



Anukey:

A History of the Ramsey County–American Indian Community Partnership April 2008

Prepared by:
Rahel Tekle, Senior Program Evaluator
Alyssa Erickson, Intern

Ramsey County Human Services
Office of Performance Measurement and Evaluation
160 East Kellogg Blvd. Suite 9200
Saint Paul, MN 55101

Ramsey County Workforce Solutions
2098 11th Avenue East
North St. Paul, MN 55109

American Indian Policy Center
1463 Hewitt Ave
Saint Paul, MN 55104

Lifetrack Resources
709 & 738 University Ave West
Saint Paul, MN 55104

In collaboration with the American Indian Family Center
579 Wells Street, St Paul MN 55101

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I. Executive Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to document and capture the history, the innovation, and the changes that have resulted from Ramsey County's American Indian Community pilot project, the Anukey partnership. The Anukey Partnership (from the Ojibwe word meaning "to work") was created in response to racial disparities Ramsey County found in their Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Employment Services outcomes.

In 2002, Ramsey County Workforce Solutions evaluated existing programs by race and ethnicity. The findings showed significant outcome disparities for American Indian MFIP participants. In particular, the American Indian sanction rate was disproportionately higher compared to the small percentage of the overall MFIP caseload they represent. American Indians were more likely to stay on MFIP longer and less likely to leave MFIP employed compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

Ramsey County management approached key leaders in the American Indian Community to share these findings and make recommendation as to how to proceed. By then, management in the County clearly understood that the MFIP delivery model in use at that time was not working for communities of color.

Ramsey County decided to solicit recommendations from the American Indian Community and involve that Community in designing a service delivery model that would work for their population. This was a bold step for the County to take. The vision of reducing MFIP outcome disparities and moving American Indian families from welfare to self-sufficiency was embraced by the American Indian Community, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, and Ramsey County MFIP management teams. This Community initiative to establish partnerships and Community engagement processes was fully funded and supported by Ramsey County from 2003 to 2006. The funding has been subsequently renewed.

"I'm not sure I had a clear idea of where we were going to go with this partnership when we started it because one of the guiding principles was that we wanted the Community to be the guide."

The American Indian Community initially chose to focus on building trust, reducing sanctions, and increasing successful transitions off MFIP. The County chose to focus on building a culturally specific service delivery model and improving outcomes for American Indian participants. The common goal of the County and the Community is, to close the gap of racial disparities and to successfully move families from welfare to self-sufficiency. The shared vision and common goal of this collaboration fostered the Anukey partnership.

Methodology

This study was designed to be a participatory Community-based project. The innovative methodology used was developed in collaboration with the Anukey partnership. Ramsey County Evaluation staff worked closely with the partnership to gather information and to develop strategies and meaningful research methods that were appropriate for the American Indian Community. The evaluation staff invited members of the partnership to review the draft research and incorporated their feedback in the study. Since the study was a new and exploratory process, we adjusted the process to incorporate the learning that occurred while the study was taking place.

During the process of writing this report, 16 informal interviews or conversations were conducted with current and former partnership members. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed to capture common and distinct themes. These themes were systematically coded and analyzed to explore further findings and learning of the Anukey partnership. Partnership documents such as meeting minutes and plans were reviewed to fill in the historical details.

Findings – What We Learned

“It may be a flawed welfare system but there’s still opportunities to do something that might matter.”

From these conversations, we learned that members of the Anukey project faced fundamental challenges including the inflexibility of the statutory MFIP rules, the layers of bureaucracy involved in welfare-to-work programs, and staff turnover.

The rigidity of the MFIP rules also imposed limitations on what the partnership could really do differently, which has made systemic change slow.

One of the other challenges identified in the interviews was the County’s high pressure, outcome-based environment and the need to show results and improve programs. Some of the County partnership members found it difficult to demonstrate progress and improvement of programs immediately through Anukey. In a government environment, accountability is not necessarily measured by the amount of trust and Community engagement that County staff build. Most of the partnership members from both the American Indian Community and Ramsey County felt that government bureaucracies and rules and regulations of accountability presented challenges in establishing a partnership. Community members also found it challenging to navigate the County’s extensive system of regulations.

Another challenge identified by members of the partnership was the turnover in several key staff positions on the County side shortly after the partnership had been established. While the partnership was able to weather the staff turnover, the new staff that joined wished they would have known more about the work of the partnership prior to joining.

“It’s neat to learn that a rigid entrenched system such as the County can actually make some changes.”

The Anukey partnership itself has experienced unique challenges because it exists within a societal context that holds the many challenges faced by American Indian families. Many American Indians in Ramsey County continue to deal with historical trauma from what their families have been put through at the hands of the U.S. government. Family structures were severely disrupted by the forced removal of American Indian children and their placement in boarding schools. As a result of the many betrayals they have experienced at the hands of the government, many American Indians distrust government institutions. Despite all these challenges, County members and Community members succeeded in establishing a solid partnership. Several people mentioned that strong leadership, the quality of relationships between the individual members of the partnership, a shared influence and decision-making process, and willingness to learn from each other are some of the factors that make Anukey work. However, the long-term sustainability of the partnership is an ongoing concern to some of its members. It will be challenging to carry the work of Anukey if the County is unable to continue funding the partnership.

