

## Diversity and Inclusion Cohort- 2 Credit Seminar Summary

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As I reflect back on all the components of this seminar, a couple main themes jump out at me. First, that I have more passion and interest in the area of D&I than I previously thought, especially with regard to youth development. And second, that there is so much work to be done still!!

As a gay man, I have always been aware of diversity and inclusion issues in youth development. My work as a youth director in the ELCA highlighted some of the most non-inclusive and bigoted people I have worked with, even within an organization that claims to be open and affirming. While I know that there are pockets within that organization that are open and affirming, there are so many more places that claim to be on the surface, but once your inside their doors, all bets are off. The same can be said of many of the school districts I have worked in in central MN. All claim to be open, and pledge their commitment to no tolerance and anti-bullying policies, but many still don't offer safe space for LGBT youth. In fact, at least one of the districts won't allow a Gay Straight Alliance group to convene, which is illegal, but they get away with it. The information I have found through the GLSEN school surveys has really changed my perspective and motivation. I feel that my future work should, and will, center around advocating for these youth who, especially in rural MN, are ostracized, mistreated, and don't feel safe in school. We must engage our students in activities that bring social change to the forefront of their minds, and help them see discrimination and injustice for what it is – life threatening. In such a rural and conservative community, the issues around the gay community become even more dangerous, because often there is no place a young person can feel safe, or like they can be themselves. Given that students spend most of their time away from home at

school, isn't it our responsibility as educators to make sure that their experience here is positive, safe and fosters growth?

We must incorporate activities for social change. We must hear about, and face every form of discrimination. If we don't, the repercussions to our youth are life threatening. I am hopeful that the workshop I created can be useful in helping to create change within youth serving organizations and schools.

### **Summary of Diversity and Inclusion Cohort Experience and Outputs**

Over the past year in the Extension Center for Youth Development (ECYD), 15 Extension Educators and Program Coordinators, including myself, from all regions of the state have participated in the ECYD Diversity & Inclusion Shared Learning Cohort. I applied and was accepted into this learning cohort. This cohort emerged out of a grassroots effort among staff, and was both designed and led by program staff. In meetings two years ago, they recognized that important work was happening across the state as individuals within ECYD worked to create more diverse and inclusive programming, and yet there was a real need to connect these innovative staff members and for them to learn from one another's best practices in order to advance the program as a whole.

As Minnesota's communities change demographically, part of the essential work for the ECYD is to determine how to evolve in order to remain not only relevant, but a leader in the field both in terms of research and praxis. Recent US Census data indicates that Minnesota communities are already increasingly diverse--racially, ethnically, socially, and economically. According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center (2009), we are seeing great demographic shifts throughout Minnesota. The white population is projected to decline in future years. Substantial gains are expected for Latinos, Black/African Americans, and

Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, with their population almost doubling over the next 30 years. The Extension Center for Youth Development has made some significant efforts in recent years to intentionally reach out to some of these new audiences, yet this group believed that we needed a more coordinated, intentional, and long-term effort in order to bring our work on diversity and inclusion to the forefront and have a long-term sustainable impact on the positive development of all Minnesota youth. I wanted to be a part of this effort.

The goals of the cohort were to: 1) learn and share their diversity and inclusion experiences in a reflective process; 2) participate in a process to capture their stories on video; and 3) share their digital media segments with volunteers and colleagues in multiple formats in order to positively promote diversity and inclusion within the Center. The cohort's learning objectives were for each participant to develop a:

- **Mind Set:** Understanding privilege and culture and diversity's role in their work in youth development
- **Skill Set:** Develop the ability to shift between perspectives and effectively communicate their work of diversity and inclusion
- **Heart Set:** Develop an attitude of mutual respect and caring through finding and sharing a link between personal and professional experiences and practices

## **Text**

We studied these concepts with the guide of the following text:

Schauber, Ann, and Rebecca Kirk. *Working with Differences in Communities: A Handbook for Those Who Care about Creating Inclusive Communities*. Corvallis, Or.: Oregon State U Extension Service, 2002. Print.

Official announcement of the final showcase- video premiere

**Diversity & inclusion shared learning cohort update & short film premiere**

September 5, 2014

Over the past program year, 15 staff members from across the Extension Center for Youth Development engaged in a staff development opportunity to share and learn through personal stories about diversity and inclusion within our work. Cohort members included: Josey Landrieu, Kathryn Sharpe, Susan Beaulieu, Ann Walter, Anita Harris, Judith Conway, Jacquie Lonning, Darcy Cole, Carolyn Dingfelder, Joe Rand, Anna Gilbertson, Joanna Tzenis, Joshua Kukowski, Amie Mondl, and Krista Lautenschlager. Participants discussed readings, engaged in group activities and discussion, and reflected personally on enhancing and developing a mind set, skill set, and heart set for working with diversity and inclusion.

As an output of their learning, the cohort members have created seven short films focused on topics such as: building partnerships across cultures, culturally responsive youth-adult partnerships, serving youth with disabilities, religious inclusion, and working with LGBT youth.

**Please join the members of the cohort at the premiere of their short films on Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2014 from 9:30 a.m. - noon at the Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC).** The project was funded by the University of Minnesota's Equity & Diversity Transformation Awards, a grant program sponsored by the Office for Equity and Diversity.

*Extension Center for Youth Development Diversity & Inclusion Shared Learning Cohort*

*Planning Team*