

Treating And Counseling People Of Colour Conference: a Native Hawaiian perspective

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Introduction

On November 6 - 10, 1999, the *Thirteenth Annual Counseling and Treating People of Colour Conference* was hosted in Honolulu, Hawai'i, at the Hawaiian Regent Hotel. This marked the conference's third rotation through Hawai'i and was significant in terms of the strengths and challenges presented within the collaborative process of this event. The planning committee from Hawai'i was provided with the opportunity to establish a continuous and viable presence throughout the planning, design and implementation of the conference program. Committee members were committed to imparting a more in-depth and realistic infusion of Native Hawaiian culture throughout the proceedings and ancillary activities. This paper will discuss the process of melding an international conference within the cultural framework of Hawaiian and local norms.

A primary objective of this unique international conference is to provide "hands on" information for participants in improving health and behavioral health care to all people of color.

The *Counseling and Treating People of Colour Conference* is an annual forum developed and cosponsored through the State University of New York at Stony Brook (SUNY), and the Human Resources Development Institute, Inc. (HRDI), Chicago, Illinois. Since its inception in 1986, the two co-founders of this event have been Dr. Frances L. Brisbane, Ph.D., Dean of the School of Social Welfare at SUNY, and Dr. C. Vincent Bakeman, Ph.D., President & CEO of HRDI, Inc. A primary objective of this unique international conference is to provide "hands on" information for participants in improving health and behavioral health care to all people of color. Participants and presenters represent a spectrum of ethnic and cultural backgrounds from across the nation, and internationally from such areas as Latin America, Europe, New Zealand, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin. Diverse professional fields include counseling, education, social work, psychology, medicine, indigenous healing, law enforcement, courts and corrections, local, state and federal administrators and legislators.

The location of this conference has rotated yearly through various settings that are recognized for their cultural pluralism and uniqueness. Sites include the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, the West Indies, and in more recent years, Arizona, and Hawai'i. These settings are utilized specifically so that the host culture(s) of each conference can provide a focal point for recognizing the traditions and values of strong cultural groups who live and work together.

It was a steadfast and primary goal for the Hawai'i committee members to ensure that the conference reflected the host culture as a focal point of the conference curriculum. To achieve this goal, it was a natural evolution to reflect a planning process that incorporated cultural elements and protocol. Mary Kawena Pukui helped define the term *kūkulu kumuhana* as, "the pooling of strengths, emotional, psychological and spiritual, for a shared purpose. Group dynamics (are) characterized by spiritual elements and directed to a positive goal."¹ In order to ensure the group's focus, a well-respected *kupuna* (elder) was asked to assist and provide cultural and spiritual guidance. Protocols were followed at meetings and,

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eventually, structured within the conference. Such protocols and values, which are often overlooked or misunderstood, particularly when outside planners are involved, became critical aspects of the committee's modifications to the conference.

For example, one basic change involved adding the presentation of *lei* as an essential practice for hosting a conference in Hawai'i. It was clarified that this tradition is a culturally prescribed custom for conference organizers to express their *aloha* and appreciation for the speakers. Additionally, significant cultural considerations were reflected in the selection of the conference facility, opening ceremonies and protocols, program design, presenter topics, community site visits and an off-site evening event. Special focus was placed on maintaining the integrity and respect towards Hawaiian and local customs and nuances, especially as these related to acknowledging the presence of island participants.

Integration of the *E Ola Pono* curriculum

Historically, the general program framework consisted of panel presentations that addressed one or more of the following subject areas: health, mental health, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, violence, and education. More recently, the primary planners added a separate Youth Forum component composed of special sessions and activities for pre-adolescent and adolescent participants. To make certain that Hawaiian culture would permeate the conference, the Planning Committee adapted a substance abuse and violence prevention curriculum entitled *E Ola Pono* (Live the Proper Way). Developed by the Kamehameha Schools Safe and Drug Free Program (KS/SDFP), *E Ola Pono* features eleven posters that integrate Hawaiian values and concepts with protective factors and resiliency constructs.

