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Reshaping the Narrative

Tóʔutouʔu

University of Montana

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Reshaping the Narrative

Naaniisihitʔo Təʔutouʔu. Niinaaninəənʔ ʔʔʔóóniθááninəəʔ nəhʔ niiʔócinéninəh bínʔa. Niinaaninəə ʔihíicíih ʔəʔóóniinén.íítáanʔə (My name is Hits. I'm a White Clay woman and Frozen Clan. I am from the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation). The ʔʔʔóónaakiit'ə wʔeeitʔa ʔʔʔəóniih ʔiinʔikiitʔə (White Clay Tongue or White Clay Culture) defines who I am, explains my kinship, my place names, philosophy, etc. It teaches me values such as humility, generosity, trust, respect, discipline, patience, resilience, and courage. As I navigate through higher education, I remain rooted in my cultural lifeways. Most importantly, my approach to social work is informed by the values of my ancestors.

I grew up learning with a community of artists, makers, and elders, a luxury that not everyone has. Along with my mother, I was raised by my older siblings and extended family. Our weekends and summers were filled with family and community activities. My uncles were traditional, so it was common for us to also go to sweat and ceremonies. They talked a lot about the culture of the White Clay people. They also talked about the challenges and hardships. These stories fueled my passion for nation building.

My passion has always been to serve Indian Country. Initially, I studied nursing and public and community health. I worked in a variety of settings including the Indian Health Service, Public Health Nursing, Salish Kootenai College Center for Prevention and Wellness, and the Fort Belknap Tribal Health Department. This experience was great; however, I found my niche in serving the younger generation. In my capacity as a Relief Therapeutic Worker at a therapeutic home, I served adolescent girls. Additionally, I worked for a Native-led nonprofit mentoring organization for children and adolescents who faced adversity. In my most recent position as program director in a public school district, I finally got enough courage to apply to

the University of Montana's School of Social Work (UMSSW) graduate program. Upon receiving my acceptance letter, I realized my lived experience, professional work, and personal qualities led me to this field and would contribute to my success in accomplishing my academic goals in the Masters of Social Work (MSW) program. Although I was nervous, I recall sharing the news and seeking guidance from a friend whom I also consider a mentor. They assured me that I would undoubtedly achieve success. Their exact words were "You'll be an amazing social worker!!!"

Before I begin discussing experiences as an Indigenous student, it is important that the reader understand and appreciate the context in which these experiences take place. I focus on my lived experience in the MSW program at the University of Montana which may or may not overlap and be relevant to other Indigenous students in an MSW program and/or other disciplines.

The Five Elements of Advanced Practice

Element I: Engage in ongoing critical self-reflection and examination of the values and assumptions that shape social work theory, practices, policies, and programs.

I entered the program without formal foundational education, training, or practice experience in social work. While this initially intimidated me, I was eager to gain new knowledge and skills. The MSW program, per its mission statement, is designed for people who will promote and support the profession's historic commitment to social and economic justice through direct practice activities and community-based efforts reflecting the needs and dignity of all individuals. The coursework focuses on advanced knowledge of social work policy, human behavior in social environments, social work practice, and research methods. Students gain

theoretical knowledge, well-honed practice skills, behaviors, and values of the social work profession. These core functions are guided by UMSSW anti-racism principles.

As an Indigenous student and a professional working in Tribal communities, I found a misalignment between the program's values and my own. I remember the first few weeks being front-loaded with terms such as vulnerable, power, social justice, empowerment, and self-determination. These concepts were used frequently but the meaning varied for those that have a Western worldview and those who struggle against them, like myself. The language may be appropriate and applicable when working with Indigenous People and their communities; however, I noticed the field of social work does not regularly advance these concepts that correspond to the experiences and needs of Indigenous populations. Furthermore, I was taught clinical and developmental models directed mostly at small target systems of individuals and small groups. The family component and social context beyond the family were often left out. The implementation of Western social work practices in Tribal communities can be arguably challenging. In fact, these practices perpetuate the same hegemony social work claims to fight against. They are based on white ideology and norms. As such, the shortcomings include problematic binary and oscillating approaches to cultural competence and multiculturalism.

One way I coped with the challenges of the program is by seeking out and connecting with relevant social work theoretical and methodological frameworks rooted in Indigenous epistemology. By incorporating local, specific, and value-based aspects of Indigenous culture, I am able to redefine social work in a more inclusive and transformative manner.

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

As I continue to reflect on my experience in the MSW program, I held critical ethical conversations in just about every course. More specifically, I raised concern about the UMSSW's

circumstances may require Indigenous students to correct and challenge colonial frameworks and histories presented in class lectures and discussions, or in course assignments and readings. It's important to recognize that emotional labor can have a significant impact on student's mental health and wellbeing. The MSW program must take steps to support Indigenous students in this work and to ensure that emotional labor is not exploited or taken for granted.

On a better note, learning about the person-in-environment perspective helped me to hone my skills in program development and implementation for the local school district located on the Flathead Indian Reservation. I found it to be equally important to collaborate with local and federal agencies to bring in services and resources for program participants and their families. I made sure to collaborate in a cohesive manner with a common objective to include multiple generations within the family, the effects of historical and contemporary experiences, and other factors like the influence of daily experiences of racism on the concern of the client. I will describe these experiences in more depth below.

Competency 2: Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice

For this competency, I will reflect on my experience in the Legacy course. Legacy was offered during the spring 2022 semester as a one-credit elective. It is worth mentioning this course was made possible by my former MSW advisor and mentor, Laurie Walker. The idea stemmed from our conversations about my practicum experience and co-authorship of a research project. Although it took much work to get the Legacy course approved, I truly appreciate the opportunity.

The Legacy course was facilitated by Kimberly McKeehan and Jordann Lankford who worked in public schools serving Indigenous students. The required textbook was Legacy:

Trauma, Story, and Indigenous Healing. The author, and educator Suzanne Methot uses history, human development, personal stories, and others to trace the roots of Indigenous dislocation and community breakdown from colonization. Methot also covered paths to recovery and healing. For the first time in the MSW program, I felt seen, heard, and understood in this one-credit elective.

The narrative decentered objectivity by using a fierce critical interrogation of the history and contemporary harm white supremacy inflicted on the rights, sovereignty, and well-being of Indigenous People. The trauma runs deep within our bodies and impacts our communities in the same way, it is a symbolic relationship. I learned trauma isn't a barrier, but rather, a place of both personal and political power where resilience is engaged. This has given me a certain clarity about my work in Tribal communities and personal relations. I will describe this concept in more depth below.

Competency 3: Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice

Engaging in this competency can be seen in my Cultural Humility in Montana assignment (Appendix A). This assignment required a group effort. I was paired with three of my colleagues and we wrote about cultural humility training while working with Montana Tribal Nations. We each contributed to this project with respect and importance. The project included various perspectives and theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of whiteness and how to navigate the complexities of cultural humility.

In addition, our collaborative teaching and learning project included diverse perspectives. As Indigenous MSW students and non-Indigenous MSW students, we brought different interpretations and insights to the table. This diversity balanced any blind spots I may have carried. The more objective, removed, and fresh outsider perspective that my colleagues brought

in collaboration with other Federal, State, and Local agencies and helping professionals, as well as Tribal leaders to address the systems of oppression that impact Tribal members' ability to establish economic stability within their communities. For instance, I was invited to participate in a state-wide initiative aimed at providing high-speed internet to Tribal communities. These are just examples of the opportunities I am given at this site; however, in the infancy of this role, I have opportunities to practice beyond the scope. As an economically disadvantaged Tribal member myself, I have a passion to carry out the mission of the program.

Element III: Integrate the skills of direct practice and community work and creatively bridges multiple levels of intervention.

As an Indigenous student in the MSW program, my journey has been a mix of empowerment and frustration. Within the program, the ongoing discussion surrounding evidence-based practices and empirically supported interventions brings to light the delicate balance required between research-driven approaches and cultural relevance for social work in rural and Indigenous contexts of practice. While evidence-based practices rely heavily on rigorous scientific evidence, such as randomized controlled trials, to determine the effectiveness of interventions, they may not always align with the unique needs and cultural values of Indigenous people. Consequently, community wisdom and traditional healing practices, which hold great significance, are marginalized and may not fit into the rigid criteria set by evidence-based practices.

This tension arises from the potential clash between Western research paradigms and the ways Indigenous communities define and value evidence. The scarcity of Indigenous faculty and mentors exacerbate this challenge, as there were limited opportunities to learn from individuals who understood the unique needs and experiences of Tribal communities. Sometimes I felt a

disconnect from the program.

Despite the challenges, my journey as an Indigenous MSW student and professional working in Tribal communities had also presented opportunities for connection and community empowerment. Centering Indigenous voices and actively engaging in community-led initiatives became central to my journey.

Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

In my role as an Indigenous social worker, my engagement with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities allows for a holistic and culturally responsive approach. In a paper for SW 525 titled *Community Analysis and Intervention Proposal for Open Aid Alliance* (Appendix B), I had the opportunity to apply this engagement process to gain a deeper understanding of harm-reduction services in Missoula, Montana. Recognizing the importance of engaging with frontline workers and community stakeholders, I actively sought out opportunities to gain insight into their experiences and perspectives. To accomplish this, I arranged a meeting with the staff and volunteers at Open Aid Alliance. Through these interactions, I had the honor of hearing directly from the individuals involved in empowering people who inject drugs to protect themselves from harm. These conversations provided valuable insight into the social determinants of harm to personal and community health and shed light on the most pressing needs within the community.

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Assessment begins with an awareness of our positionality and the ethical considerations that come with it. This competency requires social workers to honor the lived experience of those we serve, acknowledge power dynamics, maintain a teaching-learning approach, and critically examine the themes of meaning, context, history, and possibility through a Just Practice lens.

In my case presentation for SW 535, titled *Broadband Access to Montana Tribal Communities* (Appendix C), I applied these principles and reflected on the Just Practice themes. I highlighted the barriers faced by Tribal communities in accessing broadband internet, considering the significance of this issue for their economic development, education, healthcare, and overall wellbeing. I also shared the unique cultural and historical factors that shape the context and needs of Indigenous communities, emphasizing the importance of broadband access in promoting self-determination and addressing the digital divide.

It is a sad reality that only two out of eight Montana Tribal Nations applied for and received federal funding for broadband internet. This outcome reveals the ongoing systemic challenges and inequalities which emphasize the need for continued policy advocacy and community organization to address essential resources. This experience reinforced my commitment to being an advocate for nation building, working to dismantle systemic barriers, and promoting equitable access to resources for all communities, particularly Indigenous populations.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Intervention is a continuous and interactive component of the dynamic process of social work practice. I have had the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills, and experience in implementing interventions that align with the goals and needs of clients and constituencies at various levels. My engagement in this competency can be seen in the SW 525 group facilitation project titled *Finding Your Way: A Support Group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency* (Appendix D). In this project, we were required to thoroughly describe the purpose and type of the support group, as well as provide a comprehensive summary of the major points of our

proposal. We explained how the group would function, outlining the activities, discussions, and exercises that would take place. Additionally, we emphasized the need for empathy, active listening, and creating a safe space for group members to share their experiences.

Another important aspect we addressed in our intervention was group composition, timing, and structure. We explored group member selection, and consideration factors such as shared experiences, cultural backgrounds, and emotional readiness to participate. We discussed strategies for recruitment and composition, ensuring the group was diverse and inclusive. A session contract was established to establish guidelines and expectations, and we emphasized the importance of an orientation session to familiarize group members with the purpose and rules of the support group. We also considered environmental aspects, such as choosing a welcoming brave space and accessible location that reduced barriers to participation.

I gained valuable insight into the complexities of group interventions and the significance of cultural sensitivity in designing and facilitating support groups. It allowed me to apply theoretical concepts learned in the classroom to a real-life scenario, honing my skills in engaging and supporting individuals within a group setting. I felt these group dynamics were especially important considering the emotional nature of our topics.

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Evaluation of our social practice is crucial in our quest for professional competence and ethical service delivery, and as an Indigenous social work student, evaluation has been a central component to my personal and professional growth. In the evaluation process, I have relied heavily on critical self-reflection, while also being mindful of power dynamics, social inequalities, and the impact of policies and systems on individuals and communities.

Additionally, I have sought out diverse perspectives and engaged with literature and discussions that challenge mainstream narratives. This exposure to different viewpoints has broadened my understanding of complex social issues and helped me question the underlying ideologies that shape my thinking. Moreover, I have actively analyzed power dynamics, systems of oppression, and structural factors contributing to dialogues with my colleagues and educators. I have deepened my critical analysis skills and honed my ability to think critically about social justice issues.

Furthermore, I have incorporated critical reflection into a research project in SW 521, titled *Preventing Burnout in Social Work Careers* (Appendix E). In this paper, my colleagues and I examined the impact of burnout and identified areas for prevention and treatment in systems and workplace environments. We recognized the importance of going beyond the individual-level analysis and integrated a social justice lens into our evaluation process.

We considered the broader social, cultural, and political contexts in which individuals and communities exist. This involved critically examining power dynamics and identifying oppressive structures that contribute to burnout. We understood that addressing burnout required advocating for systemic change and challenging the underlying causes within the social work profession.

Our evaluation process encompassed not only measuring individual-level outcomes but also assessing how practice interventions contributed to broader social change and addressed structural inequalities. By applying change theory to our evaluation practices, we examined how workplace policies and practices perpetuate or mitigate burnout and identified areas for prevention and treatment that prioritize the wellbeing of social workers within the larger social justice framework.

Through this critical reflection, we were able to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, as well as assess their alignment with social justice principles. We considered the potential for unintended consequences and sought to promote practices that challenge existing inequalities and advocate for systemic change. This process helped us develop a more holistic understanding of burnout in social work careers, moving beyond surface-level solutions to addressing the underlying systemic factors that contribute to burnout.

Element IV: Continually bring knowledge and skills of research, policy analysis, and advocacy to bear in practice, regardless of setting, problem area, or specific job description.

The MSW program aims to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to effectively engage in social work practice, research, policy analysis, and advocacy. However, it is important to acknowledge the unique experiences and perspectives that Indigenous students bring to the program, as well as the ongoing struggles faced by Indigenous communities.

As an Indigenous student in the MSW program, I have encountered a stark realization of the deep-rooted issues that Tribal communities continue to face. The high rates of substance use, mental health problems, and interpersonal violence among Indigenous populations are not simply isolated incidents but are emblematic of the cumulative effects of systemic discrimination, racism, economic marginalization, and assimilationist policies. These experiences have had a profound impact on the mental health and wellbeing of me and of Indigenous people, their families, and communities.

One aspect that I have found particularly challenging is the dominant social work framework of cultural competence, which tends to focus more on individual cultural

understanding rather than interrogating and addressing systemic issues. This framework has often neglected the structural influences and interlocking systems of oppression that perpetuate inequalities. As an Indigenous student, I have felt a deep sense of responsibility to challenge and transform this limited perspective within the program.

Another challenge I encountered was my personal experience with the MSW learning agreement requirements. Upon reviewing the learning agreement, I found it to be completely antithetical to creating a conducive learning document for myself as an Indigenous person. Instead of facilitating my growth and learning, the document felt invasive and emotionally triggering.

The MSW learning agreement seemed to demand that I document aspects of my life as an Indigenous person and as a professional working in Tribal communities. It required me to outline behaviors that are specific to Indigenous and Tribal communities, as well as address issues that are directly relevant to the lived experiences of Indigenous people, such as trauma-informed care, decolonization, and diversity, equity, and inclusion values.

