

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

A LEARNING JOURNEY

Evaluation of The Human Services Internship Program

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March 1996**

“My dream is to be a worthy member of society ... I am looking for career that is going to keep my son and I at a happy medium lifestyle... Let’s face it, the [Social Assistance] system is not exactly good for self-esteem”

“... I’ve spent a long time in my mind studying ways of how to grow in that river we call life. A lot of time you spend pushing against the river ... One thing I’ve noticed about this job is that it has provided an opportunity to go with that flow in ways which I never experienced before ...”

I wish to thank all of the women who shared the details of their learning journey. Without their stories, this report would not exist. To each one, I extend my best wishes for the future. A special thanks for being part of my journey!

MIGWECH!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	PAGE 1
NATIVE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES: A UNIQUE LEARNING SETTING	PAGE 1
HUMAN SERVICES INTERNSHIP PROGRAM: DESCRIPTION	PAGE 3
PROGRAM EVALUATION	PAGE 4
ACCESS TO THE PROGRAM	PAGE 6
PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM	PAGE 10
THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING	PAGE 18
PROGRAM IMPACT	PAGE 28
CONCLUSIONS	PAGE 29

INTRODUCTION

NCFST's Human Services Internship Program was designed to increase the numbers of qualified and experienced Native service providers, while providing opportunities for those on social assistance. Trainees were given an opportunity to benefit from practical on-the-job learning opportunities and community-based training, and support in their post-training educational or job planning.

This report follows six women in their journey towards meaningful employment. The metaphor of a "path" - at least in Webster's dictionary definition - seems slightly inappropriate, with its suggestion of a "...trodden way...constructed for a particular use". The Internship Program does indeed have a certain structure, providing for on-the-job learning and support for training outside of the agency. The real journey, captured by one woman's statement on the previous page, lies in the world of experience . . . of opportunities, self and new ambitions. I begin with a description of the setting for these experiences.

NATIVE CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES: A UNIQUE LEARNING SETTING

One of the few Native child welfare organizations under the direct control of the Native community, Native Child and Family Services gave interns a unique opportunity for considering a career in Native services. Trainees were exposed to a diversity of programs, based in a culturally-based service approach. During the last year, they worked in a child welfare environment in transition to becoming Canada's first off-reserve "authority" under the Provincial Child and Family Services Act.

Like all parts of the Agency, the character and focus of the Internship reflected NCFST's overall mission:

"Native Child and Family Services of Toronto strives to provide for a life of quality, well-being, caring and healing for our children and families in the Toronto Native community. It does this by creating a service model that is culture-based, respecting the supreme values of Native people, the extended family, and the right to self-determination."

Trainees in the Internship program contributed to a comprehensive system of services with the following goals:

1. To create and maintain a culture-based agency of service, healing and well-being for Native individuals and families that contributes to the development of a whole and healthy Native community.

2. To develop an integrated network of effective programs and positive relationships for a caring and supportive environment.
3. To develop awareness of culture, along with the knowledge, skills and attitudes for contemporary Native health, well-being and self-determination.
4. To provide Native-appropriate support services and resources for child and family care, healing and well-being.

Trainees in the Internship Program were placed in one or more of several service units and programs. NCFST offers the following services:

- **Family Services:** a casework service of supportive counselling, information and referral, family mediation, advocacy, information on housing and welfare rights, and on-to-one interventions - all to support families and prevent the apprehension of children.
- **Customary Care:** a substitute care service for children needing to live away from their families temporarily. Customary care homes may be provided by the child's relatives, fellow band member, or a member of the Native community. This is the first fully licenced off-reserve residential placement program under the direct control of the Native community.
- **Mooka'am Treatment Services:** culture-based and contemporary treatment service for adult and child victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse. Includes a **Children's Circle Program** for children from substance abusive families, and a newly developed **Women's Support Program** for abused women.
- **Youth Services:** a Youth Outreach Program which targets youth, often adoption breakdowns, who are at risk in the downtown core. This program establishes relationships with these youth, makes referrals, and holds drop-in events - all in the interest of helping them avoid a path of self-destruction.

NCFST provides a number of new initiatives, as well: The **Ninoshe Program** sees older Native adult women providing support, instruction, and nurturance to young sole support parents with infants. The **Operation Wolverine Program** is an after-school social and recreational program for Native children. The **Koognaaswin Program** is a prevention program for parents and children, focussing particularly on parenting skills.

Since it's beginning, NCFST has provided numerous training opportunities for students pursuing a career in Native human services, some of whom are now on staff. The Human Services Internship Program is another type of initiative for training.....

HUMAN SERVICES INTERNSHIP PROGRAM: DESCRIPTION

NCFST's Human Services Internship Program grew out of three distinct needs in the Native service delivery system: (i) the need for trained and experienced workers in Native child welfare, (ii) the need for Native people to access training opportunities in Native social services, opportunities which will create the skills and knowledge for work in a culture-based context, and (iii) the need to develop initiatives for persons on social assistance - opportunities for learning and self-realization.

Taking advantage of opportunities provided through the Job Link Program, NCFST responded to these issues by designing a program to provide and facilitate social services and administration training for 5 Native trainees currently on social assistance. The trainees participated in four different Agency service and administrative units: the Family Support Programs (2 trainees), the Mooka'am Program (1 trainee), the Social and Recreation program, and Administration. The internship was designed to provide skills and knowledge training, using internal training resources and activities as well as outside training programs.

The official objectives of the program, as indicated in the initial proposal are as follows:

1. To hire five trainees to undertake an internship at NCFST in the delivery of Human Services
2. To provide trainees with practical hands-on experience in specific areas of service operations
3. To augment experiential learning with formal training programs specific to their area of interest
4. To assist trainees in furthering their education and improve their marketability

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The program's evaluation component was designed to contribute to high quality training experience for the participants, and contribute to the development of useful internship programs for trainees in other Native service settings. Evaluation objectives can be sub-divided into those which will understand and facilitate the process of providing the internship, and those which pertain to program impact.

Evaluation of Process

The processes of putting into place the internship includes recruiting appropriate trainees, making sure they are well oriented to the program, the agency and their responsibilities, and assuring that they have the appropriate learning opportunities for developing skills, knowledge and confidence to do quality work in the agency and in other settings.

