



## PROJECT SNAPSHOT

### Pathway development in Social Work for OSHKI-WENJACK learners

**Type:** Pathways Development

**Project Number:** 2019-33 or P1933

**Project Lead:** Lakehead University

**Collaborators:** Oshki-Pumache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute, Sault College, and Canadore College

#### Project Summary

The purpose of this project is to explore options for developing one or more seamless pathways for OSHKI-WENJACK students in the Social Service Worker - Native Specialization (Sault College partner) and Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Prevention (Canadore College partner) diploma programs into Lakehead University's Honours Bachelor of Social Work program. This project serves as the next step towards addressing the need for postsecondary educated Social Workers in the 49 Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities.

#### Project Rationale

There are many college diploma graduates working in northern, rural and remote communities doing social service work, including preliminary mental health counselling. Most government and insurance requirements require a university degree or a graduate level clinician/therapist for mental health intervention. This results in individuals from the north travelling to major urban

centres where the cost of a flight, accommodations, and meals are added to the therapeutic session. The demand for mental health intervention in the north is greater than the ability of government services to meet. The necessity of professionally trained workers throughout the north, especially in remote and rural communities, poses a challenge for those without professional credentials who are already doing many of the initial interventions.

That is, diploma graduates do not get the recognition of their initial work and are excluded from employment requiring professional credentials.

For the above reasons, Oshki Wenjack and Lakehead University wanted to explore whether a pathway could be created for Oshki Diploma graduates of the Native Social Service Worker (NSSW) Program and the Indigenous Wellness and Addiction Prevention (IWAP) Program applying into the four-year Honours Bachelors of Social Work(HBSW) degree program. The project reviewed Lakehead University's advanced standing credit policies, learner outcomes of the two college programs and the HBSW, CASWE professional accreditation standards, and provincial quality assurance university degree level expectations.

## Outcomes

1. The cooperation and collaboration of Project Partners. Everyone shared the goal of finding the best pathway for diploma graduates transferring to a four-year HBSW degree. Cooperation in sharing knowledge, expertise in respective programs, and in willingness to make time for meetings and travel. During the process, we discovered that other partners who have academic, admissions, professional accreditation, and quality assurance responsibilities were also needed at the table.
2. The existing Learner Outcomes by themselves do not have sufficient information to compare diploma programs with degree programs. Learner outcomes identify the "outcome" desired but not the process of getting to the outcomes. We had to look at course outlines in detail (e.g., assignments, readings, textbooks, grading rubrics, pace of learning, and instructor qualifications) and reviewed current transfer credit policies (See Appendix A). Without the details of course outlines, those comparing learner outcomes cannot interpret the intellectual level in which course content is being taught. At first glance, learner outcomes do look similar between college and university programs at the first- and second-year levels. However, after careful examination, there are many questions raised as to whether students are learning similar levels of knowledge. For example, the use of the word "research" was explored on a college learner outcome (NSW100, #7) by looking at the specific assignment. In that learner outcome, research meant identifying social services that dealt with addictions in the community. At the university level, research generally questions knowledge and its validity.
3. Identifying next steps and what policies/standards/credits to consider before a decision can be made regarding a recognition of a two-year credit transfer

## Pathway(s) Development

### Key Steps

We examined limited learner outcomes between two diploma programs and the four-year HBSW program. Wording of college and university learner outcomes looked similar but differed in breadth and depth of content. We reviewed current advanced standing agreements between Lakehead University and Colleges offering Native Social Service Worker Diploma and Indigenous Wellness and Addiction Prevention Diploma.

We reviewed other advanced standing agreements within the Province of Ontario.

### Pathways Created

There were no pathways developed.

### Challenges

Everyone on the committee had multiple responsibilities within their respective institutions. Trying to arrange meetings was difficult, and the amount of time individuals could commit was challenging.

The location of each institution (Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, and North Bay) made travel difficult and expensive. Community consultations were also difficult due to the unpredictability of local events that affected the team's ability to enter the community on several occasions. There are multiple layers of academic policies that need to be considered (e.g., Lakehead University, School of Social Work, Canadian Association for Social Work Education Professional Accreditation Standards, and Provincial University Degree Level Expectations). Solely examining learner outcomes between college and university courses does not cover additional expectations and standards set out by other sectors (e.g. provincial and professional). For example, whether diploma graduates will have the time to fulfil all the undergraduate degree level expectations in years 3 and 4. There are national professional accreditation standards (external to the university) that affected the ability to fully consider two-year advanced standing for diploma graduates. CASWE requires 40% (8 FCEs) liberal arts credits prior to applying into third year of the four-year HBSW. Current advanced-standing policies grant diploma graduates/applicants 20% (4 FCEs). The School of Social Work does not have the authority to grant advanced standing credits on behalf of another Faculty, in this case, the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities.

### Student Outcomes

This project did not add to the current one-year advanced standing credits college diploma graduates already receive.

## Institutional Outcomes (Pathway Stream)

No changes were required (within the institution) as a result of this project.

## Sector or System Implications

The sector/system is not coordinated at the provincial level. Each college and university, or program/discipline are negotiating advanced standing individually. This makes a patchwork of agreements throughout the province. This is confusing for students, their parents, secondary school advisors, colleges, and universities.

## Tips/Advice

The Project identified the School of Social Work as the department that could grant the pathway for graduating diploma students to enter directly into third year of the four- year HBSW. It was assumed that reviewing learner outcomes between the college programs and university degree would identify equivalence or similarity that justified credit transfer at the second-year level. However, the School only has one FCE requirement at the second-year level, the other four FCE courses rests with the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. Social Sciences and Humanities is the Faculty that can grant four advanced standing credits at the second year, not the School of Social Work The advice would be to examine the multiple systems, academic and administrative policies affecting the intended pathway and individually address them. I would also recommend hiring someone full time for at least six months to implement a project of this kind. There are political and institutional relations to consider as well.