
Native Community Care

Counselling and Development

INTERVIEWS WITH THREE HEALTH WORKERS BY MARY DELEARY

Mary DeLeary is an Algonquin from Maniwaki, Quebec. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Native Studies from Trent University and is employed as a Relocation Support Officer at Cambrian College, Sudbury, Ontario. She talked with three women looking forward to graduation from a demanding two-year program of college education.

BACKGROUND

Native Community Care: Counselling and Development (NCC:CD) is a two-year, post-secondary program leading to a community college diploma for Native community health workers in Ontario. It is offered at Cambrian College, Sudbury and Mohawk College, Brantford.

Course content and delivery format for the program were designed by a Working Group mandated by the Union of Ontario Indians and the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians. The Working Group included front line health workers in its membership, and consulted closely with community college personnel, other educators and curriculum specialists over a two-year planning period. The first students were admitted to the program in September 1987, and at the time these interviews were carried out, eighty health workers were enrolled, most of them Community Health Representatives (CHR's) or Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NADAP) workers.

The NCC:CD Program has many distinctive features established to meet Native community requirements:

- The program allows employed workers to continue in their jobs by alternating two-week modules of on-campus instruction with six to eight weeks of work in the community. Home study is supported by distance education materials and travelling support officers.
- Adult education methods recognize and build on students' prior knowledge and practical experience to complement theoretical studies.
- Native-specific curriculum focuses on the context of Native family, community and traditional health practices, while health sciences content emphasizes issues of particular concern to Native people,
- Authority for guiding program delivery is shared by the college, communities served by the program, and students themselves, through a Contract Advisory Committee.

Mary Ann Morrisseau, C.H.R. Worker (Fort William Indian Band, Thunder Bay, Ontario)

Mary Ann, what prompted you to go back to school, especially into a 2nd year program such as this one?

I was more or less told I had to come here when I applied and received the job as C.H.R. at my Band Office. I was told that my training would consist of travelling to Sudbury 4 or 5 times for 2-week periods. It wasn't until I arrived at Cambrian College that I was made aware that in fact this was a 2-year College program. I have my R.N.A. so I'm used to working, but not going to school.

Why did you apply for a job as C.H.R.?

I have back problems so I couldn't continue to work in the hospital. I needed a new type of employment and when the opportunity on the reserve came up, I grabbed at it.

Mary Ann, how many children do you have?

Five grown children, but I still have problems and concerns with them and for them. All those years I've been the sole breadwinner.

How did you feel then when you found out this was going to be a 2-year program?

Totally in shock! I didn't want to be here in the first place and then to find out it's for two years! I felt like going back and quitting, but I had to stick with it because what else am I going to do?

Have you found it beneficial to be here?

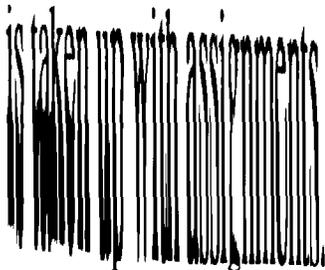
Oh yes, it's been beneficial. It's just that I feel that if I had known what I was getting into, I would have been better prepared.

How much of a challenge has it been and how have you coped?

The first part was really stressful, how many times you wanted to quit, eh, how are you supposed to maintain a home, do your job, and look after your family plus, do all these assignments all at the same time! The last time I was in school was twenty-six years ago. We all sat at little desks. Here I was in shock, we could go for coffee, have a smoke, talk to your buddies... It's been fun too, you know, not all work. I've enjoyed it and I'm glad the end's in sight. I didn't think I could do it, you know, and when I look back I don't know how I got A's.

Academically, you've done well then?

Yes, I've just had to find the time and that's been difficult on my children because I have grandchildren but they don't want to interrupt. They can see me working through my living room window as they drive by, so they don't like to stop. My kids sort of feel rejected because we have always been close and now my time



Do you find this course beneficial in terms of your community work? Is it better preparing you?

Well I've yet to find out, to apply it really. But I guess so. This is the first time I've been around Natives from so many different areas. Finding out how similar we are and that basically we have the same kinds of problems has been interesting. For me it was a new experience just going to work at the Band office. I didn't know anything about my identity, my culture, and heritage, and now I understand a little. I was scared or apprehensive of this learning at first, but it is something I can take back home.

What was the most difficult part for you?

Adjusting to going back to school after all those years. Doing the assignments and having to make room in my life at home for this.

Where has most of your support come from?

My S.O. Carol. Also my family is happy to see me do this. In terms of the Band office, they allow the occasional time so that I can finish assignments, but I don't necessarily feel their support.

When you've felt like quitting what's kept you going?

The light at the end of the tunnel. I'm the type person that finishes even if it wasn't really my idea to start it in the first place.

What was the high point of this program for you?

Satisfaction because I didn't think I would do as well as I did and now I have faith in myself.

What would be your advice to another woman who attempted something similar?

Go for it.

Mary Ann, what do you see for yourself



Well, I'll go back home to my job, but continue to take courses part-time to stay learning because now I know I can do it.

Carol Eshkakagan, NNADAP Program (22 years old, mother of 1, Spanish River Reserve)

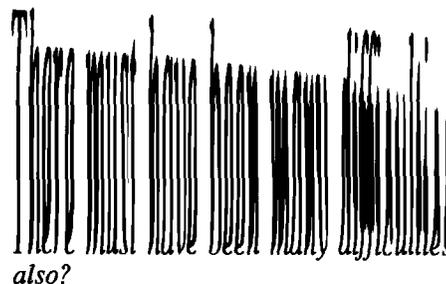
Why did you decide to embark on a college education?