1. Trainee Accessibility and Program Participation

Objective 1.1. To assess whether the trainees were recruited as planned.

Objective 1.2. To describe the various patterns of trainee participation in the program, with special attention to participation in learning experiences, and program completion.

2. Implementation of the Internship Program

2.1 To assess whether the internal core program components were provided as planned.

2.2 To document which community training events or programs were used by the trainees.

2.3 To evaluate the various internship learning opportunities in terms of the trainees' assessment of (i) relevance to their learning goals (ii) compatibility with their learning style (iii) relevance to their jobs at NCFST, and finally (iv) their sense of learning tangible skills which are transferable to other settings.

2.4 To describe the challenges or problems in the process of providing the program.

Evaluation of Program Impact

An evaluation of the impact of the internship will concentrate on the consequences for the trainees and for the agency programs in which they participated. Impact will be assessed in terms of : (i) whether the trainees made an acceptable contribution to NCFST's services or administration, and (ii) whether the trainees were supported in their progress towards a career in social services.

3. Contribution to Service Delivery or Administration

- 3.1 To document the work performed by each trainee during the internship.
- 3.2 To assess the importance of the trainees' contributions to work while in NCFST's Internship Program.

4. Continuation in Social Services

- 4.1 To document the trainees immediate career steps following the program.
- 4.2 To assess the program's contributions to the trainees' career decisions, steps or aspirations.

Evaluation Methods

The methods for this project included a combination of program learning circles (focus groups), interviews with trainees and their supervisors, and document analysis.

Three program learning circles were held with the trainees at the beginning, mid-point and towards the end of the Internship Program. The purpose of these circles was to learn about the trainees' various work experiences and training opportunities. As well, the circle afforded an opportunity for the trainees to meet as a group, and share their experiences, raise issues and consider solutions. In this quasi-support group I was able to glean close first hand knowledge of the joys and struggles of the internship, and observe as they thought through plans and solutions. Unfortunately, scheduling difficulties made it difficult to have all the trainees together at the same time, necessitating supplementary meetings with smaller groups or interviews.

Interviews were held with trainees unable to attend the program learning circles. Telephone interviews were also held with Supervisors to estimate the trainees' potential for service work, as well as to document any special contributions.

Finally, analysis of documents was an important part of the evaluation. These were quarterly reports including reports from trainees and supervisors, submitted to the Aboriginal JobLink Council. For evaluation purposes, they provided detailed documentation of work responsibilities and training activities, both internal and external. The experiences with these activities were pursued in learning circles and interviews.

Presentation of Information

Generally, this report is presented as a story of six women preparing themselves for careers in social services. In places, I am free to provide details of their lives, hopefully giving the reader the best possible appreciation of their lives, ambitions, and fears. In other parts of the report, the mode of presentation changes and becomes more like a research report - somewhat bloodless and slightly abstract. This is necessary to protect the confidentiality of the women.

The six women are Ann, Isabelle, Valerie, Maureen, Lorraine and Marion. As we shall see, Isabelle ceased being a trainee in the program, and assumed a temporary full-time position with the Agency, during a staff member's maternity leave. Marion took over her Internship position. I begin first with their hopes and ambitions.

ACCESS TO THE PROGRAM

The intent of the program was to provide an experience for the trainees that was both "tangible and real". For this reason, the program began with a formal job posting. The idea was to replicate a job competition, giving the candidates job application experiences that may be useful later.

Twenty-five applications were received by the Agency; fifteen applicants were short-listed and subsequently interviewed. Five persons were offered jobs, but one had to withdraw the application for personal reasons. The successful candidates commenced their employment on May 29, 1995.

Well into the program, one of the trainees was offered a position within the Agency, as a replacement for a staff member who took maternal leave. The position was in the same service unit as her internship. The intern position was quickly filled by the applicant who was next in line.

In summary, six women participated in the program for at least some period of time. Four participated from beginning to end; one for a few months, and the other for a total of eight months. At the outset, the Agency promised that candidates would be in the competition for later positions; within months, one person benefitted from that opportunity. I now begin to tell the stories of the six participants.

Ann

Ann was searching for eventual employment. She was very ambivalent about being on social assistance, preferring to seek training and employment. In fact, she had a “five year plan” for raising her child, after which she would prepare herself for a career in human services. Her previous work was also in social services - geriatrics; but she did not want necessarily want to return to that specialization. With a few years of parenting to go, she began looking around and doing the research to begin her career.

The Greater Toronto Aboriginal Management Board (GTAB) was “quite helpful”, encouraging her to apply for NCFST’s Human Services Internship Program. She was sure that she wanted a human services career; she didn’t know what specialization.

Ann believed that by doing the actual work in family services and parent\child work, she would develop feelings and understandings concerning her next steps towards a career. Recognizing the importance of academic learning towards a family services career, she was very much looking forward to the outside training during the internship. These opportunities would give her the “readiness” to enter university or college. Most of her previous leaning was “on the job”, so she was looking forward to earning paper credentials for her educational accomplishments.

Isabelle

Isabelle had always worked. She had only brief experience on Social Assistance before becoming eligible for this program. She was previously employed as a clerical worker in the field of market research. Although officially she had never done human service work, she has been very active in her community helping friends and counseling informally. This life experience drew her towards a human services career. She was offered an Internship in Family Services and Customary Care.

During the Internship year, Isabelle planned to complete her B.A. in Sociology, concentrating in Aboriginal Studies. She was very enthusiastic about balancing her academic work with practical experience in the Internship Program. She anticipated that the practical work experience would make her far more competitive for future job opportunities.

By the first program learning circle, Isabelle had worked in Family Services and Customary Care, and was leaning towards an interest in customary care. The latter was new to her since she provided “something like” family services in her community. Like Ann, she was beginning to be aware of the diversity in the social service field, activities like court work and child welfare.

Isabelle valued the Program’s opportunities for outside training, particularly any training which she could immediately use in her customary care work. She would not have been able to afford such training on her own.