These aspects are not separate from my life but deeply intertwined with my identity and professional practice. They are not simply abstract concepts to be learned or activities to be completed but integral components of my everyday existence. I struggled to understand how documenting what is already a part of my life as an Indigenous person, would benefit me or generate a meaningful learning activity.

In spite of these challenges, I have remained committed to bringing my knowledge and skills of research, policy analysis, and advocacy to bear in practice, regardless of the setting, problem area, or specific job description. Through these efforts, I strive to make a meaningful impact on the lives of Indigenous people, their families, and communities.

Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

Engagement in practice-informed research and research-informed practice involves the integration of research and practice in the field of social work. This process contributes to the advancement of the profession, improved outcomes for individuals and communities, and allows social workers to advocate for evidence-based policies and interventions. In the action research project for SW 521 titled *Preventing Burnout in Social Work Careers* (Appendix E), my colleagues and I conducted research to enhance our understanding of the factors contributing to burnout in social work. Our aim was to shed light on challenges faced in everyday practice. Through this project, we recognized the critical role social workers play in helping their colleagues mitigate the negative effects of perceived powerlessness. We focused on sharing strategies for personal empowerment and advocacy for systemic change.

Reflecting on this project, I came to realize that ethical dilemmas often become private dilemmas rather than being seen as part of broader societal factors. Based on my personal experience, I feel the blame is placed on the individual which can lead to a sense of personal accountability and distress. This may be due to having a narrow understanding of ethics and having limited learning and critical dialogue within the MSW program. Based on this insight, I believe there is a pressing need to expand social work education beyond the confines of formal ethics education. It's crucial to create spaces to share and address ethical challenges in social work careers. Essentially, ethical decision-making is a shared responsibility.

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Just as the person-is-political, the practice of social work requires us to navigate through the historical, cultural, economic, and political forces that shape public policy, to understand how public policy shapes our social work practice. In a policy analysis for SW 530 titled *Social*

for Indigenous youth and positively impact my community. I am dedicated to serving Tribal families, communities, and professional affiliations, always mindful of the influence I have on the next generation of leaders.

These experiences and examples demonstrate my ability to assume a leadership role in my profession and community to promote participation in efforts to empower individuals and groups, and to strengthen programs by advocating for policies and practices that promote social justice.

Competency 10: Apply Forms of Leadership to Support Collaborative, Interdisciplinary, or Transdisciplinary Relationships and Active Community Participation in Addressing the Intersection of Local and Global Issues Impacting your Community and Greater Geographic Region

This competency emphasizes the importance of fostering partnerships, bringing together diverse perspectives, and actively involving the community in addressing complex social challenges. Social workers can play a vital role in promoting collective action and addressing the interconnected issues that affect individuals and communities on both local and global scales. In the SW 491 paper titled *Reflection of WPLI* (Appendix G), I wrote about my experience in collaborative leadership by attending the 17th Annual Women's Policy Leadership Institute in Helena, Montana. This event, organized by Montana Women Vote, aimed to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds to foster community building and provide education on policy issues and advocacy for change.

Participating in this institute proved to be immensely beneficial and meaningful for me. It not only broadened my knowledge base on various policy issues but also allowed me to establish valuable connections and enhance my leadership skills. The opportunity to engage with

individuals from different disciplines and backgrounds fostered a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to addressing local and global issues impacting our communities and the greater geographic region.

Attending the Women's Policy Leadership Institute has equipped me with the qualifications and preparation to apply policy practice at both personal and professional levels. I now possess a deeper understanding of the importance of collaborative relationships, interdisciplinary perspectives, and active community participation in addressing the complex challenges faced by our communities. This experience has empowered me to take on leadership roles that promote inclusivity, encourage collaboration, and advocate for policies that bring about positive change.

By engaging in events like the Women's Policy Leadership Institute and actively participating in collaborative initiatives, I have honed my skills in bridging different perspectives, fostering teamwork, and promoting community engagement. These experiences have positioned me to be an effective leader in supporting collaborative, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary relationships to address the intersection of local and global issues impacting not only my community but also the wider geographic region.

Appendices

Appendix A

Cultural Humility in Montana: An Approach to Working with Indigenous People

We developed an integrated Interprofessional Education (IPE) and cultural humility training that will help prepare first-year graduate students from two or more professions to improve the ways in which they work with Indigenous People living in Montana. Ideally, this training would take place prior to students working directly with Indigenous people within their practicum or field experience. Training would be interactive and include opportunities to learn about, from, and with each other, as well as intentionally engaging in self-critique and reflexivity to recognize and accept biases and assumptions. We would also utilize a pre- and post-training survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. Our training goals would include:

1. Improve students' basic knowledge of the Indigenous People and Tribal Nations that are in Montana (e.g., be able to identify the federally recognized Indian tribes and where tribal people live in the state and acknowledge differences in culture and traditions between Indian tribes).
2. Encourage students to commit to lifelong learning, self-reflection, and the willingness to learn from Indigenous people and what is important to them, and work together to provide optimal services.
3. Teach students the skills to redress the power imbalances in the client-professional dynamic, build trusting partnerships with Indigenous people and the communities they serve, and advocate for and maintain institutional accountability.

To accomplish this, we propose educational activities and examination of one's own bias, beliefs, and assumptions are part of the self-reflection piece. Furthermore, the training will

emphasize the principle of “client as the expert” when students serve Indigenous people and their communities. Students will learn how to practice respectful and curious inquiry about Indigenous points of view, values, and life experiences, by holding the stance of “listening as if the speaker is wise.” Students will also learn to use trauma-informed approaches that recognize how trauma has created and perpetuated alarming trends such as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) movement and what role resiliency has played in the preservation and endurance of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Finally, students will practice strategies to redress power dynamics that negatively influence or obstruct healthy and helpful service delivery. Following is a brief overview of the literature that informed our approach.

Foundational Literature

Although not comprehensive, here we describe potential theoretical frameworks, trauma-informed approaches, and how experiential learning is key to making the integrated IPE and cultural humility training a success.

Theoretical frameworks

In framing our training opportunity, we first turned to Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit; Brayboy, 2005), which expands on critical race theory by recognizing how traditional tribal community values intersect with the values embedded in larger societal institutions and power structures that perpetuate racism and injustice. Using TribalCrit as a foundation, our training would expand participants’ knowledge and perspectives by acknowledging that (1) colonization has been incredibly harmful to our society, (2) material gain, white supremacy, and manifest destiny are at the root of United States policies impacting Indigenous people, (3) tribal communities occupy a unique and liminal legal and political position within the United States, (4) tribal sovereignty is desired and necessary, (5) an

Indigenous lens is necessary for understanding culture, knowledge, and power, (6) the impacts of forced assimilation must be recognized, (7) the lived experiences and beliefs of tribal ways provides an alternative way of adapting and being in the world, (8) storytelling and narratives are key tools for teaching and learning, and (9) tribal theory and practice are key in bringing about social change.

Another related way to enhance cultural humility is to use what Abe (2020) calls a liberation psychology framework. Fitting with TribalCrit, liberation psychologies emphasize conceptualizing cultural humility at the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels. At the individual level, Abe calls for folks to take on a perspective of critical consciousness of self-critique and self-awareness - not as an outcome, but as an ongoing part of the process of cultural humility. In this way, individuals must be continually reflecting on their positionality and how the way they exist in the world is situated within the larger culture. At the interpersonal level, a liberation psychology lens calls for the conceptualization of “others” without “othering” them, acknowledging that we can never truly “know” another and their experiences, but can create environments where others have the opportunity to tell and have their own story heard. Finally, using liberation psychologies means thinking about cultural humility at the collective level by recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of every person and believing that every person has the capacity to contribute to the good of society. Abe (2020) calls this psychosocial accompaniment.

Trauma-Informed Approaches

Another key element behind our training is ensuring that participants leave the training with a strong understanding of the importance of providing trauma-informed services, especially for those from minoritized communities (Ranjbar et al., 2020). Recognizing the vast negative

impacts of colonization, a trauma-informed approach asks practitioners to reflect on how the related series of historical and contemporary events have caused harmful, threatening, and distressing adverse effects on the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being of Indigenous people (Gone et al., 2019). Trauma-informed care is individualized and tailored to the unique needs and strengths of the client and should emphasize “empowerment, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and safety” (p. 9). In this way, trauma-informed care is particularly person-centered and facilitates healing by recognizing that trauma experiences often lead to a sense of a loss of control or lack of power. Participants in our training would learn about the cultural-ecological model of health (Ranjbar et al., 2020), in which individual experiences are embedded in relational, structural, and cultural contexts that must be taken into consideration.

Finally, to be truly rooted in cultural humility and trauma-informed practice, the training would also need to include the voices and perspectives of Indigenous people in a meaningful way. Participatory and collaborative approaches are the best way to ensure that participants receive the most relevant and applicable training. For example, Gone and his colleagues (2020) used these methods to create Indigenous spiritual practices for health equity training that was “by Indians, for Indians” (p. 280), highlighting the importance of including people who will actually use the programming in design and implementation. This is a great example of a practice that is empowering.

Experiential Learning

In order to ensure engagement and long-lasting impacts of the training, we would use experiential learning techniques. For instance, we would use reflective writing in which participants would reflect on their experiences, their positionality, and what beliefs and

understandings they bring to the training (Sanchez et al., 2017). This exercise would enhance self-reflection and encourage participants to develop their own ongoing practice of self-reflection in the future. We would also use this training opportunity to integrate anti-racist principles and acknowledge the impacts of white supremacy and the experience of whiteness in our practice (Lerner, 2021), encouraging participants to “neurodecolonize” their thinking by replacing negative and harmful thought patterns with more healthy and productive thinking. This experiential approach also invites facilitators to use examples of problematic behaviors and thinking in real-time as learning opportunities to be approached with curiosity and kindness. Lerner recommends using an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy approach because of its emphasis on the importance of language, relatedness, and self-determination. We might consider using the tool presented in his article illustrated in Figure 1.

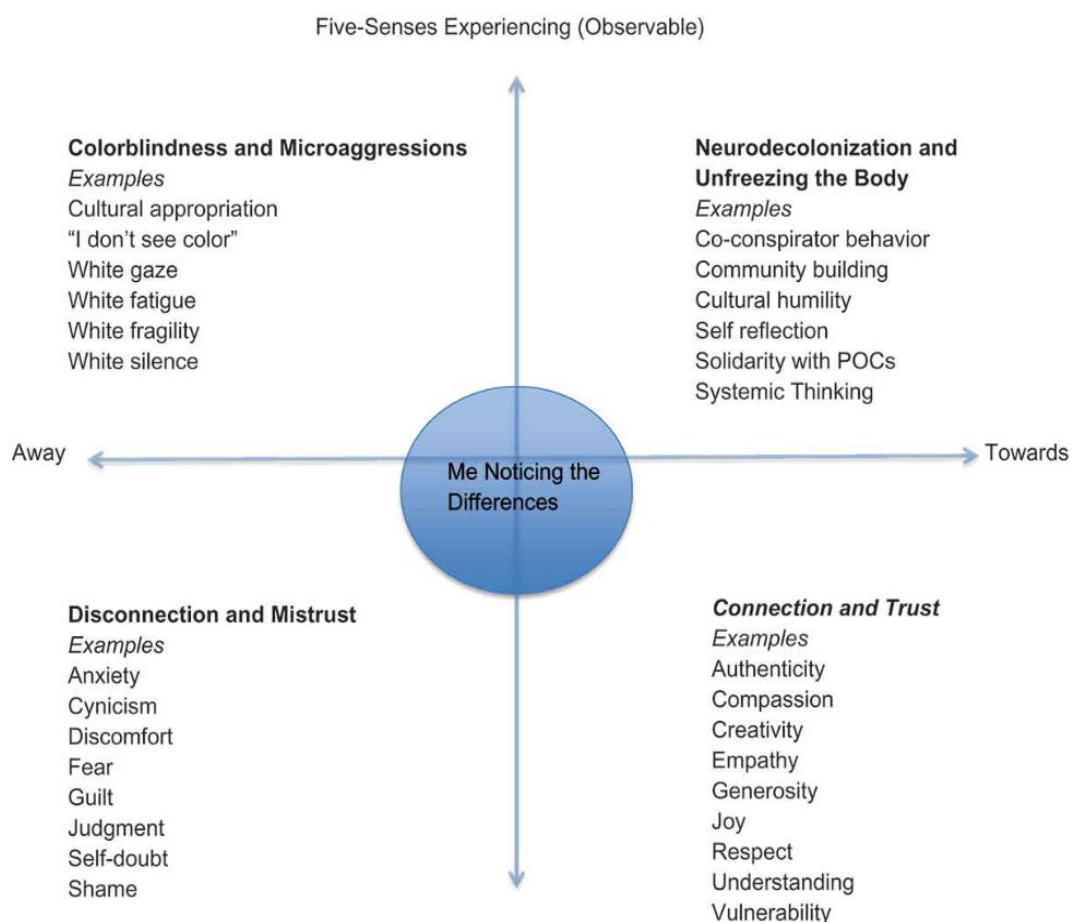


Figure 1. The acceptance and commitment matrix applied to reflecting on whiteness in the classroom (Lerner, 2021)

Conclusion

We believe first-year graduate students would benefit greatly from an integrated IPE and cultural humility training who would be working with other professionals to enhance their services and working relationships with Indigenous people in Montana. The experiential learning techniques emphasize the importance of trauma-informed care and increase basic knowledge of Tribal Nations and customs; furthermore, orient students to a TribalCrit approach that also highlights individual, interpersonal, and collective knowledge needed when working with people from a place of cultural humility.

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Appendix B

Reducing Harm Related to Injection Drug Use

Open Aid Alliance Community Analysis and Intervention Proposal 1
MDB Debona, Lisa Fairman, Crystal Little Owl, Rayna Sage

A Community Analysis and Intervention Proposal
for Open Aid Alliance

Reducing Harm Related to Injection Drug Use

The United States is experiencing both a high rate of opioid overdose deaths and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections, both of which are connected to injection drug use (Vearrier, 2019). The harmful effects of injection drug use are intimately embedded in our cultural context that breeds economic and social inequality, making it difficult for many individuals to minimize the harmful effects without additional supports. Organizations like Open Aid Alliance (OAA) are employing harm reduction approaches to addressing this public health crisis. Harm reduction, which emerged in mainstream treatment approaches in the 1980's as an alternative to abstinence-based programming (Lushin & Anastas, 2011), are "any policy, procedure, or intervention with a primary goal to reduce the adverse health, social, or economic consequences of drug use without necessarily reducing drug consumption" (Vearrier, 2019, p. 121). These include efforts both directly connected to the people using drugs (e.g., needle and syringe exchange programs and opioid maintenance therapies) as well as 'upstream' factors such as anti-poverty measures, housing for all, and the anti-criminalization of drug use.

Despite widespread evidence of the effectiveness of harm reduction approaches in addressing the harmful effects of injection drug use (Azores-Gococo & Fridberg, 2017), it remains controversial and thus, requires a community organizing approach (Pyles, 2013) that helps draw in public support of those who continue to believe abstinence-based approaches are preferable. One big barrier injection drug users, harm reduction activists, and service providers face is the stigma related to drug use (Knaak et al., 2019). One theoretical framework that is useful in addressing the needs of everyone involved in this issue is an anarchist approach (Pyles,

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2013). Foundational concepts in this approach that we can use in our project are that (1) community organizers and organizing activities should use a critical lens of the state and social structures and (2) the power and strength of individuals and communities to rally the resources and plans to create communities of care that emphasize the "dignity to self-govern" (Pyles, 2013, p. 70).

yes!

