Counselling training with a focus on personal growth

While post-secondary options typically prepare students for a career in their chosen field, learners in Native Education College’s (NEC) family and community counselling certificate program also benefit from a focus on personal growth, says the manager of the school’s cluster of human services programs.

“The program is dual-focused in that the Western approaches to counselling are complemented with Indigenous approaches so students develop their own style of helping and that encourages them to undergo their own transformation,” says Wendy Simon. “Our community often faces challenges dealing with issues such as historical and contemporary trauma and racism. This program gives students a tangible skill set to work towards solutions, whatever the problem may be.”

Ten months in length, family and community counselling introduces students to the general theory and develops their foundational skills in psychology and trauma counselling while incorporating Indigenous perspectives through activities such as talking circles, ceremonies and song, and the presence of elders.

The program also employs teaching methods that include lectures, guest speakers, field trips, community engagement and discussions during which students have the opportunity to contribute and lead. It concludes with a 300-hour practicum.

“There is a lot of focus on peer learning and there is a lot of decentralizing to honour all different types of knowledge,” says Simon. “And because the practicum is 300 hours, it allows students to go through an orientation phase so they can do actual hands-on work such as program planning, facilitation, counselling intake and referrals.”

Many students, says Simon, use the program as a stepping stone to further education via NEC’s family and community counselling diploma program or programs at other institutions. Others, meanwhile, enter a field that Simon says is undergoing a period of growth.

“The climate surrounding Indigenous issues is shifting in our favour, so we are seeing new job and roles becoming available,” she says. “What’s most surprising is how far reaching the influence of our grads is as they occupy important positions in the community. Because they overcome their own personal challenges, they bring that resilience, strength and healthy growth to their clients. They embody it because they have been through it.”

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