As it turned out, the Agency quickly valued Isabelle's contributions. When a Customary Care staff member left for maternity leave, she was offered a temporary full-time assignment.

Valerie

Valerie was a trainee in Administration. Prior to entering the Internship Program, she had been on Social Assistance for one year, as well as working in the Ambassador Program in NCFST's Youth Program. She became comfortable with the Agency, and applied to the Internship Program.

Valerie applied for a training opportunity in services; administration was not her first choice. Shortly after commencing the program, she recognized that although she did not seek a purely administrative career, administration is very much part of a human service worker's job.

Upon entering the program she hoped to get affordable training which would help her to find employment before starting university.

Maureen

Maureen entered the Internship Program hoping to gain experience and additional skills for communicating with young people, for a career in working with children. Also, she hoped to learn program planning and administration in social services. Since she already had some office experience in a business setting, she saw herself as up-grading her skills. Eventually, she planned to go to university possibly to study business administration, hopefully which she can apply in a Native organization.

However, Maureen's educational career goals needed to be clarified.

In addition to clerical work at Anishnabe Health, Maureen worked in a modeling agency. Her life experiences included supporting children in foster homes, and advising youth. In general, Maureen hoped for the opportunity to gain work experience and work towards some specific goals for the future.

Lorraine

Prior to her Internship assignment in the Mooka'am Treatment Services, Lorraine had done volunteer work with NCFST's Youth Program. This experience made her realize that she liked social service work. When this opportunity came up, she decided to pursue a services career. Apart from the volunteer work, Lorraine did not have formal training or education in human services, although she was trained and experienced in marketing and administration.

When she initially applied for the Internship position, she was interviewed by three Program Co-ordinators. She was initially attracted to Family Services, feeling more comfortable with that type of work. At the time, she was less confident in her interpersonal skills and felt that the Mooka'am position may not be as appropriate. However, after the interview, Mooka'am's Program Supervisor indicated that Lorraine's personal healing experiences and "being in touch with her self" made her a good candidate for the program.

Marion

Marion replaced Isabelle as a trainee in Customary Care and Family Services.

When she first heard about the opportunity, she had been working at First Nations School as a cook. She applied immediately, but did not get the position right away, although she was told that she would be considered if something else came along.

She also had previous experience as a trainee in the Nechi drug and alcohol counselling training program. Among other things, she had picked up skills and experiences in counselling and group facilitation. However, she felt she had to build on what she considered "incomplete" training in other programs.

Marion's attraction to a human services career began with nursing, shortly after her son was in the hospital with burns. Later, during her own therapy and growth, she turned her sights to working with single parents and children. Eventually, she aspired to a career in therapy. She felt that an internship in the Customary Care Program would broaden her experience with abused children and different families.

Marion's personal experience also played a part in her career thinking and her attraction to NCFST's Internship Program. Like other trainees, she had some previous experience with the Agency. She herself had been abused as a child, and had sought help. To some extent, she felt that it helped to know people in the Agency, and to know its history, goals, programs, and cultural base. Even so, she started her program with some excitement and nervousness. She wondered what it would be like giving rather than receiving help. She also wondered how she would be received.

Prior to starting her internship, Marion contacted the Program Co-ordinators for details of the work. Her feelings were mixed excitement and nervousness. She realized that some work experiences - like court work and attending agency meetings - would be stressful.

In addition to training opportunities, Marion anticipated how the Program would help in other ways. She valued the opportunity of having full-time, albeit temporary, employment. As a single mother without a partner, she needed steady employment to look after herself and her son.

When she started the Program, Marion expressed an interest in a University education, but felt constrained by the sky-rocketing costs of tuition and looking after her son. What she considered a realistic plan was to finish High School through home correspondence, work for three or four years, budget, and enter university later. By obtaining the work experience and a good recommendation through this training program, she hoped to be employable and avoid Social Assistance. She had high expectations for the Program.

“So to me its an opportunity, I mean its not a guarantee of the job here afterwards but if I do my job well and I do the training well, and I leave here knowing I know what I am doing and I’ve trained and learned enough to know that I can do a job like this, I can get a recommendation and go somewhere else and really push at the door and say I don’t have a University degree but I know what I’m doing, I’ve had training.”

PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM

NCFST’s Human Services Internship Program consisted of two training experiences: an internal component with on-the-job learning and an external component in which trainees would attend community training events.

The Work Experience

On- the- job learning took place through placement in five different agency positions, in four units: Family Services; Customary Care; Mooka’am Treatment Services; Youth Services; and Administration. Each person would be a Trainee in their respective units, working closely with the regular staff and reporting to a Supervisor. Each trainee would be assigned specific tasks in the unit, giving them broad based experience in that unit, as well as exposure to the various generic functions relevant to that type of service work. For example, two Family Support Trainees would be assigned to the family service and customary care functions, participating in activities which “may include advocacy, assisting families, in finding accommodation, supervising visits, child care, informal counselling -- in short, whatever is needed to keep families together” (Human Services Intern Program, January 17, 1995, Pg. 6)

To what extent did the trainees undertake the Agency activities as planned? Table 1 summarizes the trainees’ work experiences at the Agency. Names are pseudonyms.

TABLE 1: TRAINEE WORK ACTIVITIES

TRAINEE	TITLE	UNIT	ACTIVITIES
Anna	Case Aid	Family Services\ Koognaaswin Program.	<u>Family Services</u> : Transportation of children; assisting families-appointments; assisting families with various documentation; aid apartment hunting, food banks, getting ready for new baby; child care; team meetings; supervision. <u>Koognaaswin</u> : assisting in planning, delivering, and assessing parenting skill groups.
Lorraine	Mooka'am Trainee	Mooka'am Treatment Services	Assistance in planning, development, and implementation of a children's group program; co-facilitated children's circle; team meetings in three units; supervision; observations; play therapy;
Marianne	Social Recreational Trainee	Youth Services	Camp counselling; completion of forms; assisted delivery of social recreational programs; team meetings; assisted transport of program participants; supervision; assisted organization of Agency Xmas party; intake.
Maureen	Family Support Trainee	Customary Care	Home visits; review of policy and procedures; supervision of
Valerie	Administrative Trainee	Administration	Typing case information; relief reception; filing; photocopying; faxing; mail-outs; purchasing; restructure manual file system; fundraising; training reception staff; assisting staff on office equipment; supervision.
Irene (replac'd)	Family Support Trainee	Customary Care	<u>Family Services</u> : Transportation of children; assisting families-appointments; assisting families with various documentation; aid apartment hunting, food banks, getting ready for new baby; child care; team meetings; supervision. <u>Customary Care</u> : home visits; assessment; maintained files and recordings; supervised parent-child access visits; supervision and support of customary care parents; attended children's arrivals from mandated agencies; co-facilitated Customary Care Training Workshop.