Injection drug use and its risks change with the social context (Lushin & Anastas, 2011), and the COVID-19 pandemic has made delivering harm reducing services even more challenging (Schlosser & Harris, 2020). To better understand this issue in Missoula, Montana, we need to gain more insight into what front line workers feel are the most important social determinants of harm to personal and community health (Galea & Vlahov, 2002) and what they believe are the most pressing needs to continue the incredible work they are doing to empower people who inject drugs in protecting themselves from harm.

Systems
 Theory?
 Empowerment
 Theory?

Engagement and Stakeholders

Engagement is about building relationships: learning to relate, listen and communicate. Janet Finn in *Just Practices* (2021) further describes engagement as an intentional process and an ongoing commitment, asking participants to be curious, humble, present, compassionate, and respectful. It is an iterative process requiring critical self-reflection, creativity, trust, and a willingness to allow space for alternative possibilities; a space to learn. It is in this manner our group plans to participate and engage during our project.

Part of engagement is to meet with stakeholders. Our team identified several, general groups of stakeholders to contact to further our understanding of and engagement with harm reduction. These groups include consumers (people who use intravenous drugs); family members or close friends of consumers, staff of OAA, and possibly, associated organizations or non-

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structured groups yet to be identified. Our group recognizes the value and priority of engaging directly with consumers; however, due to the nature of this school project, we realize it may not be feasible. Therefore, initially, we plan to contact some staff and volunteers of OAA.

Stakeholders to contact include:

- Hollis - MSW student intern
- Amanda - volunteer coordinator
- David - peer support specialist/greeter extraordinaire
- Chantz - prevention & testing program director
- Tomi - harm reduction therapist
- Amy - clinical director
- Christina - executive director

Furthermore, the contact information for OAA includes an email openaidalliance.org, telephone number is (406) 543-4770, and mailing address is 715 Ronan Street, Missoula MT 59801.

Below are potential questions for OAA staff members:

1. Please, share a general overview and goals of your harm reduction program?
2. What works well?
3. What do you envision, or what would like to be able to envision, for your program or for the growth of the program?
4. What needs to happen in order for that to happen? Include: thinking big picture! *Yes!*
5. What are obstacles for your program?
6. What is staff vitality like? *love this*
7. How do you support or care for yourself and each other?
8. What does burn-out look like in your organization? Is this a challenge for your organization? If so, what are your concerns?
9. What does the greater community support for OAA look like?
10. Where would you like more community support and what could this look like?

The Just Practice Framework

History

Harm reduction activist John-Peter Kools describes how the first Needle Exchange Program (NEP) started in Amsterdam in the 1980's. A local pharmacy had stopped selling syringes creating a need for a new source of clean syringes (exchangesupplies.org, 2011). A

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member of the neighborhood junky bond (name of the drug users union) suggested that their group could solve two problems at once by providing clean syringes in exchange for the disposal of a used syringe. The neighborhood would get cleaned up and folks would not have to share needles and risk infection from hepatitis C virus (HCV) or HIV. Three months later the first needle exchange was up and running, funded by the city health department (exchangesupplies.org, 2011).

Low level context.

Context

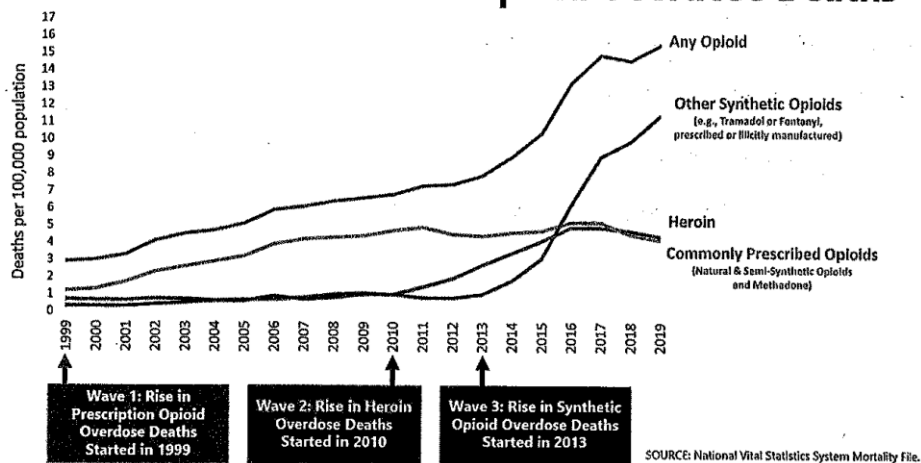
Open Aid Alliance has been operating a safe syringe program (SSP) in Missoula since 2013. Emma's exchange is named after Emma Carney who died from overdose at the age of 23. The exchange serves approximately 3,500 Montanans providing not only clean sharps, but safer sex supplies, Narcan, Nalxone, and wound care supplies. Emma was an exchange participant before her passing, bringing her friends to the exchange, and encouraging others to practice harm reduction (*About Emma's Exchange* | *Open Aid Alliance*, n.d.).

After Carney's passing the opioid epidemic exploded, fueled by synthetic opioids. Overdose death rates rose astronomically. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 49,860 individuals died from an overdose involving opioids in 2019 (CDC Injury Center, 2022).

Meaning & Power

Harm reduction recognizes that people who use drugs know the best ways to mitigate harm and should design and lead any potential interventions ("Harm Reduction Principles," n.d.). In 1988, San Francisco drug users started a volunteer-run, street-based syringe exchange,

Three Waves of the Rise in Opioid Overdose Deaths



(Understanding the Opioid Overdose Epidemic | CDC's Response to the Opioid Overdose Epidemic | CDC, 2022)

because possessing syringes was illegal they risked citation and arrest. The volunteers of Prevention Point accepted this risk as necessary in the face of rapid HIV spread from syringe sharing and re-use ("Resource," n.d.). The power of those affected taking to the streets and changing the face of the HIV epidemic cannot be overemphasized. The roots of harm reduction are steeped in personal empowerment, people who use drugs making change for themselves and the people they love. The meaning and power of harm reduction begins with those roots.

Possibility for Action

As a group of people without direct experience of injection drug use, we can contribute to the harm reduction efforts of OAA by following the lead of their staff and participants. Two areas of interest are stigma and legal persecution. Many of the harms associated with illicit drug use come from the legal system, lobbying to change paraphernalia laws and reducing stigma can reduce the collateral harms that injection drug users (IDU's) face.

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Assessments

Our group aims to develop an asset map of existing programs and services available to people who inject drugs within the Missoula community. First, we will conduct two separate focus groups. The first group will be with program managers and the other group will be with frontline workers and service providers to learn about OAA and other services they currently collaborate with in the Missoula community. Secondly, we may want to consider executing a mapping workshop for providers including healthcare providers, criminal justice staff, as well as clergy, health ministers, not-for-profit staff, including those who run re-entry programs or work with the homeless and for-profit service providers to name a few. We believe asset mapping is a powerful tool for providing appropriate support to a group caught up in a web of inequality and who are in a socio-economic disadvantage position. It is vitally important to find leads to astounding program, policy, and service delivery changes within a few years.

Love this idea...

Statements of Positionality in context of OAA Harm Reduction Project

Lisa

I am a White, middle-aged cis-gender woman with no personal experience using intravenous drugs. I am in the place of a learner - as a student of social work and in the context of learning and engaging with harm reduction for IV drug use and of Open Aid Alliance work. My experience through years of engaging and working with and for women who have HIV/AIDS has deeply informed me of the struggles with power and oppression of stigma, as well as the possibility for and actions of empowerment and increased humanity. Stigma is a powerful force that is also used against people who use drugs and the associated harm reduction programs. I recognize my place of privilege in that I am not subjected to stigma around drug use

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and recognize, as well, my limitations in not having a felt sense of being stigmatized as a person who uses drugs.

My position of privilege allowed me as a teenager to have training in emergency life-saving/CPR measures which provided me with the skills that enabled me to resuscitate a fellow high school student who had stopped breathing due to overdosing. I still recall the feelings of fear when first finding her; the click into automatic action; the sense of a calm focus as I did CPR; the shakiness through my body as I sat back when the medics arrived and whisked her away; and finally, the relief, the tears, when learning she ultimately survived. “Drug overdosing” was no longer a concept to me, it became very real and personal. As I engage with this project, I hold respect and humanity for our stakeholders; and embrace openness, reflexivity, and critical curiosity as a learner.

Rayna

I am cis-gender, white, queer, woman from rural Northern Idaho with a history of familial trauma, alcoholism, and violence. I do not have experience with injecting drugs and very little experience with people who have HIV or who have overdosed. Because of my family and rural community culture, I was brought up to believe that people who experience drug addiction (but not alcohol addiction, oddly) are weak, criminal, and a drain on society – throw away people. I have worked hard in my adult life to rewrite these scripts and have incredible empathy for people who are experiencing addiction because living in a world that is so incredibly oppressive is so hard. Thus, like Lisa, I come to this work as a learner and as an advocate for making sure people have their voices and their humanities heard and affirmed. This is evidenced in my role as an action-oriented participatory researcher in disability. This being said, I also occupy a position of privilege in a city where I can afford a mortgage on a place close to my

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work place and my perception (which may be incorrect) is that many people who are unable to protect themselves from the harms of injection drug use are unhoused or in unstable housing situations. My interactions with unhoused people are currently fairly limited to smiles and hellos on my morning runs and I look forward to humbly learning more and working with my group mates and OAA to create more space for marginalized people in Missoula.

MDB

I am white non-binary person living in Missoula, Montana. I am part of the professional class. I am a drug user, but the drugs I use are not stigmatized, either licit or illicit. Several of my drugs are prescribed and one is injectable. I go to my primary care provider's office to receive my injection every two weeks. I don't have to worry about securing clean syringes or alcohol swabs, or getting my prescription refilled. Some of the illicit drugs I have used have a certain social cache meaning that you can read books about their potentially beneficial properties by such popular authors as Michael Pollan. Because of my class, housed status, and the types of drugs I use I am not stigmatized by my doctor, employers, or the legal system. Just this year was the first time I had to take a drug test as part of an employment screening. I do not know the risks associated with the illicit drugs that I use, but because they are not opiates they are generally viewed as low risk by society (ie. not stigmatized). The drugs I have used are not racialized or subject to class prejudice. I volunteered with the SSP at OAA during the first year of the COVID pandemic. I know people who are HIV positive, people who take PREP to prevent HIV infection, and sadly people who have died from an AIDs infection. As a Queer person I feel a deep responsibility to fight the harms associated with the stigma of HIV status, and injection drug use.

Crystal

I am an Indigenous, ci-gender, woman who grew up on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in a lower-class family. I do not have experience with IDU; however, I was raised in a community that has higher rates of substance use compared to the general population, and has historically been subject to a number of risk factors that are known to increase the likelihood of substance use. At a young age, I witnessed injection drug users not getting adequate, prompt care. I saw it in my family; I saw it elsewhere. I come to this work to learn and gain the skills necessary to work in various settings with a diverse set of people and in conjunction with multi-agency collaboration for one prime objective, to help individuals and families in need.

*positionality
statements
we do rarely.*

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well researched.

Appendix C
Broadband Access to Montana Tribal Communities

Broadband Access to Montana Tribal Communities

Vince Camillo, Haley J. Hatfield, Crystal Little Owl

Definitions

Broadband - A high-capacity transmission technique using a wide range of frequencies, which enables a large number of messages to be communicated simultaneously (High speed internet access)

The Middle Mile Problem - the need for smaller networks to feed their data into the international telecommunications backbone, which is key to the best internet service

Telecommunications - is the transmission of information by various types of technologies over wire, radio, optical, or other electromagnetic systems

Fiber-optics - the use of thin flexible fibers of glass or other transparent solids (plastics) to transmit light signals, chiefly for telecommunications. Non-metallic, they are not affected by (electromagnetic interference) weather.



A Blackfoot Communications employee installs conduit for fiber optic cable near St. Ignace, Montana, June 2020.

“In the 21st century high speed internet is not a luxury it is a necessity.” - Vice President Kamala Harris (2022)

“As the internet becomes our new town square, a computer in every home, a teacher of all subjects, a connection to all cultures, this will no longer be a dream but a necessity. And over the next decade that must be our goal.”
President Bill Clinton, 1997

Magnitude

Many tribes do not have the broadband access needed to apply for the funding that would improve their internet access

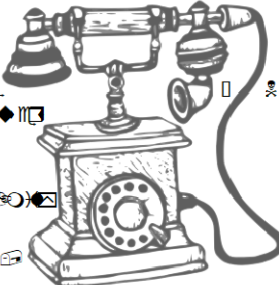


Federal Commission data from 2019 showed that fixed broadband services reached 95.6% of the nation as a whole, but just 79.1% of people on tribal lands - and only 46.5% of tribal households had adopted these services. The FCC bases its report on geospatial data collected by broadband providers showing where broadband currently exists and could potentially exist

Just Practice Framework: Context and History

Context

- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]



History

- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]
- [Illegible text]

A little more context



- American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 provided **\$20 billion** for Native American tribes covid response
 - **\$520million to 8 MT reservations**
- ARPA has **\$17 billion** released specifically for broadband improvements for any local rural government
- 2022 Infrastructure act **\$2 billion** for tribal broadband connectivity fund for 574 federally recognized tribes about **500 million per tribe** with the ability to request more
 - By august only \$146 million has been approved for awards
- U.S. Dept. of Agriculture released another **\$502 million** in telecommunications project grants for rural and tribal communities
- To apply for the funding you must do it online, a continuous ironic point, internetless communities must use the internet to eventually get access to internet.
 - Kamala Harris giving a link to go to in her talk
 - Letters sent to tribal members to apply for low-cost internet
 - Access to grants and legal services
- Brownings History - has 1980's copper wire technology up until last couple years when Browning used funds to purchase the local telecommunication hub. Previous owners had 25 locations in MT, 23 of which had updated technology.
- Link to fiber optic interactive map: <https://bestneighborhood.org/fiber-tv-and-internet-montana/>

Tribal CRIT Continued

- An important way to distinguish CRT from TribalCrit is that the former emphasizes the endemic nature of racism, while the latter emphasizes the endemic nature of colonization in our society.
- TribalCrit functions to “expose the inconsistencies in structural systems and institutions...[to] make the situation better for Indigenous students” (p. 441).



Ethical Considerations/Possible dilemmas

- Working with Tribal Lands Department to get land acquisition, gravel permits, revocable permits for other land use, archaeological surveys, and land and resource planning coordination
 - Basically, it can take years to “dig a hole”
- The infrastructure of laying down fiber-optics
 - Satellites and other structural services not possible in certain terrains / mountains
 - Weather effects anything with metal
- Checkerboarded land ownership on reservations
- The cost of high speed internet (for the individual and the providers)
 - Airwave technology of internet cost about \$1,000 per household, fiber optics cost \$40,000 - \$80,000 per mile
- Do these areas even want internet? (cultural considerations)
- Continuous advancement of technology

Possible Methods of Evaluation

Congress in Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 requires the FCC to report annually on whether broadband “is being deployed to all Americans in a reasonable and timely fashion.” The Report chronicles major strides taken by providers and policymakers to accelerate deployment

Having good data is critical to attacking these problems, and this Broadband Progress Report arms the FCC with the best information it has had yet on broadband in the U.S. This is our first progress report ever to include extensive data on mobile broadband and the availability of next-generation, high-speed services. It incorporates the most robust analysis of international data that the Commission has ever done. The report includes online, interactive maps which show exactly where broadband is and isn’t available, and deployment statistics—by technology type—for every county in the nation.