It was my decision whether I wanted to commit myself to the 2 years and whether or not I wanted to commit myself to the job. Basically, the band came across with the NCC:CD program and they wanted to send one of the workers; since I was untrained and without a background in the field, I was chosen for the training. When I first started the program here, basically I was just doing my job, a 9 to 5 type of thing. It was through this course that I began to look at myself and assess where I'm at, and to rethink my goals in life and begin to make my job my career. I think that was my biggest mistake last year when I came into the program because I hadn't made a full commitment career-wise. I enjoy what I'm doing and I can see that there is so much work to be done in my community. Identifying what needs to be done is the biggest step; then I can work on accomplishing something.

This program has been beneficial for you then?

Yes, definitely.



Yes, because on the one hand I had the school telling me this was my priority and tugging me and on the other hand I had my employer (which is the band) telling me not to forget my job because that's the bread and butter. I was in a tug of war and somewhere in the middle was my family and they're saying, what about us; where's our time; you're stealing out time and my mother was real hard on me the 1st year. I'd find myself doing assignments in the middle of the night so as not to infringe on

anyone's time! It was really difficult. I was sort of in a tailspin struggling with priorities. Finally the realization came that I was my priority. I'm pursuing a further education so I can apply it to my job.

What kept you going, the one thing?

Basically what made me stick to it was the need I felt inside. In helping myself I am helping my community and I really began to realize that towards the end of last

year. I'm taking my learning and becoming a different person in a way that betters me.

Where was your support coming from?

At first only my own sheer stubbornness but after the first year I began to talk with my partner about my fears and frustrations and the sacrifices. I was looking for him to understand, and this is very emotional for me, because when I think of last year and the hardships and difficulties, it's very painful. I now have the support and encouragement of my partner (he prods me on) and also of my mother (she babysits for me). My Supervisor has very high standards and so when he mentions my improvements, he helps me to continue the striving.

What was one of the best times?

There were lots of good times, but I think the best were the personal growth sharing circles where we would pass the eagle feather around and we would all share and get to know everyone from the heart.

What would you consider the hardest time?

Deadlines, the cramming, the pressure. The first deadlines I ended up driving to the college at the twelfth hour like a mad woman to get my assignments in on time.

Carol, graduation is around the corner. What are you thinking about now?

I'm looking forward to graduation because it's been a hard road with lots of sacrifices. I see it as a sad time too because we're all going to go our separate ways and we'll never be the same group again. But we're all better people because of the sharing and we'll always carry a bit of each other inside. I get teary-eyed thinking of the good byes.

I see receiving that diploma as having it all. I'll know that I achieved what I set out to do. It signifies the best of everything. I have my education, my family, my job and I have my community. I know where home is. This course has only reinforced that. So I feel I have it all — I will continue my learning.

What would you leave with another person making the same attempt?

You can have it all as long as you dream.

Hilda Corbiere, NNADAP Worker
(married, 4 children ages 23-10, West Bay Indian Reserve)

I had just come into the NNADAP program when this whole issue of training came into being and I just went with the flow, because when I began my job there was no orientation or anything. When the actual time came to make a decision on taking the course, I wasn't sure what to do. It wasn't until two weeks prior to when the course began that I knew my answer. Since then I've just been working to the best of my ability to accomplish what I set out to do. As for balancing family, work and school... well that's really been something!

How have you coped?

What I had to do was explain to our advisory committee that I had to make priorities to retain my sanity. My work became a lower priority, while training became more important.

How has your family reacted?

My family is pretty proud of their old mother! They have struggled along with me because they haven't had me, even though physically I'm home, I'm always busy with assignments. They have had to sacrifice.

Where do you receive your support?

A fellow student who has become a close friend. Also my family. My husband

built a study room for me in the basement.

What has kept you going through the rough spots?

I remember my own mother's determination and her saying "you can do it." It's also my own formula that, even when something is a struggle, I stick with it to the end. The first year especially was very difficult. The middle wasn't too bad, but now that we're nearing the end and getting closer to the top, it gets harder to hang on and that's how I feel.

What would be one of your best times?

This may not sound like such a big thing. Our personal growth instructor had us make a three minute presentation and when my turn came I was just like jelly inside. I completed that presentation and I was so proud of myself for overcoming the fear. Now I'll express myself without even thinking of being self-conscious with the group.

What about an obstacle?

My own lack of self-esteem.

Well, it's graduation time. What are your thoughts and goals now?

I see all the growth in the students and the confidence in myself. My kids say "Hey Mom, you're going to be a college graduate!" My short-term goal is that, prior to this course, I was always looking for resource people (such as someone to conduct a stress management workshop), and now I'm anxious to get in there and develop these programs myself and be the resource person.

As far as long term goals are concerned, I'm going to concentrate more on my ten year-old daughter. From what I've learned in this course about the development stages of children, I feel I have to stay with her instead of gallivanting off to school. So continuing my education is not a priority, but working in my community and with my family is.

Information on NCC:CD and sample curriculum materials can be obtained from Cambrian College, Mohawk College, or the Health Director, Union of Ontario Indians, 27 Queen Street East, Toronto, Ontario M5C 2M6.