We now return to our story. What impressions did these placements and work activities make on the trainees? What did these opportunities “mean” to the women in terms of the work, priorities and themselves? This is a general question. I shall return to the more specific questions of challenges, career and educational planning in a later section.

Ann enjoyed her Family Services assignment. She enjoyed the case aide experience, the staff, the clients, the fast pace and the quick learning of new work. Although she enjoyed her work in the “Parent\child Program”, in her words it “did not get the juices flowing” as much as family services. In certain ways, working with parents and their children was similar to her former geriatric work - something she wanted to get away from. In general, all of Ann’s comments reflected a high level of excitement and expectation.

During the first few months in the program, Ann’s ideas about her future career became more focused or “fine-tuned”. Participating in both “parent\child work” and “family services”, she began to identify a stronger interest in family services. Experiencing the diversity and challenge within this work, she also recognized the need for a stronger academic foundation through University or College training. Ann cited several sources and reasons for how and why she became interested in family services: her experience as a case aide, the staff, the clients, the fast pace and quick learning in the work. Although she enjoyed “parent\child” work and thought it was very important, in her words it did not “get the juices flowing” as much as family services. In certain ways, working with parents and their children was similar to geriatric work, something she wanted to avoid.

Like Ann, **Isabelle’s** interests began to lean towards the work in one part of her assignment, in her case - Customary Care. Also like Ann, Isabelle quickly began to appreciate the diversity in the social services field, as she gained exposure to child welfare, court work and the like. Her expectation for practical experiences to balance academic work was being fulfilled.

Valerie too began to gain a sense of the work and its requirements. In the first Program Learning Circle, she shared her ideas about the nature of administrative work and some of the general skills required: Most things about administration are clearly written down, including the work to be done, the courses to be taken as part of the program, etc. Much of clerical and administrative work, she said, requires sound common sense and the ability to pay careful attention to the details of work.

Another important part of administration is maintaining good communications with others throughout the agency. Finally, Valerie has observed how people's work styles differ in an organization - what is appropriate for one person may not be for another. She describes herself as a well organized person, who prefers to have an orderly, neat work space around her.

Lorraine was interested in learning all aspects of the Mooka'am Program, indeed all aspects of NCFST services. In fact, her Agency work experiences went beyond the Mooka'am Program. She worked in the Youth Program, and the Customary Care (e.g. Ninoshe) Program. Since Mooka'am clients become involved with other programs, her Mooka'am work familiarized her with these programs. Also, on her own time she was a Counselor in the Youth Program, and attended week-end Pow-Wows. Also, because of allergies, she took over from Family Service Workers in the Summer Camp Program.

During our first Circle Lorraine commented on how the relationships within the Internship group were contributing to the learning. Initially, she had more interaction with Valerie and Maureen. All three knew each other before the Internship.

Maureen immediately began to have many experiences in her placement in the Social Recreational Unit. She found that adolescents are more difficult to work with than the younger group, and began to develop a preference for working with children.

Like Valerie, she also began to reflect about herself as a worker and as learner. She learned to be more open to all experiences, and generally to be more flexible in her approach. In program planning, monitoring and administration, she began to recognize the importance of paying attention to detail and to capitalize on every experience.

Marion began her Internship by helping to move to NCFST's new office space. This activity, although delaying the "official learning" on the job, nevertheless introduced her an important norm of service agency culture - that everyone helps out, and sometimes job boundaries are crossed. Because of the business in the office, she did not start job activities immediately. Instead she was oriented through reading the Customary Care Policy and Procedures Manual.

Like the others, Marion was beginning to develop her understanding of the work in relationship to herself. When I interviewed her, I got a clear sense that Marion had begun to see the relevance of the Customary Care Placement for her ambitions to be a therapist. To quote:

“I’m certain that’s what I want to do and by being here in this customary care area will help me also expand my mind to realize that there are different kinds of ‘helping’. To me customary care is a therapeutic process. You’re still going in the homes and you’re still seeing what you see in here and what you are hearing and how to deal with the children and the parents. So it still is therapeutic, and this will just expand my mind and let me know the different branches that there are. But this is for certain what I want to do for my life. Like I said there’s not much money involved and its a lot of time and a lot of emotions and a lot of energy, but I’m young I’ve got some energy.”

Participation in External Training

Another important core component of the Internship Program was the external training opportunities. Access to outside training resources would allow the trainee to acquire training which supplemented on-the-job training and allowed explorations of emerging career path. Outside training would be available according to a purchased service agreement. Each plan for external training would be customized to the trainee’s interests, whether these allowed exploratory training, job-specific or cultural learning.

What were the patterns of external training, and the trainees experience of this component? Table 2 summaries each trainee’s external training.

