Indigenous Young Mothers & Leadership

Agency leadership structures need to include the population using those services, as leadership affects the structure of services and should reflect the cultural traditions of those they support.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Allowing other cultural perspectives to influence service provision requires cultural safety and the elimination of policies that privilege the dominant culture. Indigenous peoples are often lumped with other cultural groups which fails to consider colonial practices (Hunt 2013).

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

❑ The success of a 2001 leadership program for young Indigenous women was based largely on the use of creative expression and re-immersion in indigenous culture rather than critical analysis of the larger structure of colonial repression.

❑ The largest issues faced by urban programs are related to diversity of participants, who are from a wide range of nations and a variety of religious backgrounds.

❑ Indigenous leaders are challenged with functioning within multiple, often conflicting, worlds, which may hold competing views, requiring leaders to negotiate the diverse demands placed on Indigenous communities.

❑ Indigenous leadership stresses the interconnectedness of community members, and ways issues are interrelated (Kenny 2012), allowing complex underlying issues to be uncovered and addressed.

KEY POINTS

❑ Women's and family social services and institutions are largely structured in ways that continue to reflect colonial frameworks and understandings.

❑ Indigenous leadership practices emphasize connection to the land, ancestors, Elders, community, and story. Leadership emerges from a feeling of responsibility to the community, and tends to be relationally focused.

❑ Like leadership, Indigenous parenting embraces a holistic perspective. Limited perceptions of parental involvement ignore indigenous parents' challenges, such as teachers' cultural assumptions.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

❑ Women traditionally hold a strong leadership role within indigenous communities, as a final voice of accountability and moral authority, acting as support and validation of the formal leadership roles usually occupied by men.

❑ As research participants, Indigenous parents emphasize types of parental involvement such as provision of a stable home life, and education in cultural values and knowledge.

❑ Having a child is often seen as a way to provide Indigenous youth with a positive focus and direction, as well as allowing them to quickly become viewed as adults within their communities.

❑ For women to pass on healthy perspectives of Indigenous knowledge and culture, they must first be empowered to see the value themselves.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

❑ Changing institutions into inclusive and culturally appropriate spaces requires them to be decolonized by deconstructing colonialism, searching for sovereignty, reclaiming Indigenous knowledge, language, and cultural practices and transforming relationships between Indigenous people and colonizers.

❑ The Aboriginal helping approach focuses on colonization and the need to heal, to promote wellness in communities, and the importance not only of resurgence of Aboriginal values, but on the way that families play a role in transmitting these to children.

❑ Indigenous leadership structures emphasize a non-hierarchical, supportive style, which prevents domination by a single male leader.

❑ It is important to consider young Indigenous women's reasons for becoming mothers, the decision making process before becoming parents and the resulting changes of becoming a parent.

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