The seven values selected for the conference included, Preserve the Culture, *Mālama* (Nurture the Resources), *Hilina'i* (To Rely On), *Launa Hau'oli* (Joyful Friendship), *A'o* (To Teach and To Learn), *Lōkahi* (Balance, Unity, Harmony), and *Laulima* (Work Together). Additionally, the importance of *'ohana* (family, community) was articulated throughout the proceedings. These values served as the "backbone" of the conference and provided participants an opportunity to share the embodiment of these concepts within their own culture.

Using this approach, panels were configured according to general topic area and associated Hawaiian value(s). A

moderator summarized how a core value was reflected within each presentation, and further explored how it might be described and demonstrated in other cultural settings. Presenters could utilize the Hawaiian constructs as a cultural conduit to illustrate and compare the unique features of their community based strategies and interventions. For example, if the core value was *Mālama* (Nurture the Resources), presenters were to include discussion on how *Mālama* is actualized in their program's design, its influence in their work, and describe parallel values within their own culture. When appropriate, the moderator facilitated group discussion comparing program similarities and differences in integrating the concept of *Mālama*. Audience participation was also encouraged to exchange strategies that illustrated similar values in different cultural settings.

Conference program

The conference began each day with a morning plenary session followed by two sessions of workshops. Plenary presentations were represented by a distinguished group of local, national and international speakers. Among these presenters were Dr. Marilyn H. Gaston, Assistant Surgeon General and Director of the Bureau of Primary Health; USDHHS, the Honorable John Camacho Salas, Ph.D., Senator and Chairman of the Committee on Judiciary, Public Safety, Consumer Protection and Human Resources Development, Sinajana, Guam; and Jane Middleton-Moz, M.S., Founder and Director, Middleton-Moz Associates, Liberty, WA. Presentations focused on institutional and policy issues impacting the delivery of healthcare services to people of color.

There were a total of 28 workshops composed of culturally diverse and Hawai'i-specific presentations. Special Sessions focused on youth issues, the legislative process, and the Drug Court model. A sample of conference topics follows:

Health:

- "Policy Development for People of Color" (Preserve the Culture)
- "Native Hawaiian Healing Approaches" (*Mālama*, Nurture the Resources)

Mental Health:

- "A Story Board of Micronesian People: A Navigation Chart to Better Understanding" (*Lōkahi*, Balance, Unity, Harmony)
- "Mental Health Issues in People of Colour" (*Mālama*, Nurture the Resources)

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Substance Abuse:

- ❑ "Using Spirituality to Produce Resiliency in Youth" (*Laulima*, Work Together)
- ❑ "Responding to Pacific Islanders: Culturally Competent Perspectives for Substance Abuse Prevention" (*Laulima*, Work Together)

AIDS/Health:

- ❑ "HIV/AIDS Counseling and Treatment Services to Hispanic and Other Ethnic Groups" (*Lōkahi*, Balance, Unity, Harmony)
- ❑ "Addressing the Challenges of HIV/AIDS for Individuals and Families in Hawai'i" (*Lōkahi*, Balance, Unity, Harmony)

Violence:

- ❑ "Research and Strategies on the Prevention of Violence" (*A'o*, To Teach and To Learn)
- ❑ "Youth Violence Prevention and Services in Hawai'i" (*Hilina'i*, To Rely On)

Education:

- ❑ "Multicultural Youth Leadership for Hispanic/Latino and African American Youth" (*Mālama*, Nurture the Resources)
- ❑ "Safe and Drug Free Activities for Youth and Families of Color" (*Launa Hau'oli*, Joyful Friendship)

The Hawai'i planners also coordinated three post-conference site visits and hosted a final evening cultural event. Two site visits introduced guests to culturally related community-based service programs assisting the Waimānalo and Wai'anae Coast areas of O'ahu. A third site visit provided a presentation on the Drug Court Program in Hawai'i, a prototype model of substance abuse treatment currently being developed on a national level. On the final night of the conference, the committee coordinated a festive Hawaiian *lū'au* and cultural program for guests and their families at the Bishop Museum. In addition to having a delicious catered Hawaiian buffet, live music, and access to the Museum, attendees were offered a *lua* (Hawaiian martial arts) demonstration, and a video presentation by Wave Riders Against Drugs, a non-profit group of professional surfers and body boarders who promote a drug free lifestyle.