TABLE 2: HUMAN SERVICE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM - EXTERNAL TRAINING

TRAINEE COMMENTS	EXTERNAL TRAINING	
ANNA	<p>Workshops on: Substance abuse and family effects; Sexual abuse and systems response; assessment of sexually abused children; Treatment development for sexual abuse victims; Assessment and treatment methods for sexually acting-out children; Methods of response to parents of sexually abused children; Family violence: indicators and method of response (Central Toronto Sexual Abuse Treatment Program); Child poverty and the Child Welfare Act; Computer skills;</p>	<p>Started in second quarter.</p>
LORRAINE	<p>Nechi Addictions Training Program: addictions and their effects on the family; Group Therapy for Sexual Abuse Victims (Central Toronto Sexual Abuse Treatment Program); Native Women and Wellness Conference.</p>	
MARIANNE	<p>Standard First Aid and Wilderness First Aid (St. John's Ambulance); Bronze Medallion Re-evaluation and NLS Training; Computer skills (Academy of Learning); Healing and Self-Awareness (Two-Sprited People of First Nations); Family Violence and Living Skills (Catching the Dream)</p>	
MAUREEN	<p>None</p>	<p>Began October; .</p>
VALERIE	<p>Introductory typing course (Toronto School of Business); Cultural training (Pow Wow, Walpole Island); Telephone Courtesy (Bell Canada); Stress Management Seminar (Skill Path Seminars); Grammar and Usage Basics (Skill Path Seminars); Crisis Management Workshop ().</p>	
IRENE	<p>Natural Healing (Native Women's Resource Centre); Positive Parenting (Native Women's Resource Centre); Sexuality: Normal Sexual Development (Metro Hall); Orientation and Culture-Based Services (Catching the Dream Program).</p>	<p>Partial completion of Internship Program.</p>

Table 2 shows that all but one trainee took advantages of external training opportunities. The woman who replaced Isabelle was on a shortened Internship, and opted to concentrate on the internal opportunities through on-the-job learning. Also she had recently completed counselling skill training, and was eager to apply her generic counselling skills.

The Program did not require trainees to participate in outside training events. Supervisors and advertisements made them aware of opportunities, and trainees chose - in some cases negotiating or making a case for - certain events. Supervisors were in a good position to highlight certain opportunities as useful to the work. Some events were missed due to scheduling conflicts with Agency work.

Most training was directly linked to the trainees, current work, although some (eg. stress and crisis management) involved personal life skills development or cultural education. Most training was skill-oriented, and would be applicable in other service settings.

Trainees used opportunities from both the Native and non-Native training communities. Culture-based training was available from Native organizations (e.g. Native Women's Resource Centre) or Native agency networks. The "Catching the Dream" Program - a nine workshop program - was organized by several Aboriginal agencies in Toronto. As well, all trainees used opportunities from such mainstream sources as St. John's, the Central Toronto Sexual Abuse Treatment Program, Bell Canada, and the Toronto School of Business. Some training events (eg. Catching the Dream) involved extensive programs, with several units; no trainee attended all units.

I now turn to some trainee impressions about these opportunities, based on comments from interviews, program learning circle meetings, and quarterly reports. In general, it is fair to say that the trainees' comments reflect a positive assessment - that most training was well received. They were most enthusiastic about Aboriginal culture-based training, and somewhat more critical - though not extremely so - of mainstream training.

The positive comments about outside training events contain the following themes:

- Trainer's style: "humorous"; "made it interesting"
- Opportunities for certification
- Skills directly applicable to current Internship job
- Training builds on trainee self-awareness and life experience
- The healing component

- New information
- Culture-based format (talking circle) and opportunities for cultural learning
- Comfort

While it was gratifying to learn technical skills and acquire interesting new information, some trainees expressed slightly mixed feelings when a training event provided familiar material. Mixed with a sense of slight frustration with redundancy, was the more positive feeling that they were indeed learning on the job. It may be, too, that not only were they developing technically, but what they had learned represented, in a sense - "what every good professional service provider knows".

The trainees more critical comments reflected their disappointment with ...

- The trainers' style (e.g. "Too much time talking about their own background")
- Redundancy with what the trainees already knew from their on-the-job learning
- The level of technical training (e.g. insufficiently advanced)

As well, some trainees expressed frustration at not being able to attend some training programs in their entirety. This grows out of the nature of the on-the-job commitments, case-loads, and the crisis nature of human service work.

THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING

I began this report by describing the setting for a journey toward meaningful employment - a setting which offered an Internship opportunity within a unique service environment for Native people. From there I introduced six Native women who - although they came from backgrounds which were both different yet similar in some ways - entered the program with the common goal of assessing the attraction and feasibility of a career in human services.

For these women, The Human Services Internship Program was more than simply a bundle of opportunities for on-the-job learning, and participation in community training events. These are important - and they have been documented above. The Program is also an emotional - perhaps spiritual - journey. This will be documented from their perspectives, including the anticipations, fears and joys of journeying through a new learning environment.

The following also includes their interpretations of what was challenging in that environment, and what organizational structures and personal actions served to meet those challenges. But more than this. Participation through the Internship Program - as a journey through work arrangements, people and relationships - produced new opportunities for reflections and transformations of who they are, and who they might become. I now turn to the more experiential part of the journey.

From the outset, **Ann** conveyed enormous enthusiasm for the experience. Even though much of her previous learning had involved on-the-job training - **“this has been the most challenging on every level mind, personal growth, spiritual ...”**. Having an opportunity to do family services and “parent-child work” helped her develop strong feelings and understandings of the next steps towards a meaningful career in Aboriginal social services. Early on, this excitement was tinged with a touch of apprehension that the Internship would end, and she would be without a job. Her ultimate career goals helped her deal with these feelings.

With her dual training placement in family services (crisis work) and the Koognaaswin parent-child program (preventative education), Ann felt she saw **“the big picture”**. She characterized working with the Child and Family Services Act as a **“bit more cerebral”**.

Ann was often away from the office, seeing parents and children in her case-load, holding parent groups at Gabriel Dumont, and occasionally attending family court. Even so, she valued sharing an office with Shirley - talking and sharing ideas about the Koognaaswin Program.

One important sense of transformation concerned her trainee status within the Agency.

“ I stopped thinking of myself as a trainee ... I feel the responsibility to my clients ... I am not a second class citizen here. My input is requested, and where practical, my ideas are implemented... I feel respected ... “

Part of Ann’s personal and professional growth is reflected in her sense of her own skills:

“ I have an eclectic background and training. [Certain skills] I had when I entered, although I didn’t know at the time they were techniques. [For example, when planning recreational activities for Seniors on a previous job] ... I asked the old folks what they wanted to do. But its trickier in social work, you have to listen ... they may be telling you what you want to hear ... It takes good listening to figure out what they really need.”