A Possible Course of Action Cont.

Consulting Groups and Internet Service Providers such as **Tribal Communications** which helps in the facilitation of Tribally-owned and operated broadband and wireless services. Directing tribes in creating their own Internet Service Providers (ISP)



What is happening...and how it could be better

Possible Methods of Evaluation

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Possible methods of Evaluation

HB 673
Missed deadline for general bill transmittal
4/8/21

Provides for a Montana broadband coordinator; provides duties; provides an appropriation.

SB 297
Signed by governor 5/10/21, Chapter 449

Provides for broadband infrastructure development laws; establishes the Montana Broadband Infrastructure Accounts; establishes the Montana Broadband Deployment Program; provides a proposal process; provides for an appropriation.

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Appendix D

Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency

Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency is a support group for adults who have lost someone and are in the process of grieving. Together, group members will explore ways to foster connection; feel and give support; develop and practice coping strategies; and learn about some ways of grieving. It is an opportunity to start building resiliency and moving forward with grace. This free grief support service will be offered in Missoula, Montana.

Group Formation

This proposal outlines the objectives and goals, interventions, and desired outcomes of a grief support group. This outline will serve as a basis for implementation. Below are the four major sections:

1. **Group Formation:** describes the purpose and type of group, summarizes the major points of the proposal, explains how the group will function and describes the role of facilitators.
2. **Group Composition, Timing, and Structure:** addresses group member selection; recruitment and composition; session contract; orientation of sessions, and environmental aspects including reduction of barriers to participation.
3. **Summary:** provides a summary of the group proposal and references cited.
4. **Appendix:** houses the session agendas, reflection worksheets, and supporting information for attendees and facilitators.
 1. Appendices A through C details the session agendas.

2. Appendices D through K contain handouts and resource materials detailed in session agendas.

Purpose of Group

The purpose of this group is to provide an emotionally supportive gathering place and time for adults experiencing grief and loss. Our goals are to create a space for members to:

1. Foster connection with themselves and each other.
2. Feel, give, and share support.
3. Identify their own existing coping strategies and develop and practice additional ones.
4. Learn about and explore some ways or practices of grieving; and
5. Coalesce into a group that continues to meet, in some form, after the formal group ends.

Our desired outcomes for participants in this support group are for members to begin to feel more connection, support, ease, and grace in their world; to learn or engage with some coping, self-care, grieving, or growth practices; and to have the tools and basic framework to continue this support group or to launch a new one should they desire to do so.

The group type is a blend of support and mutual aid (Finn, 2021; Jacobs, 2012). The work of the group is finding and developing support, connection, resiliency, and grace in the shared experience of grief. Conducting grief work requires compassion and the presence of all participants. With the guidance of the co-facilitators, the group will create a trusting space to allow and support this work. Three planned sessions will include the beginning, middle, and ending or closure stages of group work (Jacobs, 2012). Each session will begin with a dedicated time to arrive or become more fully present, and continue to include prompts or activities inviting reflection, connection, or curiosity; time to share - hear and be heard, and a take-home reflection or exploration will be offered. Weekly agendas, prepared by facilitators, outline the

flow and suggested content of the sessions. The agendas and handouts are located at the end of this proposal in appendices A through K.

The facilitators' primary role for Finding Your Way is to build and maintain a trusting and compassionate space for individuals and for the group to explore grief work. Our group facilitators strive to embrace the collective wisdom of Janet Finn (2021) and Adrienne Maree Brown (2017, 2021), particularly regarding the importance of anticipatory empathy, holding space/holding change, being present, slowing down, working at the speed of trust, truly listening, and allowing silence. As facilitators, our role is light-handed, offering a framework and purpose for each session, and supporting individuals and the process. As Adrienne Maree Brown (2017) offers, "Trust is a seed that grows with attention and space" (p. 214). She expands upon this further and states, "The facilitator can be a gardener, or the sun, the water" (Brown, 2017, p. 214). This imagery will help guide our group facilitators.

The group will be composed of local Missoula community members that have recently experienced grief or the loss of a loved one or someone close to them. This group will be open to members of an adult age but will provide supportive services to alleviate barriers to entry for all populations. For example, group admission may include those grieving the loss of an adult partner, friend, parent, or child, which will result in commonalities of loss among group members.

Agency Setting

This grief support group will be offered under the new University of Montana's pilot program Bringing Our Community Together¹. Formed in 2022, the initiative has set forth to increase a sense of community in Missoula by offering student-led programs, activities, or

¹ Bringing our Community Together does not really exist. It was created for the purposes of this class assignment.

gatherings that promote engagement, exchange of support, and understanding. Finding Your Way is designed, offered, and conducted by current graduate students in the Master of Social Work program.

The University of Montana has a lengthy mission statement addressing its values and educational perspective. Within it lies the missions of providing an active learning environment for students and of offering programs and services responsive to the needs of Montanans (University of Montana). Finding Your Way advances these aspects of the college's mission.

The University of Montana is a public research university in Missoula, Montana. The college website provides abundant information about physical facilities, staffing, and finances. According to Collegesimply (n.d.), the college has a student population that is 80% White and 20% students of color. Furthermore, the faculty population is 95 % White and 5 % faculty of color. In a similar time period, 59% of undergraduate students were women and 41% were men.

Anecdotally we also know 60% of the students are permanent Montana residents which includes 33% have low-income status. Overall, we know that all humans at some time in their life experience the loss of a loved one. Thus, while making Finding Your Way available to all community members and students, the grief support group will also simultaneously advance the mission of the University of Montana.

Group Composition, Timing, and Structure

Group Composition

Finding Your Way will focus exclusively on adult populations and will add another resource for processing grief to local Missoula citizens. Death and loss are often unexpected, however, the loss of someone close to you is a universal part of the human experience.

Expectedly and unexpectedly, human beings pass away. Millions of individuals die yearly in the United States. Indeed, in 2020, approximately 3 million deaths occurred in the United States (Ahmad F.B., Cisewski J.A., Miniño A., Anderson R.N., 2020). Missoula County is not exempt from this universal experience. With factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an uptick in deaths in the valley and therefore an increased need for bereavement support for adult populations. Missoula Public Health reports that to date 201 individuals have lost their lives due to COVID alone (Missoula Public Health, 2022). Due to increased need and the persisting need for support in the grief journey Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency is providing adults with a space to connect and discuss grief. Prominent researchers and clinicians state that... “offering a safe place to discuss experiences, a grief support organization is also likely to be a very important community resource for both making referrals and increasing awareness of the needs of grieving [adults]” (Abeles, N., Victor, T. L., & Delano-Wood, L., 2004). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has put adults at increased risk of isolation, which can result in delayed or unresolved grief. When left untreated it has been found that “unaddressed grief can have a negative impact on family health and well-being” (Abeles, N., Victor, T. L., & Delano-Wood, L., 2004). It has been found in studies that, “these groups [bereavement groups] buffer the bereaved sense of isolation” (Abeles, N., Victor, T. L., & Delano-Wood, L., 2004). With these parameters in mind, the facilitators of The Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency support group will be open to all Missoula County adults but will be capped at eight adults.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the group will be done via the following methods: placing a notice in local church bulletins, Montana Kaimin newspaper, Missoula Senior Center, Missoula Adult

Mental Health Services, Providence St. Patrick Hospital, Community Medical Center, and on the local radio programs such as KUFR 91.5, Trail 103.3, and KHKM 98.7. A poster about the group will be placed in the Missoula Public Library, which serves as a meeting place for several adult education classes and programs. Lastly, and maybe the most successful outreach, will come from word-of-mouth. See Appendix I for the advertisement.

Composition

The Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency will be a closed structured group of three weeks. It will be available to adult participants only. Registration is accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Furthermore, the minimum requirement is five participants and the maximum number allowed is eight.

The closed group allows more bonding among members, which means they may trust and share more, as well as, have a greater likelihood of developing new friendships which last outside the group. With this model, people cannot come and go as they wish, which for some bereaved can be a struggle. This program can be a wonderful introduction to what a group might be like for people who are uncertain they want to be in a group and certainly benefits those people who feel they just need/want a brief, one-time session to ask a few questions or clarify a few issues. A closed group also allows for more definition, if you wish, of who participates, so there may be more commonalities, such as type of loss, age, etc. For some participants, having a group with a beginning and end is more comforting and can further assist them in saying goodbyes. “The death of a loved one is universal and also one of the most stressful experiences in life” (Maass, U., Hofmann, L., Perlinger, J., & Wagner, B, 2020).

Contract

Finding Your Way is a brief bereavement support group meeting for three sessions in total. We will meet once weekly on Fridays at 4 pm on March 4, March 11, and March 19. Our group will meet for thirty minutes with the hope that group members form relationships to continue outside of the group. We require pre-registration so that we can assure continuity and trust.

Orientation

Before the first session, a handout will be sent to all registered members. Questions on the handout are geared toward helping the members think about what they would like to share with the group and how they are coping with their loss. The purpose of this questionnaire is to lessen the anxiety that is common when beginning a support group, especially a support group dealing with this sensitive topic. It also gives members the opportunity to think about what they feel comfortable sharing.

All sessions will begin with a mindfulness exercise to help the members center their minds and bodies. The first session will focus on introductions including an icebreaker activity of sharing the name and a photo of the loved one who has died. Facilitators will discuss confidentiality and respect and allow members to add what boundaries are important for them to feel safe to share. From there members will be asked to share their story of grief.

During the second session, members will be prompted to discuss their reflections from the previous week's homework - What brings you comfort? The bulk of the session will examine the six needs of mourning. A handout describing these will be distributed to group members. The session will wrap up with an evaluation of whether the group has been meaningful, if goals are being met and what members need for closure of the group.

The third session opens with a reflection on the homework - Ways to Remember the Loved One You Lost. Members will explore and share ways in which they have memorialized the person whom they are mourning. The session then transitions to focusing on the summary and closure of the group. A list of grief resources, online support groups, readings, and crisis lines will be distributed to members as well as a group evaluation form. See Appendix A-C for complete session outlines.

Environment

We will meet on the University of Montana campus in Gallagher Building, Room 225. The reserved space allows us to have privacy and we will create a warm space with flowers, Kleenex, bottled water, and snacks. The University of Montana is on the local bus line and the childcare center has graciously offered to provide childcare during our group time.

In summary, Finding Your Way is a bereavement support group that meets for three sessions in total. Finding Your Way is a program that was created and is currently being run by graduate students in the Social Work department at the University of Montana. This program is funded through a new pilot program run by the University of Montana titled, Bringing Our Community Together. Created in 2022 as a response to the global pandemic, this program seeks to increase the sense of community in Missoula by offering programs, activities, and gatherings that are organized by students.

Trust and compassion are two of the most cherished principles held by the facilitators of Finding Your Way. Guided by the relevant and necessary wisdom of Janet Finn (2021) and Adrienne Maree Brown (2017, 2021), facilitators within Finding Your Way strive to facilitate an environment where the primary focus is on the importance of anticipatory empathy, holding space/holding change, being present, slowing down, working at the speed of trust, truly listening,

and allowing silence. Additionally, it is the hope of facilitators that this group leads participants to feel or to begin to feel more connection, support, ease, and grace in their world; to learn or engage with some coping, self-care, grieving, or growth practices; and to have the tools and basic framework to continue this support group or to launch a new one should they desire to do so. It is through the centering of trust and compassion, with an emphasis on building the tools and skillsets to begin to navigate grief that facilitators of the Finding Your Way support group hope to aid in the grief journey of local Missoulians.

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Appendix A

Session Agenda 1

“Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency.”

Meeting for Three Fridays at 4:00

March 4th, March 11th, and March 13, 2022

Gallagher Building, Room 225; University of Montana, Missoula Campus

4:00 Welcome

- Introduction of facilitators and group members
 - Icebreaker: Introduce yourself + bring a photo of your deceased loved one to ‘introduce’ him/her to the group.
- Discuss the purpose of the group.

4:05 Centering and Arriving Practice (~3 min)

4:10 Explore group boundaries.

- Co-facilitators offer basic “ground rules” of confidentiality and respect.
- Group members can discuss safety in general and add any other rules they feel would make them feel safer.

4:15 Sharing in a round.

- Referring to the handout (Appendix D, sent to members prior to the first session), answer questions members feel comfortable sharing.

4:25 Exploration for next week

- Please refer to the handout (Appendix E) and be ready to discuss your thoughts in session two.

4:30 Closing

Appendix B

Session Agenda 2

Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency

Meeting for Three Fridays at 4:00

March 4, March 11, and March 13, 2022

Gallagher Building, Room 225; University of Montana, Missoula Campus

4:00 Welcome

- Centering and Arriving Practice (~3 min)

4:05 Circle Sharing of Reflection

- What brings you comfort, ease, or joy? (Appendix E)

4:15 Discussion

- The Mourner's Reconciliation Needs of Mourning (Appendix F)
- Deep dive on #3 Exploring ways to remember the loved one you lost (Appendix G).
Brainstorming ideas.

4:25 Exploration for next week

- Introduce the handout - Ways to Remember the Loved Ones You Lost (Appendix G).

Questions to consider:

- What was that like?
- What are ways of remembering that you would like to continue?
- What has been meaningful?
- What do you need for the closure of our group?
- For next week, please bring something that represents your way of remembering. (i.e., part of a shrine, photo, or an object - something to show or share.)

4:27 Closing

- Group activity

Appendix C

Session Agenda 3

“Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency.”

Meeting for Three Fridays at 4:00

March 4th, March 11th, and March 13, 2022

Gallagher Building, Room 225; University of Montana, Missoula Campus

4:00 Welcome

- Centering and Arriving Practice (~3 min)

4:05 Circle Sharing of Reflection

- Deep Dive on #3 in Ways to Remember the Loved Ones You Lost (Appendix G).
 - What was that like?
 - Is there a way of remembering that you would like to continue? If so, what?
 - Would you like to show us something?

4:15 Summary and Closure

- What would you like to remember from this experience?
- What was most impactful for you during this experience?
- What do you need or want for closure?
- Thoughts about continuing the group?
- Connection, Support & Resiliency (summary of the group)

4:25 Closing

- *We've got each other's back!* Activity
- Contact List for group members.
- Resources for Additional Support Handout (Appendix J)

Appendix D

Questions for reflection before Session 1

The following are some questions for you to think about before our first group session. We would also like you to bring a photo of your loved one. Please share as much or as little as you would like with the group. We look forward to meeting all of you.

- What is the name of the person who died and what is your relationship to them? How did it happen?
- Are there times it doesn't seem real? What is that like and how do you deal with it?
- How have things been with your family and friends since the death? Are you able to talk openly about the deceased?
- How have you been sleeping? How have you been eating?
- Are you able to enjoy your normal activities and hobbies?
- Think back to other difficult times in your life. What coping skills worked for you then?
- What goals do you have for this group?

Appendix E

What brings you comfort, ease, or joy?

What brings you comfort, ease, or joy? After naming or identifying this, spend some time being with or doing what it is you just named. Like, for instance, if you named - “playing with Poppy”, your Cat.... if you can, play with Poppy! Or imagine playing with Poppy! Immerse yourself or imagine immersing yourself in/with that thing (person, animal, activity, place, etc.). Allow yourself some time.