Youth forum

The conference's three-day Youth Forum, developed and coordinated by the Coalition For A Drug-Free Hawai'i (CDFH), offered learning sessions for youth, which ran concurrent to the general conference. The forum provided opportunities to focus on issues that have meaning

for youth as they face the everyday challenge of making healthy lifestyle choices while dealing with the realities of substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and violence. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 21 as well as several adults sponsors, coming from places that span the globe, from the East Coast to the Pacific Islands. They came together to explore their values, get in touch with their cultural and spiritual base, and challenge their life perspectives with other youth.

The cultural context of the forum was provided by the general conference, which incorporated Hawaiian protocol and established the *E Ola Pono* values base framework. Three primary values were brought into practice: *Lōkahi* (Balance, Unity, Harmony), *A'o* (To Teach and To Learn) and *Mālama* (Nurture the Resources). It was important to the planning committee that youth have the experience of living and practicing these values through an active learning format. It was also important for participants to gain new knowledge, tools, perspectives and attitudes through discussions, relationship building, and hands-on activities. With these outcomes in mind, the forum wove together three major themes: 1) the values of *Lōkahi*, *A'o*, and *Mālama*; 2) the context of people, place, and time; and 3) the youth-adult partnership model.

The values base underlying the Youth Forum set the cultural and spiritual focus of each day. The first day was developed to bring the experience of *Lōkahi* to each participant by offering a practical model for understanding and achieving holistic health and wellness. The model, which presents the areas of emotional, intellectual, spiritual, physical, social, and life planning wellness, provided participants with time to reflect on and renew their spiritual source. The second day was dedicated to practicing the value of *A'o* by having youth teaching and learning from each other. Inviting each youth to share about their

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experiences, activities, assets, and gifts opened the door to a collective energy that redefined diversity into *kūkulu kumuhana*, or the pooling of strengths for a united purpose. This dynamic created the group cohesion that is especially meaningful for youth because of their reliance on the peer group for acceptance, and the feeling of belonging as they journey toward establishing their sense of purpose and self-direction. The third day intended to instill *Mālama* through caring of the *'āina* (land) at the Cultural Learning Center at Ka'ala. Taking the time to learn about and practice respect and care for the *'āina* created the opportunity to cultivate the earth as well as the caring spirit in each of us.

Presentations were also designed to established the sense of people, place, and time with respect to the youth

themselves, their relationships, the *'āina*, and the current issues brought forth by the main conference. The flow of the forum began with participants focusing on holistic wellness and self-reflection. Group activities were planned to begin the process of relationship building as the context for furthering the sense of people. The sense of place took on a spiritual element as the Cultural Learning Center at Ka'ala hosted a field learning experience in the *lo'i kalo* (taro patch). The planning group felt it was important for participants to connect with the *'āina* to ground themselves in the experience of the forum and feel the culture and spirit of the island host. Ka'ala provided the perfect venue for this with its landscape displaying the *ahupua'a* (land division) from mountain to ocean, representing self-sustaining life of the traditional Hawaiian culture and people. The sense of time was established by Coach Powell's presentation on stereotypes, life experiences, and standing by one's values and beliefs. He addressed current issues with a look to history for positive role models, and presented the future as the time where youth can make vital changes in their lives.

The third theme, CDFH's youth-adult partnership model for designing youth-centered training and programming, brought the call to action for each youth and adult to take responsibility for their learning and contributions to the forum. Youth-adult partnership is the practice of both youth and adults respecting and complementing each other's strengths with shared leadership based on working toward common goals. CDFH staff worked as a cohesive team with their youth advisory board members to plan and facilitate the first day of the Youth Forum to initiate the modeling and practice of youth-adult partnership. These local youth leaders assumed responsibility to *mālama* the visiting participants and act as hosts and representatives of the island spirit.