In addition to skills from previous jobs, Ann sensed that her personal situation - a fifteen year marriage and four kids - contributed to what she was able to contribute and learn from her placement. Even so, Ann gained tremendous confidence as she acquired a case-load within Family Services: “***I felt that I have been given an opportunity to contribute in a way that I didn't expect when I started ... feel very encouraged by the Supervisors***”. She also realized how everyone works differently in family services, and this sometimes led to confusion about what is appropriate. When this happened, she simply asked workers to explain their different styles, or even approached her supervisor.

Ann experienced the Internship as “***not a blue-print structured training program like in a school situation***” - and this she saw as a good thing. For one thing, what Ann saw as the “organic” nature of the training, allowed her to jump at training opportunities which made immediate contributions to her work at the Agency. Computer training, for example, acquainted her with the place of computers in human services, and gave her immediate skills for writing case notes and parent group reports.

Ann felt that her family situation limited the extent to which she could be involved in the Agency and helped to maintain boundaries between her personal and work life - both in a physical and emotional sense. Compared to another trainee, she had to be home at the end of the day to prepare dinner for her children. Talking to her partner also helped to cope with the emotional challenges of human service work. Also, the Internship made Ann, and other trainees, aware of how different service areas make different emotional demands.

In her assessment of the learning environment, Ann spoke of the emotional atmosphere, drawing comparisons to mainstream organizations. She highlighted two sources of tensions, one being the stress affecting a Native person in a non-Native environment. She found that she was singled out, and cast into the role of “expert” - an uncomfortable role which was unnecessary for the work. Another difference, in her experience, was the attitude and response to making mistakes. She found that making mistakes at NCFST were opportunities for feedback and learning. “***In mainstream, making a mistake “was a big heavy-duty thing - You're reminded of it forever and ever ... in a way that makes you not feel good”***”

Early in **Lorraine's** internship she became involved in many parts of the Agency - the Youth Program, Ninoshe Program, and summer camp - some as a volunteer. She had a tremendous desire to get as much as she could from the experience, ***"hoping to find where I can fit in where my gifts are"***. This initial enthusiasm made her feel somewhat unfocused, and she admitted needing to prioritize her involvements. Gradually, she became more focussed, partly from her heavy involvement in the Agency's new Children's Circle program and partly from her outside training in alcohol counselling in the Nechi Program. Regular supervisory opportunities with the Program Co-ordinator helped her to focus.

Lorraine's major involvement was in the Children's Circle Program - a new prevention program for children from addictive families. The program was innovative in its blending of cultural and contemporary format and methods. Her participation in the first year of delivery afforded an opportunity to participate in a developmental and evaluation phase. Her contributions ranged from transporting children to each Circle to the agency, to front-line group work and cultural education. As part of the evaluation process, she was videoed in part of her work.

Despite its developmental status, the Children's Circle Program had a definite structure when Lorraine arrived, and was well along in its first year at Eastview School. The Program's goals, objectives, resources, and staff roles were understood. In short, Lorraine began in a program with a clear identity. Lorraine participated in a process of fine-tuning.

The one-way mirror in the Mooka'am service area afforded Lorraine a learning opportunity which was not available to others. For example, she was able to observe the experienced staff working with children. Later, she began play therapy with one child.

Like Ann and Marion, Lorraine's work took her to different communities in different parts of the city. The Children's Circle Program is offered in several different schools serving large populations of Native children. Involvement in a treatment unit, in comparison to other programs, provided insight into the administrative and time-demand reality of the "case-load", as well as the emotional demands of working with severely troubled people. Learning about the demands of human services is well conveyed in her following comment:

" ... I have a lot of people, things to keep track of... It's like I'm barely able to keep track of myself ... There's no line in between my personal life and my work, because I care a lot"

Lorraine's journey through the Internship made her vividly aware of the terrain - what was "out there" and what had to be done. Clearly, though, it was also an inward journey into oneself, one's feelings and the different parts of one's life. She talked about "boundary issues" - when the work allows little time for other parts of the self - and the importance for human service workers to look after themselves.

For Lorraine, one of the most gratifying part of the internship was the opportunity to learn and do certain kinds of work, under supervision, without having the professional training. How the Agency facilitate this, the implications for her personal life, and what it means in terms of self-concept, is well illustrated in this comment:

“ The main difference that I appreciate ... is that I know that if I was at a mainstream job (with a marketing and business education) I would never have gotten the opportunity to go into therapeutic work. I didn’t grow up in a Native community, and when I go home and talk to my non-Native friends, they find that it is totally amazing that somebody without what they call an education can be doing it... But, to me, everything that I’ve learned up to this point , everything in my life, everything I’ve learned in the training position, is my “formal” education. And I find it very insulting that people feel you don’t have the education or knowledge, because you didn’ t go to school. I feel that here I get recognition for what I’ve I done and what I’ve been through, and what I have’t been through and that it enables me to learn, and to recognize about myself, and things that I do need. In mainstream, I would never have been given the opportunities or recognition.”

Maureen entered the Internship with a general interest in working with young people, and an interest in the program development and administrative aspects of human services. She received less of an orientation to the agency and its programs than she would have preferred, and began with considerable uncertainty about work responsibilities, reporting and lines of communications. She began her Internship in the Summer Camp Program, and found that many other summer staff had the same feelings. The informality of camp may have contributed to these perceptions.

Another important factor was that, Like Lorraine, the bulk of Maureen’s internship was in a new program. She was part of a development team with responsibility of developing and fine-tuning a new After School Program. This placement was a sharp contrast to those in Family Services, Customary Care, and the Parent-Child Program - all well-developed and “up and running”. Unlike Lorraine’ s situation, the After-School Program was in an earlier developmental stage. Maureen’s journey took her into somewhat unknown terrain!

After a confusing beginning, Maureen in consultation with her Supervisor and the Program staff member began to establish clarity. In the process of finding her way into the program, she feels she developed communication skills and assertiveness which represented a new level of personal and professional maturity. Early challenges in a somewhat uncertain part of her journey provided unexpected opportunities, with satisfying results. A new sense of self emerged, in which she valued unpredictability, without giving up her need for - as she put it - “some skeletal structure”.

