

KEY APPLICATION QUESTIONS - SAMPLE

The sample responses come from the **Indigenous Circles of Community Care team: Sonja Stone, Bobby Hasselstrom, Amara Leclair, and Chetna Sareen.**

Question 10 - Proposal Description sample

We are Indigenous social work students, Indigenous students and workers in the helping professions and other helping profession students and workers (immigrants, settlers, etc.) who want to engage in Indigenous Circles of Community Care. Using Indigenous structures to relationally engage in community care and education, our community will discover and augment on strengths and offer care to each other as we learn and grow, deal and heal from hostilities at all levels.

It is felt by multiple Indigenous students and other students in the Faculty of Social Work that increased cultural safety within the helping professions and student populations would enhance the strengths of each individual in those systems and result in more culturally competent social workers and more cultural safety overall in the helping professions. In 2015, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recognized the legacy and impact of residential schools on Indigenous peoples across the country [22] and put forth 94 Calls to Action, including for the health, social work/child welfare, and education systems. These calls included providing cultural competency training for health professionals to address unconscious bias and systemic racism and developing culturally appropriate education curricula, while building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect [23]. The calls also set out the need to ensure that social workers who conduct child-welfare investigations be properly educated and trained about the history and impacts of residential schools on children and their caregivers. In terms of education systems, the TRC recommended that resources be provided to ensure Indigenous schools utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in the classroom and that relevant teacher-training needs be identified to ensure such knowledge and methods are implemented" (MacLean et al., 2023, p.1).

We need to build a structure like what we imagine in this application, for those in the helping professions to hone their cultural safety skills in a non-hierarchical, peer-led, and Indigenous way in order to join the universal circle of care that we are all guided to when we connect with our ancestors, our selves, each other and our larger communities. We are hoping cultural safety will emerge and grow between our community members and that the knowledges and skills that come with that growth will be transferred to their professional helping arenas, particularly within our current healthcare, social work, child welfare and education systems. Within our programming and as we build comfort together and collectively increase access to care for ourselves and each other, we expect that the many intersectional identities present in the

Indigenous circles will lead to addressing and fulfilling everyone's different safety needs in a good way.

At the very least, Indigenous Circles of Community Care will act as a soft landing place for any students or faculty in the helping professions to be supported as we work in spite of and heal from the harmful effects of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and ageism (among other isms and obias) still present within our education systems and professional workplaces.

MacLean, T., Qiang, J., Henderson, L., Bowra, A., Howard, L., Pringle, V., Butsang, T., Rice, E., Di Ruggiero, E., & Mashford-Pringle, A. (2023). Indigenous cultural safety training for applied health, social work, and education professionals: A PRISMA scoping review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20065217>

We know we need something to practice cultural safety collectively within the FSW and we experimented with the Indigenous Circle structure during the spring equinox when the Indigenous Helpers Society hosted a learning gathering. The community we describe in this application gathered in March 2025 and after sitting for 1.5 days in a beading circle, a few feasting and ceremony circles, 2 teaching circles, and a prayer circle, we sat down at the end of the event intentionally and did a talking circle about what we needed from each other and anyone else we cared about in the helping professions. About 16 of us (Elders who used to be social workers, Indigenous Social Work professors who have retired, currently working Indigenous Social Work professors and Social Workers, emergency service workers, nurses, community health workers, and students from the UMFSW as well as Yellowquill College) described our ideal support systems in our helping professions to each other after prayers and sitting in circles for 1.5 days. We described connection, decolonization, micro-mezzo-macro empowerment of ourselves and each other, belonging, cultural safety, embodied respect, transfers of power, community education, community care. We asked for more occasions when we could sit in the circles we'd experienced together over the equinox weekend. We also relied on grandparent teachings to speak about the problems we were experiencing in the FSW/the social work and helping professions communities and how the Indigenous Circles of Community Care structure we'd engaged in that weekend could mitigate the faculty's/community's baked-in hierarchical tensions by providing a soft landing place and a solid base to ground oneself with.

The outcomes we are imagining are:

- Indigenous social workers and other helping workers who have a community of care to turn to when the profession causes moral injury or becomes adverse in any way
- a community of people of all kinds to do ceremony with, celebrate each other, and know that they have people to connect with in Indigenous ways
- more organically Indigenous social work and helping profession community spaces inside and outside the FSW because there will be more workers who have this Indigenous community care structure to rely on and replicate.
- regular events in social work and helping profession spaces on UM campuses and off-campus (UM campuses, non-profit agencies, community health spaces, libraries, etc.)
- fostering meaningful belonging in the professions where Indigenous and Queer workers are often othered and excluded.

The intended events are loosely based on the Equinox Gathering's program:

- Introduction Circle with Community Feast and either a Community Education or a Circle:
 - Community Education (Indigenous presenters): presenting research we've done, papers we've written, things we've learned and need to share
 - Circles (cultural teachings and practices with each other by each other for each other: beading, teaching, talking, rattlemaking, etc.)
- For empowerment and mutual aid, each event will require a discussion among participants about what to do next, who will do it and when
- Virtual meetings when guidance is needed by community members to organize the next events.

The circle events will be 2.5 hours in the evenings or on weekends. We are expecting 5-15 people to attend each circle, with a max capacity of 30 people. If there is a large uptake/interest, we will already be seeing within the group who are our natural leaders and knowledge keepers, and we will invite those folks to lead smaller circles during the event. Then we'll gather as a large circle at the end, for a round of sharing by each person about the teachings and other strengths offered within the smaller circles.

Assessment and Evaluation:

- In a confidential follow up survey on Microsoft Forms, we will ask the community how the event was and what could be better
- The organizing team will email frequently before and after the events to reflect and evaluate how we did, what we could improve, and discuss how to welcome more leaders that we can rely on to help continue the work
- We will document the impact and eval throughout the process to prepare for our final reflection for CLDP