



Diversity Works

Office of University Partnerships

Minority-Serving Institutions Developing Partnerships, Building Communities

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Reducing the Literacy Gap One Child at a Time

Reading road signs and prescription labels, completing job applications, and ordering from a menu are activities we take for granted. But for the 21 million Americans who cannot read and the 45 million who are marginally literate, these activities are a source of frustration and fear. Studies show that developing and strengthening reading skills during childhood can help adults avoid these challenges. Faculty and students at Tennessee State University's (TSU's) College of Education and Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement are working to this end. With funds from a 2007 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of University Partnerships (OUP), TSU is reducing the gap in reading achievement one child at a time. In partnership with Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, TSU is raising the literacy achievement of area students by establishing reading clinics in three urban schools.

"The reading clinics really could not have happened without the HUD funds," said Dr. Deena Sue Fuller, director for the Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement. "These funds enabled us to purchase curriculum materials, supplies, and technology for the clinics. Other grant funds helped sponsor project-related events, continue the clinic in the summer of 2009, and

fund the expansion of the reading clinic to three sites," said Ginger Hausser Pepper, director of the HUD grant.

Individualized Reading Instruction

The clinics serve a dual purpose: providing intervention for at-risk readers and offering college students who want to be teachers an opportunity to develop and refine their reading instruction. Reading clinic tutors are TSU undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom hope to become teachers. They are paired with students in grades K-9 who are at least one to two grade levels below their peers in reading. They meet twice a week in 30-minute sessions for 1 year and gain critical knowledge and skills through supervised one-on-one tutoring of K-12 students in a reading clinic setting. TSU students indicate that the one-on-one supervised experience is the best preparation they can have to be excellent reading teachers in an urban school system.

Currently, there are reading clinics at John Early Middle School, Charlotte Park Elementary School, and Pearl-Cohn 9th Grade Academy at McKissack. YMCA Boys and Girls Club students (K-6) are also tutored after school at Pearl-Cohn Academy at McKissack.

Reducing the Literacy Gap continued on page 4



Early Learning Center Removes Childcare Barrier, Increases College Enrollment

The University of New Mexico (UNM)-Taos serves a unique student body. Many students are parents pursuing higher education later in life and are the first in their families to do so. For these parents, reliable and affordable childcare is vital to their ability to enroll and remain in college. UNM-Taos wanted to remove any childcare barrier that would prevent these individuals from pursuing and completing their educational journey and address the shortage of childcare facilities in communities in and around Taos County. That is why it used its 2004 Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities (HSIAC) grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to construct an Early Care and Family Support Center to provide childcare for the UNM-Taos family and the community, promote parenting skills, and serve as a training center for early childhood education students. Now, UNM-Taos is reinforcing its commitment to helping students and the community by using funds from its 2008 HUD HSIAC to expand this facility. The expansion will allow UNM-Taos to provide pre-kindergarten services to an additional 20 to 30 children from low- to moderate-income families in northern New Mexico.

More Room, More Opportunity

The construction of three new rooms is slated for completion in September 2010 and will accommodate a preschool-readiness program. The new center will occupy 3,018 square feet with a pueblo style exterior and a fire suppression sprinkler system. It will house two new 24-foot-by-32-foot and 32-foot-by-20-foot classrooms and a 24-foot-by-24-foot multipurpose room.



Pre-K classroom at the Early Care and Family Support Center

“There will be many beneficiaries of these new rooms,” explained Patricia Gonzales, UNM-Taos student enrollment director. “The multipurpose room will provide a space for trainings, conferences, meetings,

and the university’s Early Childhood Multicultural Education Program. And we will have two additional classrooms for our pre-K program sponsored by our New Mexico Pre-K Program grant. This will allow us to accommodate between 40 and 50 pre-K students.”

Engaging Young Minds

Currently the program serves about 20 children that meet Monday–Friday from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. It is a creative, hands-on curriculum for preschoolers that involves different units of learning that include music; water play, in which children learn social skills and improve fine motor skills; and a community helpers unit that helps them identify and learn about important helpers in the community such as fireman and policeman.

“We’ve even had these helpers visit the classroom and speak with the children. They love this. After the pre-K program ends at 11:30 a.m., the center affords early learning, school-readiness activities for 4-year-olds,” Gonzales added.

This year the center held its first graduation from the pre-K program, and these students are currently enrolled in kindergarten in a public or private school system.

Strong Community Support

The UNM-Taos family is pleased with the community’s response to the Early Care and Family Support Center. “Our initial planning committee included Margaret Mactavish, professor emeritus; Chandler Barrett, institutional research director; Catherine O’Neill, executive director; Martha Montoya, UNM-Taos Kid’s Campus Center for Early Learning Director; and myself,” stated Gonzales. “Initially, we were a little concerned that the community might not participate in our program because we are not centrally located and getting to the center requires a bit of a commute on their part. However, the majority of children we currently serve are from the community, so it’s safe to say that we have gotten an overwhelming response from the community.”

For more information on the University of New Mexico (UNM)-Taos Early Care and Family Support Center programs and expansion project, contact Patricia Gonzales, UNM-Taos student enrollment director, at 575-737-6212 or patrodr@unm.edu.