Let that sense of comfort, ease, or joy build and permeate through your body. Imagine each and every cell feels a bit more comfort, ease, or joy... continue for as long as you like. “What does that feel like - that comfort, ease, or joy?” “What are you noticing in your body? What sensations or feelings?” “What feels different?”

We invite you to write down, draw or even create some other representation of your reflections. Next week, we’ll have the opportunity to share and reflect more in our group.

Appendix F

The Mourner's Reconciliation Needs of Mourning

1. Acknowledge the Reality of the Death - This need involves encouraging the grieving person to gently confront the reality that someone loved has died and will not return. Not including the newly bereaved, many members will have begun to meet this need before they enter the group.
2. Embrace the Pain of the Loss - This need involves encouraging the grieving person to embrace all the thoughts and feelings that result from the death of someone loved. We all need permission to mourn.
3. Remember the Person who Died - This need involves allowing and encouraging the grieving person to pursue a relationship of memory with the person who died. Memories that are precious, dreams reflecting the significance of the relationship, and living legacies are examples of some of the things that give testimony to a different form of a continued relationship.
4. Develop a New Self-Identity - More broadly, this need is about griever's figuring out who they are now. Support groups help meet this need by allowing members to talk out their thoughts on self-identity challenges and changes and explore them with others in similar situations.
5. Search for Meaning - Support groups help by providing a safe, non-judgmental place in which to search for meaning. With support and understanding, grieving people usually learn that human beings cannot have complete control over themselves and their world. They begin to befriend impermanence and become more comfortable with vulnerability.

6. Let Others Help You: Now and Always - I have already pointed out that grief is an ongoing process that unfolds over the course of many weeks and years...In any case, it's a good idea for you to compile a list of community resources that people leaving your group can turn to in the months ahead.

(Wolfelt, A. D., & Wolfelt, A. D. (2021). *The Understanding Your Grief Support Group Guide: Starting and Leading a Bereavement Support Group*. Companion Press).

Appendix G

Ways to Remember the Loved One You Lost

An activity for between Sessions 2 and 3. Some ideas include:

- Rituals
- Shrine
- Journaling
- Music, singing.
- Preparing or eating certain foods/meals
- Activities
- “Coffee” with loved one
- Pictures, photo boards
- Garden stone

Appendix H

Some Centering, Grounding, and Arriving Practices

There are many techniques or ways for centering, grounding and arriving into being more present. Here is the beginning of a list for you to add to and grow! Starting the day with a mindful action, such as these, can help frame your day with ease and calmness. It can help to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.

1. Energy ball - a variation of a Qigong practice in the words of Adrienne Maree Brown (2021)

- In front of you is a ball of energy. It is yours, an extension of you. It hovers in the air, shifting with your attention.
- Breathe out while pushing this invisible ball of energy away from you.
- Breathe in, bringing the energy in and all around you.
- Breathe out, move it above your head spreading it like a massive, glorious umbrella.
- Breathe in, bring it back to the center, and hold it there.
- Breathe it out and take it down through your bones to the floor.
- Breathe in roll back up and bring energy back into your heart.
- Keep breathing.

2. Back-to-Back - a playful exploration to sense connection and support: a sharing of support

- In pairs: Standing back-to-back; slightly lean into each other so your backs are touching for a good amount of their length. Bend your knees a little bit, adjust the distance between each, and bend your knees to an amount that feels sturdy and

supportive. Slowing shift, almost pour your weight back and forth between the two of you. It's almost like a giving and receiving of weight. Explore different directions, movements, being mindful to keep your backs connected to each other. If no one is around, try this with a wall. And really let the wall support you. What do you notice? What's it like?

3. What brings you comfort, ease, or joy? (See Appendix E.)
 - Sit, stand, or lie comfortably and take yourself through the exploration. It's a way to build your resiliency and to shift neuropathways, your brain, to recognize comfort, ease, or joy.

Appendix I

The 3-Minute Guided Meditation Script

1. Close your eyes.
2. I invite you, when you take your next breath, to simply be more conscious.
3. Allow your breath to bring you into the present moment, here and now.
4. Breathe through your nose. Inhale cool air and nurture yourself.
5. Exhale warm air and expel any tension and negative emotion.
6. Feel your feet connecting you to the floor and the earth.
7. Gently correct your posture by slowly lifting your chin until the top of your head radiates up toward the sky.
8. Relax your shoulders down like ice melting in a hot spring, and feel your neck grow long.
9. Relax your forehead, relax your eyes, relax your jaw, relax your ears, and relax the muscles at the back of your neck.
10. Notice your breath and allow it to bring you into the present moment where you're safe, relaxed, and doing something positive.
11. Quiet your mind. Let thoughts go by like leaves floating in a mountain stream.
12. Bring your attention to your breath. Disengage from the past and from the future.
13. Enjoy fully the present moment.
14. Begin to cultivate a feeling of inner peace.
15. A safe place in your heart, filled with love and light.
16. Breathe. Open your eyes. "I welcome you to Finding Your Way today. I'm so glad you are here with me, and we are here together.

<http://thegeniusofyoga.com/3-minute-guided-meditation-script/>

Appendix J

Finding Your Way: A support group about Grieving, Connection, and Resiliency

Support during the grieving process can help the bereaved cope more effectively. Join with others and find compassion and comfort.

Our support groups are informal gatherings of 5 to 8 people, led by University of Montana MSW Graduate Students. Participants listen and share their feelings in a supportive environment. What you can expect when you attend these meetings...

- Information: Learn about the nature of grief and how it affects people in different ways.
- Reassurance: Know that you are not alone and that your reactions, thoughts, and emotions are part of the normal course of grief.
- Sharing: Stories, feelings, and memories. Members also have the opportunity to share coping techniques.
- Opportunity: Reach out to others, even in the midst of your own pain. Helping others in a similar situation can be healing in itself.

Fridays @ 4:00 pm, beginning March 4, 2022

Gallagher Building, Room 225; University of Montana, Missoula Campus

Pre-registration is required.

Call us at 406-123-5555

Appendix K

Additional Resources for Continued Support

Suggested Local Counseling Resources

- Rocky Mountain Counseling Center – grief counseling support – 406-788-5508
- Tamarack Grief Resource Center – grief counseling support – 406-541-8472
- Partners In Home Care – online support group – 406-544-8109
- Sunflower Counseling – grief counseling support – 406-214-3810

Online Grief Support Resources

- Theravive – grief and loss counseling – <https://www.theravive.com/cities/mt/grief-counseling-missoula.aspx>
- HelpGuide.org Coping with Grief and Loss – <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>
- Love to Know Blog: “Different Cultural Beliefs on Death and Dying Practices”- <https://dying.lovetoknow.com/death-cultures-around-world/different-cultural-beliefs-death-dying-practices>
- Creating Shrines and Altars for Healing from Grief <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/shrine-altar-grief-healing/>
- Mindfulness practices for healthy mind, healthy life - <https://www.mindful.org/>

Crisis Support

- National Hopeline Network – 1-800-442-4673 – www.imalive.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-8255
- Crisis Text Line – text ‘hello’ to 741741

Appendix L

Group Evaluation

Send an electronic evaluation after the group. The survey should be simple enough (i.e., short) and allow people to offer suggestions about improvements, as well as to comment on what they valued the most.

1. What was the most/least helpful?
2. Was the facilitator clear, knowledgeable, and sensitive to the needs of the group? (You can use a rating scale here if you choose, 1 being low, 10 being high.)
3. Did you find the location and timing of the group suitable?
4. What was the most important thing you learned about your grief and coping with grief?
5. Was there anything missing for you in this group?

Appendix E

Preventing Burnout in Social Work Careers

PART I: Theory of Explanation and Program Evaluation

The social work workforce includes a diverse set of professionals who work in a broad range of settings. Staffing shortages and turnover place an enormous demand on the workforce and jeopardize societal care, especially for underserved individuals. Moreover, the nature of the work, which often involves helping people in crisis, can be emotionally taxing. The social work workforce experiences high levels of work-related stress, low salaries, and full caseloads. These combined factors place social work professionals working in these fields at high risk for experiencing burnout.

Burnout is one of many factors that deter sustainability in social work careers. One study found a burnout rate of 39% among social workers, with that statistic rising to 75% over the course of their lifetime (Siebert, 2005). At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a research study in China found that frontline and healthcare workers reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and distress than previously observed (Lai et al., 2020). Another study conducted in the United States found that social workers experienced higher rates of job burnout and were at an increased risk of experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder and feelings of grief (Holmes et al., 2021). As the world continues to navigate the long-term realities associated with the pandemic, including unprecedented levels of varying societal stressors, social workers are key to deciphering what is at the helm of needed aid in these areas.

As Master of Social Work students planning our careers in these spaces, we believe it is important to look at factors such as burnout and discern opportunities to create sustainable career paths. Because burnout is complex and multifaceted, there is a magnitude to this problem that

cannot be addressed in one action research project. For the purpose of our paper, we narrowed our focus to burnout prevention and treatment in systems and workplace environments.

Additionally, we aim to subsume a wide variety of human services-oriented jobs, not excluding workers based on educational backgrounds. The influence of a range of factors on burnout prevention can prompt investigation to ascertain equitable spaces for all persons to have full opportunity to thrive in the social work field.

This action research project will identify stakeholders, investigate key factors that contribute to burnout and burnout prevention, and develop individual-level strategies and organizational-level interventions that address burnout. Understanding how mitigation of burnout amongst professionals stands to benefit both the helper and those being helped is instrumental in acknowledging the mutual benefit of this area of research. Throughout our research, we delve into ways of measuring fulfillment, interventions such as self-care and community care, and conjecture through a theory of change of how our proposed study could positively benefit professionals' longevity in helping roles.

Acknowledgment of Authors

All authors are graduate students in the University of Montana's Master of Social Work program and work within the field. Each one of us has had personal experiences with burnout. "Burnout has been frequently associated with various forms of negative reactions and job withdrawal, including job dissatisfaction, low organizational commitment, absenteeism, intention to leave the job, and turnover" (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, p. 105). One author (Haley) has developed PTSD from working within the service sector in a highly violent place. Institutions that have prevalent staff turnover should not accept that the turnover is inevitable and rather look at how to retain their staff and empower their workforce, which in turn affects client access to

services and the quality and continuity of their services. Additionally, the staff should be in a position where their needs are met and allowed to prosper with them.

My name is Haley Hatfield, I am a white, 27-year-old, cisgender woman from Montana. I have worked within the human service sector for the past decade and have tremendous experience with burnout. My work has been within group homes for abused and neglected children and adults with developmental disabilities, at a shelter for those experiencing homelessness, individual private care, and in agency work. My therapist has diagnosed me with PTSD related to my work, and I have experienced psychosomatic symptoms that have impacted my health and longevity within workplaces that I am highly passionate about.

My name is Deanna Duram. I am a 31-year-old, white, cisgender woman raised in Montana. I have had the opportunity to work at multiple organizations that provided human services and have had vastly different feelings of wellbeing within these jobs. When I had a working environment that was supportive, and appreciative and played an active role in caring for their employee's wellbeing, I loved the work I was doing, even when it was difficult. Conversely, working in a work environment that was unsupportive and unappreciative led me to feel burnt out and dread going to work, ultimately leading me to seek employment elsewhere.

My name is Alyssa Holly, and I am a cisgender, 31-year-old white woman living in Montana. My experience with burnout during my time in human services work has always been a matter of when not if. I have seen an ideological shift during my time in the field from one that promoted overwork and largely ignored individual worker needs, to conferences geared toward trauma stewardship. Still, I feel there is an element of community care not flourishing within the walls of agencies which in turn stifles the progress toward changing systems to be equitable, both for the clients we serve and ourselves. I have watched friends come and go from this field, often

contending with their own unmitigated secondary trauma, without resources or a guided path forward.

My name is Sydney Meyer, and I am a physically disabled, cisgender, white woman from Montana. As I am 23 years old and not too far removed from my undergraduate education, I acknowledge that I do not have as much practical experience in human services as the other authors of this paper. Regardless, since I started my MSW education, I have been exposed to burnout through the stories from peers in my cohort and some personal experience. While my past experiences of burnout are primarily related to being a student, I experienced a practicum environment where there was little direction and support, ultimately leading to me feeling burnt out.

My name is Crystal Little Owl. I am a 35-year-old, cisgender, American Indian woman born and raised on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. I moved to Western Montana to pursue higher education. Since moving to this region, I have worked in the human service field for more than a decade in both rural and urban communities. I experienced burnout before I even knew what it was. Furthermore, being a woman of color came with extra layers of work, dealing with discrimination, stereotypes, and racialized role assignments. Oftentimes, I found myself afraid to speak up because of fear of retaliation and/or losing my job. Looking back, I can see the path that led me to burnout and caused me to leave jobs that I loved.

Program Evaluation Report

Stakeholder Groups

Burnout is a complex issue with many key causes and drivers; thus, interventions to effectively target burnout must take an entire organizational approach. Stakeholders encompass micro, mezzo, and macro level social workers, including supervisors, government human

services department leaders, organizations that employ social workers, social work faculty and staff, and clients.

Inviting clients to engage is key to the stakeholder group's success. They are also impacted when those who serve them are experiencing burnout. One study found that therapists who were experiencing less burnout and who reported a higher sense of accomplishment were more likely to report quality client care (Salyers et al., 2014). In a following study, *Clinicians' Perceptions of How Burnout Affects Their Work*, it was discovered that the impact of burnout “included withdrawing from others, having less patience and less energy, poor communication and listening skills, worse consumer outcomes, and poor attitudes of others (consumers and colleagues)” (Salyers et al., 2015, p. 206). In this regard, clients are stakeholders in finding preventative measures to burnout, because ultimately, they might have more negative experiences and outcomes if their direct service workers are experiencing negative symptoms of burnout.

Literature Review

The literature provides ample evidence of burnout and its impact on social workers. Maslach (2003) defines burnout in the following way: “Job burnout is a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to stressors in the workplace. Specifically, it involves the chronic strain that results from an incongruence, or misfit, between the worker and the job” (p. 189). Burned-out workers simultaneously experience high levels of chronic fatigue and distance themselves emotionally and cognitively from their work.

Wilson (2016) acknowledges six factors that can contribute to burnout for social workers which include: issues related to workload, control, value differences, fairness, rewards, and organizational culture and community. When there are imbalances in any of these areas, there is

the potential for burnout. Consequently, burnout can manifest in one of three ways: professional inefficacy, cynicism, and emotional exhaustion (Wilson, 2016). For instance, a social worker could experience burnout because of their extremely high caseload and inadequate organizational support, which could manifest into emotional exhaustion, and ultimately, poorer quality of care. Despite knowing that burnout is a serious risk for social workers, the primary response to burnout has been to encourage self-care practices. As articulated in the NASW Code of Ethics, it is understood that social workers have the “primary responsibility of monitoring one’s fitness for the profession and making appropriate changes to address negative issues” (Wilson, 2016, p. 482). In this way, the responsibility for experiencing burnout is often placed on the social worker for not allocating enough time and energy to their self-care routines when structural or organizational issues are important factors as well.

The most common scale used to measure burnout in helping professions is the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (Doherty et al., 2021). This survey measures three different areas that might affect burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. In their paper, *Prevention of Burnout: New Perspectives* (1998), Maslach and Golberg describe these three elements as follows: Emotional exhaustion refers to the feelings of having one’s emotional reservoirs depleted by the stress caused by work overload and personal conflict in one’s workplace. It can cause a person to feel like they do not have the energy to handle their work anymore and that they have no way of replenishing their reservoir. Depersonalization refers to a level of detachment from others that often results from emotional exhaustion and can occur both with one’s interaction with coworkers and clients. It can come off as negative or callous and serves as a sort of buffer to separate oneself from being emotionally overwhelmed. Reduced personal accomplishment refers

to a sense of being less competent and productive. It can result in feelings of inadequacy, depression, and feelings of failure, and can be worsened by a lack of social support or opportunities for professional development.

