle did have an impact on the cultural competence of the system. Several examples of this evidence are described below.

One of the participating organizations in both series of four sessions described above was a school district. The district had at least two schools with a sizeable aboriginal population. As the result of the self-rating process (using the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Instrument), senior management became aware of the number of aboriginal students in the district. Moreover, the district created an aboriginal advisory committee as an assignment for one of the sessions. At the time of this writing, the advisory committee was still in operation, and the district is considered to have considerable sensitivity to the needs of aboriginal students. It has introduced a number of traditional practices in schools with significant aboriginal populations.

At the end of the second series of workshops described above, the organizers asked participants to fill out questionnaires anonymously. Of the 51 respondents 98.0% indicated either “strongly agree” or “agree” to the statement “My agency is in a better position now to work towards cultural proficiency.”

In reviewing the results of the second series of workshops, it also became clear that subtle, but significant, shifts had occurred among the group of organizations between the first and second series. First, the need for a discussion on colonialism was greatly reduced. Aboriginal staff members present at the second series were not nearly as concerned that the agencies they worked for understood the ongoing impact of colonization on their communities. An exercise that was done to review the ongoing influence of our colonial past on current organizational culture did not garner the kind of resistance it would have during the first series. It appeared understood by the organizations that this was a legitimate analysis they should do and the understanding of the colonial paradigm appeared to be substantially matured since the end of the last series.

A second notable difference was the anecdotal evidence presented by many of the organizations regarding changes made between the two series. Some organizations had set some goals for cultural competence of their staff, had changed policies to make the organization more culturally proficient, or had created specific aboriginal positions. Many had done presentations or workshops for their staff on aboriginal themes. These initiatives had not occurred in most agencies prior to the first series. During reporting times at the second series the solutions presented were considerably more sophisticated than during the first series, as was the diversity of initiatives amongst the group of organizations.

Further evidence of the relevance and impact of the Circle is the seven-year mandate received from aboriginal communities described above. This mandate was granted after the Circle presented its work and future directions to an assembly of community agency representatives and elders. These individuals were selected because they had a keen understanding of service systems, both aboriginal and mainstream, in the city.

All the Circle's events are oversubscribed. A significant number of participants continue to be aboriginal. This suggests not only that these sessions continue to meet a need, but that the Circle is also valued by aboriginal and non-aboriginal service providers alike as a reliable source of training. Because the topics for these events are sensitive in nature, this indicates that a trust has developed between the Circle and aboriginal and mainstream service providers.

While the target groups of the Circle's work were, and continue to be, mainstream health, education, and social service organizations that serve children and their families, events are often attended by other service providers. For example, after using an e-mail information network for advertising an event, a number of librarians registered. They indicated that they wished to increase their cultural competence in order to provide more relevant services in public libraries.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

The elements that are believed to make the Circle's approach successful, and set it apart from many other initiatives, can be summarized as follows:

1. The Circle has actively sought, and continues to receive, the support from aboriginal elders and communities.
2. The Circle enjoys the respect of mainstream organizations and is looked upon as a change agent.
3. The Circle continues to have mixed aboriginal and non-aboriginal membership.
4. The Circle provides moral support for its members in their own and their organization's arduous journey toward cultural proficiency.
5. Circle members, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, have helped facilitate change in organizations both from the bottom up and top down.
6. The Circle uses a collaborative approach of consultation with the community to identify the need for change and training for mainstream service organizations.
7. Event participants are always given the opportunity to guide the process and be involved in the planning of future workshops.
8. There is a purposeful use of experiential development of knowledge (i.e., learning by doing).

9. The Circle models traditional aboriginal practices, both internally and in its events.
10. The Circle uses a gentle but very persistent push to encourage mainstream organizations to think about the service they are providing to the aboriginal community.

The last aspect of the Circle's approach sets it apart from most other known cultural competence initiatives, in that it targets specific systems and organizations that are encouraged to be accountable for culturally competent services.

The Circle continues to evolve, facing new challenges. Feedback indicates a need for the Circle to assist agencies to continue to pursue their commitment to cultural competence. Suggestions include the following:

1. Developing a Web site, which would publicize available resources as well as events that are occurring in the city;
2. celebrating successes and allowing the opportunity for an exchange of experiences;
3. conducting a series of *brown-bag* sessions to address various topics and/or allow people to brainstorm solutions to barriers they encounter;
4. sponsoring one-day sessions focusing on specific topics such as recruitment, retention, and promotion of aboriginal staff;
5. providing cross-cultural training for existing staff;
6. development of policies, regulations and procedures conducive to cultural competence;
7. facilitating a number of traditional events for non-aboriginal people;
8. structuring ongoing support groups for attendees from the past workshop series; and
9. conducting another set of four-day sessions for other agencies.

In terms of its future, the Circle faces interesting challenges. It is always pressed to maintain equal representation from the aboriginal and mainstream communities. This necessitates a focus on recruiting and retaining new aboriginal members. Each year as membership changes, the Circle, in part, has to reinvent itself and its ways of working. For example, Circle members are being asked to extend workshops into rural and northern areas. The Circle continues to be challenged to influence change at the macro, or agency, level. In part, this results from the constantly changing leadership in the agencies we have sought to engage, the complexity of the task, and the stretched resources of those agencies. It is also the result of the failure of legislators and some funders (the meta level) to enforce cultural competence as a standard of practice and to fund agencies to implement the necessary changes. To date, the Circle has made no focused effort to influence change

at the political level, and in the opinion of some members it is important to move in that direction.

At the time of this writing, the Circle was considering asking the community for a renewal of its mandate. A meeting with community representatives and Elders is being planned for October 2010. Based on the experience of the last workshops, we believe that our work is resulting in mainstream agencies accepting their responsibility to become increasingly culturally competent as they work with aboriginal people. We recognize the need to test that belief through formal evaluation.

Given the dearth of research in the area of cultural change in systems, the authors strongly recommend further study in this area. Focus for future research could include (1) the efficacy of organizations developing their own cultural competence in isolation versus as a group; (2) government- or funder-directed versus grassroots attempts at change of corporate culture; and (3) the respective roles of policy, boards, management, and staff in organizations becoming more culturally proficient.

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