Conference evaluation

Although the People of Colour Conference does not provide for a formal evaluation, overall comments made to the planners suggested that the conference met or exceeded participant expectations. One apprehension for any conference held in Hawai'i is whether visitors will remain for the extent of the program or wander off to the beach. However, it was reported upon checking into the workshop rooms that participants, indeed, remained the entire time, and several were seen fleeting from room to room, trying to sample all concurrent presentations. Presenters and attendees commented favorably on the dynamic quality of dialogue occurring during and after the workshops, as well as the cultural connections made through the use of the *E Ola Pono* values. Many partici-

pants clearly enjoyed the networking opportunities throughout the conference.

The conference founders were pleased to report that this particular conference was the least stressful for them and their staffs, particularly with regards to logistical and programmatic concerns. The Hawaiian Regent Hotel also received compliments for their excellent service and willingness to accommodate the numerous needs of the conference and attendees. The location of the hotel was also favorably noted as it provided easy access to other attractions, a feature particularly appealing for those with families.

Planners were also made aware of several areas requiring modification. Numerous attendees thought the conference had too many compelling activities scheduled concurrently and felt cheated that they could not possibly absorb everything being offered. Likewise, many participants felt overwhelmed by the evening event, both in terms of its duration and activity overload. Consideration for time zone differences and jet lag needed to be factored into planning extracurricular activities. Overall, it appears that decreasing the quantity of activities would allow for an improved pacing of events.

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Youth forum evaluation

The success of the Youth Forum came from the energy and heart of both youth and adult participants as they connected with each other by sharing experiences, viewpoints, and deep feelings about the issues at hand. This strong bond combined with the sense of mutual responsibility and the values-based learning experiences brought a profound sense of stewardship among the participants. A case example, one young man had half-heartedly registered for the forum and at first, appeared aloof and disinterested. By the end of the first day, he was so moved by the experience that he openly shared his early reluctance and expressed a deep felt appreciation for finding meaning and connection in the group. His adult chaperone later reported that initially, she had not expected him to continue on day two. However, to her amazement, she confirmed that he returned to their hotel room that evening a "different" person. Stunned by his new demeanor, she immediately called home to tell his family about this change, including his continuation in the Youth Forum with a renewed sense of strength and direction.

Although the forum ended a day before the general conference, the energy generated from the many experiences that touched the participants' hearts and souls

permeated throughout the final conference day. One of the last early morning panels featured one of the youth participants. All members made it a point to attend the panel in a show of full support, standing together in unity where she could see them.

This young woman's presentation shifted from talking about her program activities to sharing the deep sense of connection participants felt for one another and the sadness at having to now say good-bye. During the closing ceremonies, the members presented the conference sponsor with a gift they had selected and purchased together to signify their appreciation for having the opportunity to connect and grow in so many ways beyond their expectations.

Conclusion: collaborative empowerment using cultural strengths

The collaborative partnerships developed through the Hawai'i planning committee were also empowered through the use of Hawaiian values and protocol. The infusion of such values was evident in facilitating the formation and cohesion of the committee. The membership represented a diverse range of ethnicities, cultures, human service fields (i.e., education, substance abuse prevention and treatment, primary health care, mental health, etc.), as well as geographic service areas (local, neighbor island,

Statewide, and Pacific Basin). Yet, by viewing differences between members through Hawaiian values embodying "inclusiveness," such diversity enhanced the group's constellation of strengths. These strengths helped to creatively shape and improve decision-making processes, conflict resolution, and the delegation of responsibilities.

In this context, Hawaiian values such as *Lōkahi* (Unity, Harmony), *A'o* (To Teach and To Learn), *Mālama* (Nurture the Resources), and *Laulima* (Work Together), advanced individual and group resourcefulness while also maintain-

ing *pono* (harmony and proper order) in a supportive, and productive environment. Beyond the obvious benefits to the conference planning process and outcomes, collectively, the membership also cultivated a broadened appreciation of each other's unique strengths and qualities. Through *kūkulu kumuhana*, the group was able to impart a strong and meaningful impact on the overall success of this conference.

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E ola koa
 Live like a koa tree
 Live a long time, like a koa tree in the forest