In their paper, *Exploring Resilience and Mindfulness as preventative factors for psychological distress burnout and secondary traumatic stress among human service professionals* (2016), Harker et al. explore the negative impacts that human service professionals face and possible factors that might mitigate these experiences. Human service professionals often experience psychological distress, burnout, and secondary traumatic distress. Psychological distress is emotional distress that presents with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Secondary traumatic distress is the impact of hearing stories of other individuals' trauma which results in emotional and physical disruptive symptoms in the helper. This study surveyed 133 human service professionals and found that resilience and mindfulness significantly predicted lower levels of burnout. Resilience was also found to predict lower levels of secondary traumatic distress, though mindfulness did not. The findings of this study suggest that building resilience and mindfulness within the workplace culture may mitigate the negative impacts of the human service field.

Resilience includes an individual's capability to naturally overcome the negative consequences that might normally result from hardships. It is “the ability to bounce back from adversity, persevere through difficult times, and return to a state of internal equilibrium” (Harker et al., 2016, p. 632). Mindfulness includes “bringing one’s attention to the present moment, in a non-judgmental and accepting manner” (Harker et al., 2016, p. 632). The practice of mindfulness has been shown to allow individuals to be more accepting of negative emotions that occur and has been positively correlated with psychological well-being. Knowing that resilience and

mindfulness have been shown to promote better well-being and mental tenacity in the workplace, it prompts the question about what a workplace culture that encouraged and supported raising resilience and mindfulness would look like; What kind of practices could be implemented? How often would they take place?

While the effects of burnout are often acknowledged among social workers in the field, social work educators are often overlooked. In their qualitative study, Chiarelli-Helminiak et al. (2021) found that educators in the social work field often experience burnout because of a multitude of factors. These include work-life balance, the stress of trying to obtain tenure, university leadership, and politics, the stress of maintaining CSWE accreditation, lack of resources to perform their job well, and the time of the year among other microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem factors. Tower, et al. (2015) examined the “social work faculty struggle with the intersection of the traditional career life cycle and the developmental life cycle” (p. 519). They specifically called attention to the barriers women face in social work academia as they strive to reach professional achievements while also having to contend with the normative life events of starting and raising a family, which due to biological considerations such as fertility windows, is a common co-occurring event. In their paper, they called for social support, mentoring, self-care, and supportive work-life policies to ameliorate the factors that may lead to burnout for women in social work academia.

Social work as a field, has a broad range of careers that might fall under the title of “social worker”. These fields include but are not necessarily limited to, administration and management, advocacy and community organizing, gerontology, child welfare, working with individuals with developmental disabilities, healthcare, international social work, justice and corrections, mental health and clinical work, substance abuse, occupational social work, policy

and planning, politics, public welfare, research, and academics (Types of Social Work, 2022).

With respect to the reality that all levels of social work, from micro to macro systems, experience burnout, negative symptoms of dealing with populations that experience trauma and adversity, and turnover, we want to propose the following hypothesis for our action plan:

If employers engage in practices that increase opportunities for social service workers to practice self-care and well-being, then it will serve as a protective factor against the negative effects of burnout and vicarious trauma.

Use of Action Research

Because of the nature of this project, in which we are all social workers seeking to better understand the experiences of burnout in our field, we have a responsibility to seek meaningful action once we obtain our study results. As practitioners who are educated with a social justice lens, it makes sense for us to engage in research where we can transform the ways in which the social work field is operating. When conducting action research, it is important to remember that the findings need to serve a purpose for the population being studied; there needs to be a clear benefit to the community (Royse et al., 2016). While the findings will likely be beneficial for us as social workers to be aware of, the findings need to be meaningful to all individuals working in human services. That being said, the purpose we have identified for this research is to determine what kinds of environments could potentially lessen the possibility of burnout occurring. We want to hear the stories of people who have experienced burnout, but we are primarily interested in highlighting ways to use the information we receive about past experiences and future aspirations to inform a change process within organizations and society, where burnout will hopefully occur less often.

By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, we will be acquiring data that will

help us advocate for policy changes within individual organizations that employ social workers while also allowing for the opportunity for broader social change regarding national social work policies. Simply, action research is about “improving practice [and] generating knowledge about what you are doing” (McNiff & Whitehead, n.d., slide 7). In this way, we are using the information we gain from this study to address a multitude of symptoms in hopes of lessening the prevalence of burnout. We are only in the planning phase of this project, but in the future, we will use the data we collect to propose organizational changes that reflect the needs of the study participants. After that, we will observe the status of burnout in the community and reflect on the possibility of engaging in further action research and evaluation or reassessing if there is a need for action research elsewhere.

IRB and Informed Consent Procedures and Concerns

When conducting research with human participants, it is necessary for the research project to be reviewed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that any ethical concerns are addressed before they could manifest into larger problems (Royse et al., 2016). While not all program evaluation studies need to be overseen by an IRB, our particular study would be submitted to the University of Montana’s IRB because we are specifically asking about the experiences and beliefs of social workers experiencing burnout. We are obtaining data and potentially identifying private information from human participants, which would qualify as human subject research.

Furthermore, we acknowledge that the topic of burnout can be uncomfortable for some people to discuss. While the data collection tools, namely the interview guide, would be designed with this in mind, the IRB would still need to determine if the study poses an undue psychological risk to the participants. Additionally, there would need to be a discussion about

how to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, especially if they are working for a local organization. If the social worker reports dissatisfaction with their workplace, participants may fear repercussions from employers and colleagues if their data was attached to them personally. In this way, the research team must maintain the confidentiality or even anonymity of the research project's participants.

Evaluation

When we consider that self-care is the primary form of burnout prevention, it becomes important to understand the ways in which burnout could be prevented through more macro interventions as well. That being said, the evaluation we are proposing would address ways to incorporate self-care into the social work profession and possibilities for enacting organizational change. For instance, we will consider the possibility that burnout can be ameliorated by incorporating trauma-informed practices and organizational culture changes. With the understanding that organizations might “unintentionally perpetuate and reactivate trauma,” we are coming from the understanding that creating an environment where choice, collaboration, trust, safety, and empowerment are the primary goals, leads to improved workplace outcomes (Keesler, 2020, p. 940). By addressing personal changes in self-care, systemic issues, and organizational culture changes, we are better able to address burnout as the complex issue it is.

Methodology/Triangulation Methods

In the social sciences, there has been a recent push to integrate components from both qualitative and quantitative research designs into the methodologies of novel research projects. With a mixed methods approach, there is the opportunity to embrace the strengths of both approaches while buffering the more negative aspects associated with the two types of research (Bronstein & Kovacs, 2013). Mixed methods research inherently allows for the triangulation of

methods because there is the inclusion of both types of data collection: quantitative and qualitative.

That being said, because of the depth and breadth of social work burnout as a research topic, it makes sense to conduct a widespread survey, which will include items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory as well as specifically designed questions, with the identified stakeholders to obtain quantitative data while also obtaining qualitative data through in-depth interviews with a smaller sample. Overall, the purpose of this nuanced research design is to increase the validity of one's findings while also allowing for a more detailed explanation of the phenomenon being studied (Bronstein & Kovacs, 2013).

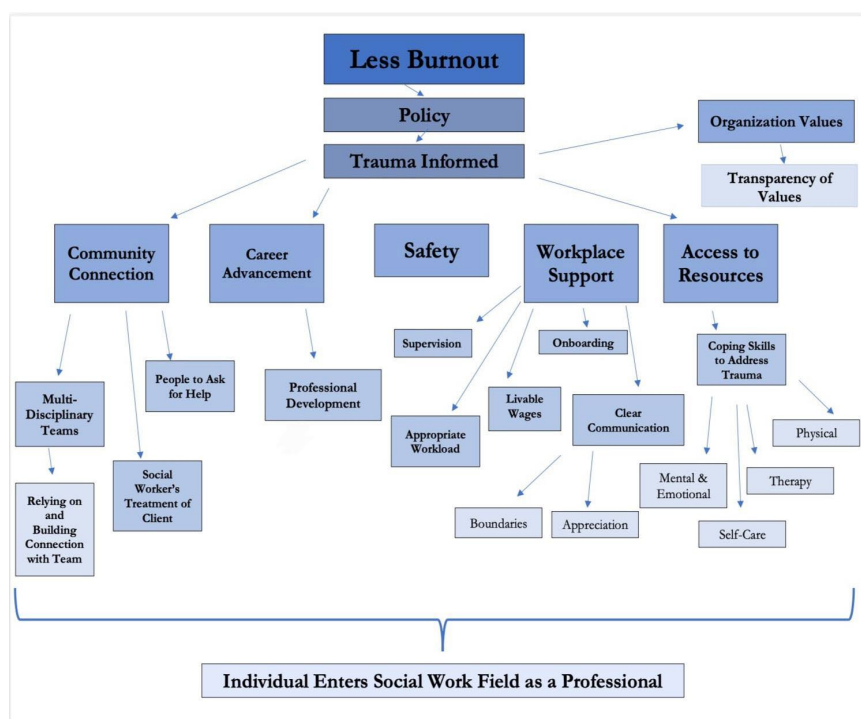
Furthermore, as a research team, we need to determine whether the data collection tools really measure what we are seeking to measure. In this case, we are looking to determine the levels of burnout experienced by the study participants and gain insight into which interventions are the most salient in preventing burnout among social workers. Because all the researchers are Master of Social Work students, there is the possibility of researcher bias which must be acknowledged in order to maintain a valid study. The items on the survey from the Maslach Burnout Inventory would ensure that we are assessing the levels of burnout experienced by the participants, while supplemental questions and the interview portion of the study would address possible avenues for intervention and the current resources available to social workers.

Because we are approaching this project with a mixed methodology, there are unique costs for each data collection tool we are employing. For instance, interviews take a lot of time, energy, and sometimes money to complete. Interviews also require the coding of qualitative data and generally more extensive data analysis. On the other hand, surveys can easily be sent out to many people at once for a much lower price. While survey software may cost money, you can

obtain many responses at once and analyze the data fairly quickly. For both data collection methods, it is important to consider if or how the participants will be compensated for their time. A common way of compensating participants is providing a gift card, but the research team along with the IRB will need to ensure that participants do not feel coerced to participate in order to receive the compensation.

Looking at the impact of sharing one's experience with burnout can also have an emotional cost on the participant. Burnout can be traumatic to the individual experiencing symptoms, but there is also a possibility to heal by sharing one's story. As indicated previously, when discussing potentially triggering subjects, which burnout can be for some people, we need to be sensitive to the fact that emotional labor is also a potential cost. When the data collection tools are finalized, there needs to be an emphasis on ensuring that we are not retraumatizing the study participants but allowing for the possibility of healing and self-reflection.

PART II: Theory of Change and Action Plan



When formulating a plan for our theory of change, we identified less burnout for social workers as our ultimate goal. As individuals who are stakeholders, we voiced our own experiences in the field and what felt important and valuable for our own burnout prevention. We also looked at the research and what has already been identified as being risk or protective factors for social workers regarding burnout. Considering the factors we identified, we formulated the above backwards map, starting with an individual entering the social work field as a professional and ending at the top with the ultimate achievement of less burnout. In the following sections, we will explore in more depth some aspects of our backwards map and their significance in the mitigation of burnout.

Policy

While the limits of this paper make it difficult to touch on every aspect of the backwards map, we wanted to explore how it was formulated in more depth. Directly under this goal of less burnout, we discussed the importance of policy in creating lasting change in burnout prevention. As mentioned previously, six antecedents were identified as factors in precipitating burnout, including workload, control, values, fairness, reward, and community (Wilson, 2016). Many of these antecedents are directly or indirectly impacted by an organization's procedures and policies. It was also important for us to recognize the different levels of policy change and their potential impact on the social worker. Within a place of employment, social workers are impacted by the organizational policies in place. The policy can have a direct impact on the daily activities of the social worker and their ability to incorporate tools that mitigate or prevent burnout. At a macro level, state and national policies directly impact both the social worker and the populations social workers serve. Social workers who work at the macro level may be

working for larger policy change, and the successes or challenges of their efforts may directly impact their well-being and sense of burnout.

Policy impacts the social worker at every level of employment, as it is embedded within the National Alliance of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. Within the actions and responsibilities of a social worker, there are responsibilities around policy development and implementation. Ethical standard 6.04(a) states

“Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.” (Workers, 2008)

Ethical standard 6.04(a) has a lot of responsibility behind it, and the weight is being carried by social workers who are actively fighting against and for federal policy change. Currently, the U.S. Supreme Court is hearing challenges to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) which has been in place since 1978. The challenges are presented through the *Brackeen v. Haaland* case, and many social workers are advocating to keep ICWA in place through involvement in the courts and by demonstrating in the D.C. capital (Greninger, Loni & Hunter, Rose. 2022).

Additionally, social workers have agency and professional policies that impact their ability to share information with people, allowing for individual confidentiality for our clients. Confidentiality is an understanding that you will keep information private between you and another person. Within the confidentiality policy, there are limitations where confidentiality

needs to be broken, which are typically based on harm done or about to be done to oneself or others. At that point, the social worker is obligated to keep the client and/or another individual physically safe. They would do this by collaboratively asking their client to go to in-person treatment or by contacting authorities. Confidentiality is also limited as new social workers enter the field because they need to share information with their supervisors, as per professional development, to make sure the new social workers are doing the best job possible.

The policy is a fascinating element that social workers work with, around, and against. The policy is seeping into everything that we do, how we do it, and what to do about it. How that policy is enacted, federally, institutionally, and ethically, will have a direct impact on how one feels about their job and their level of burnout.

Trauma-Informed

Moving down from policy, we wanted to highlight the importance of trauma-informed policies in organizations where social workers work. In her paper, *Trauma-Informed Social Work*, Levenson states that “trauma-informed social work incorporates core principles of safety, trust, collaboration, choice, and empowerment and delivers services in a manner that avoids inadvertently repeating unhealthy interpersonal dynamics in the helping relationship” (2017, p. 105). While her paper highlights the importance of providing trauma-informed care for clients as the social worker, it feels important to recognize that these same principles should be provided to social workers as helpers who are at direct risk for vicarious and secondary trauma.

A trauma-informed practice as defined by Nancy Smyth Ph.D., is the incorporation of the knowledge of what trauma is into all routine practice. Nothing in life happens in silos, rather our experiences are interconnected to many different aspects of life. The importance of trauma-informed practice and policy in the organization or the individual is not just focused on knowing

the impacts of trauma so we can help the client. There are benefits for the staff as well. Every individual at an organization, from the secretary, janitor, and maintenance man to the clinician, has a role to play (Singer, 2013). What is the impact of the organization itself and the actions they take? For example, physical restraints widely are no longer being used because of the recognition that for someone who has gone through horrible abuse, being restrained might actually be retraumatizing. Using the restraints on others may be traumatizing for the staff member who had to implement the restraint. The principles and changes that are made to operate a trauma-informed practice need to be applied not only to the client but also to the workers. The development of collaboration, choice, empowerment, and safety are key components to trauma-informed care which the practitioner can implement that allows the client to feel a greater sense of comfort.