Maureen's experience in programming for children and youth, and dealing with the trials and errors of early experiences made her appreciate the need for understanding children's behavior - hence an academic interest in Psychology. In her words:

“ ... I hadn't had that much experience to work with kids, except at summer camp. The question that I was asking myself when I was at summer camp - 'What do I need to know about children?' ”

The overall experience prompted Maureen's decision to pursue studies towards a human services career, first in undergraduate Psychology, then on to a Master of Social Work Program. A desire to work with children represented the same type of focussing reported by other trainees. This realization had practical implications for preparing the next stages in her journey:

“ ... So I think my plans have changed in a way that I know what direction I'm going ... I knew the general direction, but I didn't know the details for my educational plans. You have to do a program itinerary for U. Of T. , and how to get there to your final stage. I'm working on that, and I know which direction I'm going into. So, the job has helped me in that area - for educational planning.”

Marion entered the Internship Program with considerable excitement, mixed with apprehension about the kind of experiences she might have. Working in a court setting or having to speak at meetings with other Agencies would be new experiences.

Arrangements had to be made at home. Her participation in another training program meant that she had used a baby-sitter before. He was prepared for that - so that wasn't a worry. She was confident in her ability to make financial adjustments, and, even though it was exhausting at times, she could organize her life for the Internship.

Marion was very eager to develop a certain professionalism in her work. For example, one challenge was the issue of client confidentiality. She knew about that requirement and strongly believed in it. Yet, it was always possible to let a name slip accidentally, and she knew that would be a disaster for the client, herself and, of course the Agency. But, as time went by, she had no trouble controlling her friend's curiosity - thereby protecting her clients' privacy. The Native community in Toronto was small. Word could get around quickly. In her words:

“ You just have to remember who you are talking to. [I’ve] got to remember the different coat that I’m wearing. Once I put on that coat, it has to stay on - and that’s professionalism. Confidentiality has to remain with me, even at home.”

Even with care-providers in the Customary Care Program, she learned to differentiate between what they needed to know for their job, and the private information of families with children in care.

Marion saw the Internship as an opportunity to acquire professional wisdom, the professionalism that comes with the helping fields. Even though she was trainee, she wanted to ***“ present herself as a professional person, because this job, the agency, is a professional Agency...”***. She had confidence in her ability to learn, but she also knew that there is a right and wrong way to do things. She was eager to learn the competent way. If doubtful, she felt comfortable enough to ask others, and generally use the Agency’s resources.

As Marion reflected about her learning in the Program, she realized how she was able to use and integrate her previous training and cultural activities with her job. She was able to use resource materials from previous training (e.g. counselling manual), and incorporate previous learning experiences to help co-facilitate parent groups in the Agency. Even though she had not specifically learned facilitating techniques in previous training programs, she became aware that by participating and observing in groups, she had in fact acquired skills. She could use these in her Internship. Also, Marion’s participation in many traditional circles and women’s circles gave her the experience for the culture-based activities in her Internship.

Marion came into to the program confident in her ability to learn. But, she knew from her high school days, that reading was not her best learning style. Experiential learning was her strength. So, having to study policy and procedures manuals during her first week, was neither exciting nor particularly useful. And, it had other effects.

Her eager expectation for “hands-on’ training, coupled with the reading period, made her feel that the Internship really hadn’t started. Even though she was reviewing policy, she questioned ***“What am I doing here? I’m not doing anything!”***. Marion’s belief in the usefulness of her life experiences, and her confidence in her intelligence, competence and reliability - all of these made her eager to begin actual work and demonstrate her value to the Agency. When she talked to her Supervisor, she learned that Service agencies are busy places, the value of patience, and ***“plus it’s better to wade yourself in the water than to dive in right away”***

In general, Marion saw how the boundaries between her current life situation were intertwined in sometimes complicated ways. On the one hand, she saw her role as parent as a helpful asset in her work, giving her parenting skills, confidence and credibility for the job. Even so, at times this became a challenge. During a role play in parent education, for example, she would be required to use parenting techniques which she felt would not work with her own son. On the other hand, on-the-job observations of dysfunctional parenting, reinforced parenting principles in her own life.

Like Maureen and Ann, she quickly learned that proactively using the people in the Agency as resources for learning was a much better strategy than waiting to be helped. This helps you do the best thing for your clients, according to policies and procedures. And, seeking help - she pointed out - lets the others know that you are serious about doing competent work. Also, it helps to manage the stress of wondering whether your work is appropriate.

When working with clients, Marion found that she and her clients should be comfortable with her work. For herself, she learned to consult with her Supervisor or colleagues at time of uncertainty. She was prepared to remind clients of her trainee status, encouraging them to contact her Supervisor in the event of confusion or concerns with job performance.

Marion prepared for plan-of-care meetings with the C.A.S. by thoroughly thinking through, writing and rehearsing - everything she planned to say. This worked well, in her view, and she was complimented by the Family Service Worker and C.A.S. staff. Although she generally received positive feedback within the Agency environment, compliments from another agency were noted with surprise and satisfaction.

Like all the trainees, Marion learned the importance of a life-in-balance. She realized that human services work could not be done if ***“one’s personal problems and issues were not being dealt with”***.

Marion gained valuable experience and learned many things during the internship, ranging far and wide from case-note writing skills, presenting at meetings, using supervision, and learning policies and procedures. Perhaps most significantly, when I asked about learning self-awareness or other things about herself while in the Internship, she answered:

“I can do this work”

Learning Themes

I now step back from the trainees account, and suggest some interpretations of aspects of their journeys. Several important **learning themes** emerge from these stories. These themes help explain on the one hand the trainees' sense of progress and success - and frustrations or challenges, on the other. As well, these themes touch upon what may or may not be conducive to organizational learning in a larger sense. By highlighting these themes, I hope to contribute to processes for creating a good learning environment for all staff - not just the uninitiated.

First, there is the importance of a **sense of fitting in**. Trainees did not feel "like second class citizens". They were treated like colleagues. They were trusted. Being a client of the Agency did not feel like a disadvantage.

A second, perhaps somewhat related theme, is the **belief that, though they were trainees, they could bring something to the Agency**. Whether this "something" was the experience of being a client, being a parent, or possessing specific technical skills, most trainees knew or quickly learned that they had something to offer.