Grantee Project to Help Nurture Culturally Healthy Youth

Traditional cultural activities and connections with elders are central to Alaska Native culture and spirituality and are key to maintaining a strong cultural identity and self-esteem. However, many Alaska Native youth in Fairbanks have limited opportunities to participate in these activities. are plagued by substance abuse, poor academic performance, and even suicide. Many within this community believe that enrolling them and other young people in culture or spirit camps may help to minimize the prevalence of these issues.



Elder surrounded by camp youth.

These camps connect young people to Native elders and their cultural heritage and have been effective in helping them to increase academic achievement and self-esteem, which can lead to increased high-school graduation rates, reduced dependence on substances, and increased participation in postsecondary education. That is why the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, Interior Aleutians Campus (UAF/I-AC) is working with the Interior Regional Housing Authority (IRHA) and the Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHRC) to renovate the Howard Luke Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp, a nonprofit organization established to rejuvenate and strengthen cultural ties and instill genuine respect and a healthy attitude toward the land, culture, and community. UAF/I-AC is using funds from its 2008 Office of University Partnerships' (OUP) Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities (AN/NHIAC) program grant to help fund this effort.

Nurturing Culturally Healthy Youth

The Howard Luke Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp has been used for almost 20 years as an outdoor education and

leadership camp for youth. It has hosted a variety of civic and educational organizations from Fairbanks and the interior of Alaska, including multiple programs within UAF. Yet I-AC Director Clara Johnson and Elder Howard Luke, owner and president of the Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp, wanted to increase opportunities to use the camp for youth activities. But the camp needed construction of new structures and renovation to accommodate this increase. Thus the renovation project was envisioned.

"The Fairbanks 2008 Community Needs Assessment cited the need for 'safe and drug-free gathering places for youth, youth-friendly teen activities, safe afterschool activities for youth, youth centers, and youth activities'," said Johnson. "The proposed renovation of the Howard Luke Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp would address many of the categories of improvements cited as important to improving the health and well-being of young people, especially Alaska Native youth in Fairbanks."

IRHA, the Tribe-designated housing entity for 27 rural and remote villages that are also served by I-AC, is serving as the contractor for renovation, which will include replacement of a multiuse platform currently serving as a deck with new weather-resistant materials; construction of a new roofed structure for dining, instruction, or other events; a new shower with a well; construction of a utility building with a new alternative energy solar source; and the establishment of a fire break.

CCHRC will ensure that buildings developed or renovated under the project optimize energy efficiency and link the traditions of the past with best practices of the future, both in building design and in alternative energy infrastructure.

"The camp's entire focus is on building young leaders, helping youth create meaningful ties with their culture, strengthening academics, involving the Native community in teaching and learning, and creating a focus for Native identity among young people," said Johnson. "And the activities that students participate in and the philosophy that is lived at Howard Luke's Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp will help us continue to nurture culturally healthy Alaska Native youth."

For more information on UAF/I-AC's renovation project at the Howard Luke Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp, contact Clara Johnson, I-AC director of grants and contracts, at 907-474-5441 or clara.johnson@alaska.edu.

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Office of University Partnerships
451 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410-3000

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HUD
Permit No. G-795

Return Service Requested
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300

Reducing the Literacy Gap continued from page 1 —————

Reducing the Literacy Gap

Since the inception of the clinics in 2007, more than 200 students in grades K-9 have received daily help with reading. TSU students have provided more than 2,000 hours of tutoring to at-risk readers. The results of the effort are amazing. A hundred percent of the students tutored improved their reading scores. Some have improved three grade levels in reading.

“Our survey results demonstrate that 98 percent of the K-9 students enjoy coming to the clinic, 95 percent of them like reading with their TSU tutor, and 91 percent said they believed they had improved ‘much’ or ‘a great deal’ as a reader,” said Pepper. “In the 2008-09 school year, one principal credited the reading clinic with helping their school meet the No Child Left Behind required progress goals.” The students served in the reading clinics, indicated they learned new words, improved on test taking, and felt more at ease in class. Fifty-two percent of them believed they would go to college.

Because of the program’s great success, TSU plans to add additional schools and summer clinics with the help of its HUD HBCU grant and other financial supporters, including TSU state funds, the Tennessee Board of Regents, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, the Tennessee Department of Education, and federal Title III. The clinic expansions are evolving by creating collaborations with area colleges and universities, including Trevecca Nazarene University, Middle Tennessee State University, and Belmont University.

For more information on TSU’s reading clinics and HUD’s involvement, contact Dr. Deena Sue Fuller or Ginger Hausser Pepper at 615-963-5383, dfuller@tnstate.edu, or ghausser@tnstate.edu. For information on the reading clinic’s methodology and results, contact Dr. Tammy Lipsey at 615-473-6690 or tlipsey@tnstate.edu.

HUD’s Office of University Partnerships (OUP) provides grants to institutions of higher education to assist them and their partners with the implementation of a broad range of community development activities, including neighborhood revitalization, housing, and economic development. This newsletter, *Diversity Works*, highlights the efforts of grantees in OUP’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities grant programs and includes a variety of interesting projects, compelling grantee profiles, and other valuable resources for minority-serving institutions.