Trauma-informed care is so important that as a group, we identified community connection, safety, career advancement, organizational values, access to resources, and workplace support as key components that must be critically examined and established to lead to a trauma-informed environment for the social worker. From the components we identified as necessary to create a trauma-informed environment, we identified aspects of each category that would be helpful to achieve such standards including empowering the individual to experience collaboration and choice, and safety within their workplace, which ideally would be present for an individual upon their entry into a social work profession.

Workplace Support

Today, we operate from a deficit model in the workplace, recognizing that many organizations are limited in the amount that they can do for both the client and the workers they employ. When we started evaluating what would keep an individual from burning out, we all

listed things within workplaces that have kept us around as workers and things that made us depart from different organizations. We recognize there are many ways in which the organization can do better and many tools the individual worker themselves can do to enhance their individual well-being. As social workers, we are dedicated to a lifelong profession of working on ourselves (Jivanjee, 2015). Yet, this does not minimize the importance of how the organization operates and the direct impact on the worker that may lead to burnout.

In the next part, we will discuss the importance of community connection, safety, career advancement, organizational values, access to resources, and workplace support. These elements may lead to the worker feeling empowered to collaborate, have choice or agency, and feel safe within their workplace, which in turn can lead to worker satisfaction and a lack of burnout.

Workplace support has a lasting impact. How you receive training within the organization will directly impact how you view said organization. If you are trained by someone who is passionate and loves the work they are doing, these positive notions will cultivate the atmosphere within the new work environment. In contrast, if you were trained by someone already burnt out, they may have a cynical or negative tone towards your new workplace. If your workplace has appropriate onboarding and if your training is ongoing and reflects the needs of the workers, it can empower one to do the job they are employed to do. Does your workplace implement limits (policy) within your work that allows for an appropriate workload, leading to choice and voice over one's workload? Does your workplace support individuals by paying a fair and livable wage? As social workers, we must be able to meet our basic needs of housing and health to show up and do our best work.

Another consideration within the workplace comes in the form of supervision. Many individuals within the social work profession will argue the quality of supervision has a huge impact on whether a worker will stay within that field of social work.

“First and foremost, effective supervision is complex and involves a triad of functions: administrative and managerial tasks, professional development including educational or clinical tasks, and supportive tasks including reflection and emotional support” (Ketner et al., 2017, p. 3).

The relationship between supervisor and supervisee affects the quality of learning skills, the sense of feeling seen and heard within the organization, how able one feels to do the job, and the amount of agency the individual holds. The ability to have clear communication with your supervisor and workplace help establish appropriate boundaries and appropriate appreciation. For a workplace to respect an individual's personal life and have boundaries around calling people in on their day off, shows that the workplace has an appreciation for the worker's personal well-being and their work-life balance. As humans, we are complicated beings that connect to many more life elements beyond work. If one's workplace respects this understanding of the complex human experience, one can live beyond the helping profession.

Appreciation can be received from many sources: from the client, from coworkers, and from the workplace. In some ways, appreciation is overdone in lieu of other beneficiary factors that would cultivate a better work environment. For example, pizza parties or similar celebrations have become the norm for a job well done. While it is nice occasionally, when it's used instead of giving outstanding workers an appropriate bonus or wage increase, the appreciation pizza party loses its intended effect. When the thank you from some clients becomes the norm, helpers may feel animosity towards clients who were not thankful for the

services. How the work environment cultivates and recognizes a job well done will directly affect how the workers feel about their work environment (Pfister et al., 2020). On an individual level, how one embodies and expects appreciation will, in turn, impact how one perceives the appreciation.

Access to Resources

Access to resources is highly important in the social work field, not only for the client you are working with but also for the worker. Everyone needs the many elements that make up individual well-being. Within the social work field, individuals are helping the public in ways that can be difficult or distressing. To combat the effects of secondary trauma, the individual worker needs to develop coping skills that address the traumas they will be facing. The workplace can offer and develop safe spaces for processing the work within supervision and by cultivating a culture that actively addresses burnout and trauma. Allowing the space to enact self-care is important and how an organization might do that can vary from organization to organization. For example, some worksites have break rooms where staff can put their personal belongings, take breaks, and disconnect from work for a brief period. An organization might actively cultivate workplace self-care by scheduling a purposeful half day every week for staff to make notes, take a walk, or go to therapy. Some workplaces hire outside group therapy for their workers to join so they can have space to process their jobs away from managers and supervisors.

There are many ways the social worker can engage in self-work to address trauma and build coping skills. The individual themselves can engage in personal therapy, exercises like yoga, continued education classes, worship, reading, peer consultation groups, and other personally beneficial self-care activities. Self-care activities can be anything listed in this

paragraph but have many possibilities depending on the individual; therefore, it does not have clear boundaries. The most important thing around self-care is the curation of a culture of self-care in the workplace from the beginning so that the effects of this distressing work do not lead to burnout (Barnette & Cooper, 2009).

Having access to resources on both an individual and institutional level at the workplace is necessary for the mitigation of burnout. When you can openly discuss the hardships of the work and its impact upon you as a person and have resources in place to allow for processing of the impact, you are starting a culture within the workplace that makes space to process trauma and challenges. Once the workplace has recognized that hard work will have mental, emotional, and physical impacts on their worker, they can do nothing or begin to take responsibility on some level and provide resources for their work staff.

Organization Values

The organization's values at a macro level have a direct impact on how the organization itself runs and what is done within the micro level work. What is the mission statement? How well does the organization stick to and work within its mission? The transparency of these values, whether they are verbalized or not, will become apparent to the workers. The ideals of a workplace will show if they value their workers, including their implementation of burnout preventative measures. For mitigation of burnout, the values of the organization must align with the worker's personal beliefs and values on some level. In other words, you must like what you do, which might be more difficult if you do not morally align with your organization.

Organizational values can also be reflected in every element discussed within this paper; whether the organization wants to cultivate a culture of self-care; whether they have opportunities for

career advancement; whether they encourage the connection of the community around you; and how the organization communicates and shows its values.

Community Connection

When working with humanity, there are many considerations to be aware of. One of these considerations is the knowledge that we are social creatures. As workers in one sector of the field, we become reliant on other agencies, resources, and teams to adequately help and support our clients. Within our work, it is important to have multi-disciplinary teams to understand the complexities of the human experience. People from different backgrounds, fields of study, and/or practices have unique views and frameworks for understanding the client in the context of their situation. Utilizing a group approach has a richer, quicker, and more holistic way of understanding the human experience and can allow for more possibilities for treatment or help for the client (Lin et al., 2022). Building multi-disciplinary teams is the responsibility of the workplace, to employ and staff those with diverse backgrounds and educations. Foremost, with a multi-disciplinary group, comes the development of a collaborative teaching-learning environment for the group to work effectively (Oborn & Dawson, 2010). When you rely on and build your connection with your team, you develop an environment where you don't need to take everything on. You cannot save the world by yourself. This leads to another important point, "Heroes (social workers) ask for help when they need it" (Afonu, 2021). Once you have built a work environment where you can rely on those around you, utilizing them helps you help others.

While the ideal treatment of clients by social workers would be compassionate and caring, the reality is that good interactions are not always possible. "There's this idea that those who give support are full cups and need to empty all of their resources into the empty cups of the needy" (Afonu, 2021). What happens when the worker's cup is already empty? What is in store

for the worker who doesn't have any capacity to keep working at this level? It is important to recognize that for workers to continue to operate at a level where they can provide helpful and appropriate care for clients, they must feel supported. This support can come from the workplace but also includes the community connections available to them.

Career Advancement

When discussing longevity within a workplace, many individuals note the importance of improving and growing on the job. For example, some Master of Social Work (MSW) graduates take additional steps to obtain licensure to practice clinical social work. Licensure requires a social worker to practice 3,000-4,000 hours of supervised experience over two years. They may choose to complete the hours with their current employer. This additional step, known as upskilling, allows the social worker to advance their career without leaving the organization. Once completed, social workers take a test to achieve licensure.

Another element of career advancement is workplace appreciation. Some ways an organization can show appreciation include offering qualitative value, allowing and rewarding raises, and promoting employees. Overall, career advancement shows social workers that they have both organization and manager support in their desire to grow professionally. This collaborative process allows social workers to feel valued and important to the organization.

Duality of Burnout in the Individual vs. the Organization: Safety

It's important to note and discuss how many of these elements leading to the mitigation of burnout have a dual role: the role of the organization and the role of the worker. Historically, the responsibility for the mitigation of burnout is placed upon the individual. With the lifetime burnout statistics of social workers being upwards of 70%, the historical route needs to be challenged. Above, we have discussed many ways in which both the individual and the

organization can do better in developing a culture of support for mental and emotional well-being. Looking at how the organization upholds these qualities in its practice is one way of defining and studying the well-being of its workers. Safety being paramount in any workplace, it holds a top box in the backwards map, but you may notice no arrows are going to or from the box. A larger discussion around safety may need to be had in the Social Work profession, as it needs to be a central element within the NASW Code of Ethics. As social workers, we are ethically bound to promote policies that safeguard equity and social justice for all people by recognizing what we do to protect the safety of others. However, we also need to be safe within the work we do and the lives we live while having the freedom to live without fear.

Definition of Action Research

Action Research is a cyclical process in which action takes place alongside research (Rowells et al., 2015). While the magnitude of the subject matter on burnout in the social work professions has prevented our group from implementing this project in real-time, our intentions to explore these topics directly align with action research. Burnout in the social work profession impacts everyone from the helper to those being helped, so a collaborative research process is necessary to determine an appropriate course of action. By utilizing participant surveys within our methodology, we support a positivist philosophy which contends that in order to enact change, we must first prove it by scientific methods (Royse, 2016). By building a theory of change map, we begin to develop our understanding of those high-order questions the research should envelop to gain a broader understanding of burnout prevention. Contending with the broader lens of change appropriate to fully engage with the subject of burnout also aligns with a realist philosophy which acknowledges that there are several perceptions and ways of knowing to consider. Acknowledgment that burnout is not inherently solved by self-care alone brings us

to the possibility of institutional changes, a political endeavor that our implementation of research would further illuminate. Because burnout among professionals directly impacts those being served, our NASW Code of Ethics holds us to a standard, not only to be accountable for our actions but to also engage in social justice and change where it stands to reduce inequities (National Association of Social Workers, 2021). These principles serve to center our action research as well as our careers in social work.

Design Causality

Design causality is a process in which an outcome is determined to be the result of an initial effect. Specifically, “causality studies may be thought of as understanding a phenomenon in terms of conditional statements in the form, ‘If X, then Y.’...Causal effect (nomothetic perspective) occurs when variation in one phenomenon, an independent variable, leads to or results, on average, in variation in another phenomenon, the dependent variable.” (Types of Research Designs, 2020). For our ultimate achievement of less burnout in social work careers to occur, our theory of change assumes multiple causal effects, proposing certain outcomes, “Y”, that would need to result from changes in the field of social work, “X”.

Our first causal effect is that if workplaces provide preventative support and resources to mitigate burnout, then social workers would feel less chronic strain and emotional fatigue often associated with burnout.

Our second causal effect is that if workplaces included trauma-informed policies and procedures, then social workers would have a manageable workload and be able to do their work fully.

Our final causal effect is that if symptoms of burnout are alleviated or prevented, then social workers would have an improved quality of life as related to their careers.

Single- and Double-Loop Learning

In this particular project, double-loop learning will likely occur because the systems that we are working within inherently show that they are not working effectively to allow us to continue working in this field. We know that there is a push to encourage social workers to engage in self-care practices, but we also know that there are other factors, like organizational culture and practices, that also influence a social worker's susceptibility to burnout. That being said, we will strive to employ double-loop learning in our research process. Double-loop learning, as articulated by Chris Argyris, refers to a process in which one "question[s] the governing variables themselves" which could lead to structural changes in how organizations operate (Smith, 2001, para. 17).

When detecting errors that need to be corrected, single-loop learning allows organizations to operate under their current policies while double-loop learning requires "modification of an organization's underlying norms, policies, and objectives" (Smith, 2001, para. 18). Therefore, we would like more double-loop learning to occur in which the organizations that social workers are employed at are changing and evolving to accommodate the prevalence of burnout in the field, while not placing full responsibility on individual social workers' capacity to engage in self-care. While it is likely that organizations will want to stick to the practices that they currently employ, as social workers, we have a stake in this matter, which will encourage us to advocate for more organizational change.

Communities of Inquiry in Communities of Practice

When exploring the concept of action research, Friedman identified two components as being necessary aspects of creating communities of inquiry within communities of practice. The first was that "both researchers and practitioners must redefine their roles and develop a set of

common values, norms, terminology, and procedures” (Friedman, 2008, p. 160) This component recognizes that researchers and practitioners often play distinctly different roles in research, but when engaging in action research, it is necessary that a collaborative relationship be established with a common “language” of sorts. The second component acknowledges that “practitioners are not simply problem-solvers, but also researchers committed to critically examining their practice” (Friedman, 2008, p. 160). In this way, practitioners play an active role in recognizing the current conditions, identifying a goal of how things could improve, and developing strategies to achieve this goal or goals.

In this research paper, all the authors are Master of Social Work students, so it is important to recognize that we have a unique position of already being engaged in communities of practice due to our education requirements alone. Each of us takes part in a practicum within the social services field as part of our required experience to earn our degree. Additionally, amongst our group, we have the versatility of having practicum placements that include experiences that range from micro to macro work. Coinciding with being a part of communities of practice, through this paper, we are taking an active role in the “community of inquiry”, challenging the daunting knowledge that many individuals within the social work field end up experiencing burnout, and asking how we can be active researchers while doing the work to create a better outcome. We critically examine not only our own experience within our practices through critical reflection but also the fields of social work to better understand the factors that contribute to burnout and how it may be prevented.

“How to “do” Action Research

Throughout the semester, we have learned about how action research is not only a dual process of research paired with action, but also how we show up to participate in the work,

which directly impacts any changes we hope to implement in these areas (McNiff & Whitehead, n.d.). When deciding on a topic to explore in class, our group was drawn to the subject matter of burnout because it directly impacts the work we do and we hope to continue to do it in the field of social work. As disclosed in our positionality statement, we acknowledge the potential biases we may bring to the topic, but it also illustrates our mutual investment in mitigating burnout amongst social work professionals, directly tied to the “why” of the work we wished to explore (Royse et. al, 2016).

Starting with a broad topic, while exciting, makes it complicated to discern an access point to engage in action research. Eventually, our team agreed to return to basics by first conducting a survey to measure burnout (Maslach, & Leiter, 2016), with the intention that gathering current data would further support the historical research on this subject as an area in need of attention. Since we are unable to produce the quantitative and qualitative data in real-time, our group had to hypothesize that the data would support our research, as well as what further action could look like. If we were to truly conduct an action research project, this would involve several rounds of data collection throughout the action process in order to establish both a baseline as well as any progress made. Ideally, stakeholder groups would be formed to determine the next steps to address various aspects of burnout, thereby centering action based on what participants agree to be most important, another tenet of action research (Royse et al., 2016).

Rigor in Action Research

Evaluation involves self-evaluation and external evaluation, as we have defined throughout this action research essay, such as an awareness of potential biases the researchers bring to the area of research and centering those experiences of participants rather than our own

to determine change. Our theory of change map is built entirely on what we've found in research articles and our own experiences, so this would likely broaden and gain additional insights once participants and real-time data were collected. Utilizing proven methodologies such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory in a widespread survey lends validity to data collection methods. By evaluating the gathered data, we can move forward into another cycle of information gathering, such as 1:1 interviews, gathering stakeholders into groups to discuss and disseminate findings and center their opinions on the next steps.