The placement of trainees in **physical space** is a third theme. Having an office and a desk may also contribute to feelings of fitting in (by oneself and by others), but also it allows trainees to organize their work in ways that are useful and meaningful to them. And - to return to the learning environment concept - it provides opportunities for learning interaction with others.

Fourthly, some trainees talked about their changing **sense of skills, strengths and valuable technical assets**. Making comparisons to previous work and skills, changing their self-perceptions about qualities such as memory, or being valued for their life experiences - trainees began to think about, and value themselves differently. Some of these realizations came through private reflections; other came from direct feedback from supervisors or staff. Much of it came from the Internship structure itself, combined with the culture of the Agency - the women were given opportunities based on what they had done and what they could contribute.

Fifthly, **the trainee who is learning on the job finds that in human services work** (unlike working with objects) there are **no standardized "blue-prints"** for working with clients. Worker's styles differ, as do the various client situations, and how each worker interprets them. The newcomer, confronting these differences, is challenged to make sense of them for their own learning. This challenge is given additional weight by the enormity of client needs, the challenge of professionalism, and the reality of over-arching policies and procedures.

Sixth, the **unstructured nature of the training experience** was strongly endorsed by some, and not by others. Marianne's personality and background may have led her to value a more structured set of training goals and time-lines. Others liked the flexibility of the program, and the "organic training" - allowing them to participate in many parts of the Agency and interact with several people according to their learning needs.

A seventh theme relates to the **emotional drain of human services work and how it potentially absorbs much of one's time**. For these trainees, as with others considering a service career, becoming aware of the emotional demands and how to maintain personal and work boundaries, is a significant learning task. This challenge takes trainees beyond their personal attitudes and skills, into the realm of the supportiveness and flexibility of their world away from work.

The eighth theme pertains to the **developmental status of their assigned programs**. Two trainees were heavily involved in newly developed programs - The Children's Circle Program, and the After School Program. Depending on a trainee's experience, skills, confidence and training expectations, this can be both frustrating or rewarding. A person, like Maureen, who comes expecting direction and structure, may be initially confused and frustrated. But, the fluidity and uncertainty of the experience may provide unanticipated learning opportunities to develop communication and assertiveness skills for working in a developing, unstructured environment.

The **challenge of doing the right thing for clients and maintaining their trust** is ninth theme. In the helping professions, the clients' interests are paramount. Staff are concerned about taking the appropriate steps and make appropriate recommendations. Among other things, professionalism involves: doing the right thing and making sure that the client comfortably feels that the right thing is being done. This is the issue of trust. The trainee - particularly when alone with clients - learns to make the correct decisions in uncertain situations. As well, they learn how to sustain a trusting relationship with clients, even if it means empowering them to call the agency when in doubt.

PROGRAM IMPACT

Career and Educational Planning

For all trainees, the Internship had the effect of reinforcing their interests in a human service career. Most described the experience as one of helping them to become acquainted with the workings of an agency, including the breadth of services and activities accomplished by service staff. All described a process of starting from a general interest and curiosity, to a more focussed interest in one type of service.

For some women, the impact for employment was immediate. **Isabelle**, as we seen, took over for a staff member on maternity leave. According to the Program Co-ordinator, she is already making a sound contribution to the Agency's Customary Care Program.

Drawing upon her experience in the Children's Circle Program and her Nechi training in addictions counselling, **Lorraine** helped to mount a new program in the Agency. She will be the principle staff person in an addictions program for youth and adults - a program combining cultural and contemporary methods. Although not permanent, this employment will give her added responsibilities and experience. As well, she has received inquiries from other Agencies concerning her experiences in the Internship, and her availability. Lorraine has not yet decided whether she wishes to further her education.

For three women - **Ann, Maureen and Marion** - the Internship consolidated their interests in a human services career. For them, furthering their education was the next step in their journey towards employment. Maureen and Ann had taken steps to enroll in a BSW Program in the fall of 1996. Marion has decided to finish her Secondary School Credits through correspondence, before proceeding to College or University. Like Ann, family responsibilities requires her to continue education on a part-time basis.

Unfortunately, illness forced **Valerie** to discontinue her Internship.

Potential for Success

Throughout their Internships all trainees had the opportunity of working closely with full-time staff and Program Supervisors. In their relationships with Supervisors, they received direction in their work, job advice and feedback, educational and career advice. Because Supervisors had excellent opportunities to assess their personal and job-related qualities for human service work, I asked each of them for an assessment of potential.

Although none of the internships were complete at the time of this report - collectively, the supervisor assessments were positive. Each trainee was described as making a positive contribution to the Agency during the Internship, so much so that in some

cases, the Supervisors “hated to see it end”. The Agency’s Executive Director several times expressed disappointment at his inability to offer permanent employment.

Not one service trainee was seen as unsuited for human service work. In the case of those going on to University or College, there were no doubts that they could successfully complete their programs. From many perspectives, the Internships were judged as useful and promising.

CONCLUSIONS

I organize my conclusions in terms of the Agency’s initial objectives for the Internship.

1. Native Child and Family Services successfully hired five women to undertake internships in the delivery of human services to Aboriginal families and children. One woman was hired by NCFST after a few months, and was replaced by another.
2. Each trainee received practical hands-on experience in several specific areas of service operations, including Family Services, Customary Care, Social and Recreational Services, Mooka’am Treatment Services, and Administration. In their experiential learning, each woman worked closely with staff, receiving supervision from the Program Co-ordinators or Office Manager.
3. Trainees augmented their on-the-job experiential learning with formal training programs specific to their area of interests and Agency jobs. Most outside training was skill-oriented, provided by Native training groups or main-stream institutions.
4. The Human Services Internship assisted trainees in furthering their education and improve their marketability, by helping them clarify their career goals, and in some instances, take the next steps to further education. Two women were offered temporary jobs with Native child and Family Services.

* * *

This report, in sharing six women’s stories, provides portions of the living experience of a learning journey. Sadly, these are only partial stories, for all of us have much more to say. My own interpretive reflections on these stories are presented as a series of learning themes. Each theme, however briefly, touch upon significant personal responses to a learning environment.