Discussion

When first proposing this research project, we understood that burnout, as a topic, was so broad and vast that we would never be able to fully explore all facets of the topic. However, we recognize that one of the ways in which we can create meaningful change through our action research is by advocating for a broad adoption of trauma-informed policies in human service organizations that would allow individuals to engage in more meaningful self-care practices and community building. By creating environments where social workers can effectively do their jobs, without the looming presence of burnout and limited support, there is the possibility for better quality of life and quality of care for all involved. Through the creation of our backwards map, we realized that many of the recommendations for interventions are related to trauma-informed care, meaning this will likely be the focus of any action we would pursue.

While we have not conducted this research, the data we collect could reveal some new factors that we never considered as we have primarily been focused on the ways that organizations can assist in mitigating burnout. Through this project, we identified that burnout has a dual nature, where we must acknowledge what is in the individual's control in the process of preventing burnout compared to what organizations can do to prevent their employees from

experiencing burnout. However, due to our personal experience with burnout and the literature on the subject, we predict that the data will show that organizations are not contributing in meaningful ways in relation to burnout prevention. Due to the high number of social workers who experience burnout, we are likely to see similar rates of burnout in the Missoula community that are reported in other studies. By referencing our backwards map, we will seek to measure how community connection, opportunities for career advancement, workplace support, access to resources, and organizational values impact the safety and wellbeing of individuals in the workplace. After assessing where social workers and the organizations they work at reside with these supports, we will seek to advocate for broader changes in the systems that maintain the pattern of burnout.

Implications. Since we have yet to implement data collection, our implication section is based on the existing research on burnout, which also inferred our theory of change map, as well as our conjecture on how our action research could be used to enact change.

For practice. There are many implications for social work practice in mitigating career burnout. Operating with a trauma-informed lens could have positive implications in practice in a variety of areas, including community connection, career advancement, access to resources, and workplace values. These areas of practice trickle down from a macro systems level all the way down to the individual. Professionals have access to the resources they need to address and prevent burnout on a physical and emotional level. In turn, clients receive better care when these professionals are adequately supported.

For policy. Implications for policy mitigating social work career burnout are numerous. Some of the possibilities our group hypothesized included policies geared toward: creating and supporting trauma-informed organizations, improved safety, livable wages, and appropriate

workloads. Further development on organizational needs assessments would need to be conducted to ensure that proper policies were being introduced.

For future research. One of the exciting prospects of action research is the idea that the work is never truly finished. By exploring the factors at the heart of burnout, stakeholders could continue to build community with one another to address the multitude of possibilities. Future research could include assessing whether or not the changes implemented to address burnout had an impact on social workers' career longevity. As a response to data collected in Missoula County, a coalition could be formed with the specific goal of addressing burnout in social work careers in our community. The topic of burnout is broad enough to engage with folks on various levels of micro and macro level efforts which open possibilities for future inquiry beyond the scope of what our group has yet considered.

Limitations

With the knowledge that we chose to approach this paper from a very broad perspective regarding social work fields, it is important to recognize that our proposed theory of change and plan to achieve it may not be helpful or resonate as applicable or true for all social work fields. Additionally, certain components might pertain to certain social workers, while others do not. The nuanced factors of a social worker's role and responsibilities within an organization might put them at more or less of a burnout risk, and the power and choice that comes with higher positions in an organization might mitigate some of the stressors that exist for workers in lower levels.

Another limitation we wanted to acknowledge in our paper is how much of the theory of change is written with the assumption of a social worker being within an organization. Consequently, many of the proposed areas of change that would lead to burnout prevention are

placed on the organization's role. However, many social workers who, like the authors, plan to or who have achieved a graduate-level education, might want to earn hours to become a LCSW. Furthermore, many individuals who become LCSWs choose to become private practitioners. While this might remove some of the stressors that are unique to an organization's influence leading to burnout, there is also more responsibility on the individual in protecting themselves against vicarious and secondary trauma, and in mitigating their own burnout in the work they do. For this reason, it would be important in future research to explore the specific needs and challenges in private practice for burnout prevention.

Conclusion

With the understanding that we can forgo completing a section of the paper because of our presentation in class, we made the group decision to not include a conclusion section in this paper.

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Appendix F

Social Welfare in Indigenous Communities

The historical foundations of the United States were based on the destruction, moving, combining, and assimilating of Indigenous people and their communities. These tactics took place across many centuries and each attempt came with its own set of unique circumstances. The driving forces were the expansion of European settlement, United States territory, and United States government policies that controlled the lives and livelihood of Indigenous people (Library of Congress, n.d.). Indigenous people were pushed to respond to policy and direct change at a fast pace. As a result, many failed and were abandoned on the periphery of American Society.

The last great drive to assimilate Indigenous people was the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). The IRA was intended to loosen federal government control over Indigenous people such as allowing a greater degree of self-governance, returning control of tribal lands, and encouraging economic self-sufficiency. While the IRA provided relief to some Indigenous tribes, it devastated others. Policies introduced by the IRA continued to influence federal-Indian relations for several decades. Despite these intentional threats, Indigenous people did not disappear but instead demonstrated resilience.

Literature Review

Nineteenth Century Destruction

In the nineteenth century, Indigenous people experienced malnutrition combined with a forced sedentary lifestyle, facilitated by the rapid spread of diseases which resulted in an alarming demographic decline. Furthermore, United States federal policies broke up reservations, abolished tribal authorities, and eradicated traditional religions and languages. The

1890 census recorded an Indigenous population of less than 225,000, which was rapidly falling (Digital History, n.d.). Hardship and dislocation describe these years.

Ending an era of conquest, a new phase of assimilation began with the enactment of the Dawes Act of 1887. This had disastrous effects as well. The Dawes Act allowed the President to break up tribal reservation land, which was held in common by Indigenous tribal members, into small allotments to be parceled out to individuals. When the allotment process began, the total land held by Indigenous tribes on reservations equaled approximately 100 million acres. By the end of the allotment period, landholding had been reduced to 48 million acres (Digital History, n.d.). Land holdings continued to dwindle after the allotment period.

The Dawes Act was designed to assimilate Indigenous people into the general population and encouraged agricultural practices over traditional means of sustenance. When Indigenous people attempted this new way of life, some were often unsuccessful because they lacked the knowledge. As for the unclaimed or surplus land – it was sold, and the proceeds were used to establish Indian schools where Indigenous children learned how to read and write. These schools forced Indigenous children to dress like White Americans as well (Life on the Reservations, n.d.). These practices often led to further tribal division.

Twentieth Century Acculturation

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, industrialization led the government to redefine its relationship with Indigenous people. For instance, the idea was to shift away from military subjugation, land cession, and removal efforts. The government shifted towards policies promoting acculturation and other forms of assimilation.

This new approach was led and supported by John Collier. John Collier was a white American who was very much interested in Indian affairs. He conducted research among

Indigenous people surrounding the adverse effects of the industrial age on mankind. More importantly, his research was related to underlying political and social concerns. Early in his career, he believed Indigenous tradition and respect for the environment had much to teach American materialism. He wanted to protect these ways of life and Indigenous lands. This was his goal during the time he was with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and later when he was Commissioner for Indian Affairs (Kunitz, 1971). The centerpiece of his new policy was the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act.

The Indian Reorganization Act was also known as the Indian New Deal. The Indian Reorganization Act (1934) is defined as:

“To conserve and develop Indian Lands and resources; to extend to Indians the right to form business and other organizations; to establish a credit system for Indians; to grant certain rights of home rule to Indians; to provide for vocational education for Indians; and for other purposes” (para. 1).

The Indian Reorganization Act was part of President Franklin Roosevelt’s “New Deal,” which was a series of ambitious social programs designed to reform policies and provide immediate economic relief from the Great Depression. Funding was made available to improve the conditions on tribal reservations that had suffered under the Dawes Act and to help Indigenous groups buy back tribal lands (Landry, 2016). The IRA claimed to pave the way for tribal governments to exercise tribal self-governing powers and responsibilities. In addition, it prevented the leasing or sale of land without tribal consent and negotiated with federal or state governments for public services (Lewis, 1993).

During implementation, John Collier and his staff ran into more troubles than they expected. One of the difficulties was that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) staff had been built

up over the past half-century. These people were firmly dedicated to the idea of assimilation, despite John Collier's new approach to restoring Indigenous tradition and lands. This caused tension and pushback from many within the BIA department. The BIA was one of the most corrupt and mismanaged agencies in the history of the federal government. John Collier tried to decentralize the bureaucracy, with hopes it would shift from an executive role to an advisory role (Sachs & Morris, 2001). Unfortunately, his attempt was unsuccessful.

The Indian Reorganization Act offered generous federal subsidies to Indigenous tribes that replaced their tribal government with city council-style governments and adopted constitutions like that of the United States. Although, in most cases, tribal constitutions lacked provisions for the separation of powers which often resulted in friction with tribal elders (Longley, 2021). In addition, any decision the tribal council made was subjected to administrative review by the United State Department of the Interior Superintendent and Interior. The federal government continued to control tribal trust expenditures, per capita payments, and the leasing and other use of tribal property (Philp, 1995). The IRA did not provide Indigenous tribes with complete self-determination as it promised.

There were additional problems. Some Indigenous groups were fearful of the idea to have an Indian Reorganization Act tribal council controlled by the federal government, assuming it would be detrimental to their interest. For instance, they feared the Indian Reorganization Act would encourage segregation and increase the power of paternalistic federal bureaucrats over Indigenous lives. The Bureau statistics showed that 181 Indigenous tribes voted for the IRA, whereas 77 Indigenous tribes rejected it. A number of the larger tribes were among those who rejected it. For instance, John Collier found it impossible to get the Navajo Nation to enroll. Today, they still are not recognized under this law (Philp, 1995, p. 40).

As for funding, the Indian Reorganization Act budget was not large enough to cope with the growing demands of economic development for the reservations. In addition, it did not provide adequate health and educational facilities. It was hoped that the government would have relieved some of the political struggles within Indigenous communities; however, in many cases, it exacerbated them. Only a few individual tribal reservations were able to become financially self-sustaining. Tyler (1973) in his literature review about Indian Reorganization Act, noted that:

“The IRA was put into effect too rapidly. Neither the Congress nor the Indians were adequately informed concerning it nor prepared for it. Bureau personnel needed better training for the application of provisions contained in IRA, some of which were quite foreign to their past experiences and to their personal philosophy concerning the Indians... The philosophy of the IRA itself was violated in that the Indians did not play a truly significant part in preparing [tribal constitutions]. As a result, the meaning of these instruments of government was often quite foreign to them” (p. 132).

Indeed, the blanket solution failed to address the disparate needs of the hundreds of Indigenous tribes. It unintentionally laid the groundwork for more repressive Indian policy in the coming years. For instance, Congress agreed with John Collier’s initial suggestion of dismantling the BIA and other federal support systems for Indigenous tribes. After 1945, Congress, without Indigenous consent, passed termination legislation. The goal was:

“As rapidly as possible, to make the Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States” (House Concurrent Resolution 108, 1953, B132).

As a result, 109 Indigenous tribes were terminated, and federal responsibility and jurisdiction were turned over to the state governments. John Collier's Indian Reorganization Act had also concluded. The IRA fell short of its goal to improve most of the lives of Indigenous people and their communities, even as it is widely recognized as a valiant effort at legitimate reform (Encyclopedia Staff, 2020).

Social Justice Understanding

The United States was built on a foundation of invasion, racism, and genocide. As a result, Indigenous people struggled with American authorities in an attempt to maintain their sociocultural identity and freedom. John Collier is highlighted for also stressing the need to protect and preserve Indigenous cultures and religions. His involvement with Indigenous people and communities began in the early 1920s. He was an advocate of social reform, with a much wider comprehensive view of the world than that held by most Americans involved in politics during his time. As such, John Collier's white status, education, and involvement in the Bureau of Indian Affairs were key elements in this early social justice movement for Indigenous rights. His identity opened the way for Indigenous people to use their tribal holdings and extend them. It also stipulated that with the majority vote, each reservation could incorporate its business affairs under a federal charter and secure a constitution (Warnes n.d.). In spite of the unevenly distributed benefits, all Indigenous peoples and their communities thrived and led resilient lives. Rupert Costo (2016) said it best:

“After all, the Indians were not and are not fools; we are always ready to improve our condition. But assimilation, meaning fading into the general society with a complete loss of our identity and our culture, was another thing entirely, and we had fought against this from the first coming of the white man" (para. 6).

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Appendix G

Reflection of WPLI

I attended the 17th Annual Women's Policy Leadership Institute in Helena, Montana. This event was put on by Montana Women Vote for people of all backgrounds to build community and learn about policy issues and change. Overall, this conference was very helpful and significant for me in terms of broadening my knowledge base, networking, and leadership skills. I feel much more qualified and prepared to apply policy practice at a personal and professional level. Meanwhile, it allowed our MSW cohort to interact with each other outside of class which brought some of us closer.

First of all, the most impactful part of the conference was the breakout session, Voting Rights and Voter Suppression: What To Know and What To Do. In this session, Paul Kim, Policy Associate from American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Montana, spoke with raw authenticity. He shared how voting meets the real world and plays out in practice. Paul stated the notion "for every one person, there's one vote," which suggests everyone has equal access to their democracy, but it isn't the case for even the healthiest democracies in the United States and/or in states that haven't taken stricter voting laws. There's a fundamental contradiction and that is when we live in a country of democracy under capitalism it just so happens that your right to participate in your democracy is directly correlated to your wealth. I was really glad I chose to attend this breakout session because I learned about things, I didn't know beforehand.

There's a connection between voting and policy decisions and social work outcomes. As a social worker, I sit at the intersection of the individual and society which positions me to encourage civic participation. It is my responsibility to inspire action, educate people on issues, inform them where candidates stand on issues, and encourage everyone to get out the vote so

their voices can be heard. I would like to use these skills to help Indigenous communities in Montana. Whether it be in my current position with Accelerate Montana or as a Native American voter, I cannot stress enough the importance to vote. I plan to share information on voting and elections with clients, staff, and the Tribal communities I work with. For instance, the recent passage of House Bill 176, ending election day voter registration, along with Senate Bill 169 which imposes photo ID requirements at the polls on election day. The rights of Indigenous communities, including their ability and accessibility to vote for the representation and policy initiatives that directly impact their everyday lives are at stake. These laws disproportionately impact marginalized, Indigenous communities by creating further socioeconomic barriers and must be challenged.

Along with fighting voting suppression, I learned a lot about the state budget in another breakout session. Heather O'Loughlin and Rose Bender did a good job explaining the basic development or execution of the state budget. I learned about House Bill 2, which determines the funding to state agencies that provide services across Montana, and executive action that Montana Budget and Policy Center (MBPC) staff follow in budget subcommittees. They mentioned a \$2 billion+ budget surplus that I also wasn't aware of. The Montana Legislature can and should think proactively about long-term investments that help Montana families and the economy; however, it's a fierce debate about how and where the state spends its money. I learned about Senate Bill 121 and how it was recently passed, prioritizing tax cuts that primarily benefit the wealthy and big businesses. It also further steepens our tax code in racial inequality. Overall, I believe this presentation provided surface-level information on a very complicated budget and processing which seems inaccessible to most of us.

The Women's Policy Leadership Institute expanded my understanding of policy and how that plays out in our state legislature. It was fun networking and I feel more confident and prepared for the coming work and challenges. Thank you so much for bringing WPLI to my attention and allowing me to participate!