*“What I’ve picked up here in understanding about working in the American Indian Community expands my sensitivity and understanding to other communities that are not American Indian. Not in the way of I’m making assumptions about how this group operates or that’s how the next group operates, but just understanding that **there’s a much deeper and often unknown history piece that lives within people that we carry forward.**”*

Partnership members have been personally enriched by their participation in Anukey through the trainings, learning about American Indian culture, and building new working relationships. Some of the County staff members found that this experience led them to explore and think more about their own culture. Some found similarities between American Indian culture and their own culture and others decided to attend American Indian cultural events in their personal time. One member gained a new perspective on what families have been through in government systems. Other partnership members learned new communication styles to use when working with families. Both County and Community members appreciated the relationship they gained through working with people of such good vision. One person expressed pride in being part of the partnership because of its potentially huge positive impact.

Accomplishments

Some of the accomplishments include:

- ✓ The establishment of the partnership itself
- ✓ Co-locating financial workers at the American Indian Family Center (AIFC)
- ✓ AIFC becoming an Employment Services Provider
- ✓ Establishing culturally specific psychological assessments for American Indians
- ✓ American Indian Leadership and Culture trainings
- ✓ Decreasing the rate of American Indian sanctions
- ✓ Engaging other counties and the State of Minnesota in discussions about racial disparities

Recommendations

Both County and Community members of the Anukey partnership say that the County must continue to listen to the Community to make a partnership like Anukey work. Members of the partnership recommend that any other government institutions that are interested in partnering with a Community of color approach the Community honestly and openly. The government entity should be committed to the long-term sustainability of a partnership before it initiates one, and it should be ready to invest the resources necessary to make the partnership work. To establish a solid partnership that is based on trust, working relationships, common goals and vision takes patience, energy, time, and money.

II. Chronological Events

- Late 2002 – Ramsey County Office of Performance Measurement and Evaluation did a study on outcomes by race/ethnicity of Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) clients and found significant disparities for American Indians and African Americans.
- February 4, 2003 – Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved support for Community based planning efforts to improve outcomes.
- October 2003 – Ramsey County Workforce Solutions contracted with the American Indian Policy Center (AIPC) to begin Community planning.
- May 2004 - The AIPC submitted a written plan to Ramsey County containing information about the American Indian Community and recommendations on how to work effectively with American Indians. Outlined three key steps. Step one: create a viable, workable relationship between Ramsey County Community Human Services, Ramsey County Workforce Solutions, and the American Indian Community. Step two: identify a list of most often cited sanctions so that they may develop a deeper knowledge of the issues associated with sanctions for American Indian MFIP Clients. Step three: establish a process for incorporating program improvement recommendations. The American Indian Family Center (AIFC) was chosen by the American Indian Community as the lead Community organization to carry the work forward.
- Through the rest of 2004 – AIFC, AIPC and Ramsey County leadership began meeting.
- November 16, 2004 – Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved funding for the Anukey partnership with AIFC. Before Board approval, partnership leaders held one large workshop session with the Commissioners, and AIPC and AIFC held meetings with six of the seven Commissioners.
- December 2004 – AIFC contracted with Community consultant, Roger Meyer to create, plan, and facilitate partnership meetings.

- January 2005 –AIPC hosted two talking circles with MFIP recipients to refine the partnership goals and develop a master-planning document that included an implementation plan.
- March 31, 2005 – Training on American Indian history and culture conducted for Ramsey County leadership teams.
- April 2005 – Two Financial Workers co-located at American Indian Family Center. All American Indian MFIP participants were consolidated and are now served by these two Financial Workers.
- May 2005 – The Anukey final work-plan completed and implementation of the plan began.
- May 2005 - Talking circle held with MFIP recipients to better understand and gauge the Community perceptions of existing MFIP services.
- June 2005 - Talking circle held with Employment Counselors to better understand the role of employment counselors.
- September 2005 – Talking circle held with MFIP recipients regarding the co-location of Financial Workers at the Family Center
- September 2005 – Partnership leaders met with Minnesota State Department of Human Services’ racial disparities consultants to share about the progressing work of the Anukey Partnership.
- November 2005 – Talking circle held with AIFC staff and County financial workers regarding the effectiveness of locating financial assistance services at the Family Center.
- November 2005 –Ethlene Two Dogs, led a training about conducting culturally specific assessments.
- November 2005 – John Poupart, AIPC, conducted training on American Indian history and culture.
- December 2005 – Partnership named itself the Anukey (Ojibwe for “work”) partnership.
- April 2006 – AIFC Employment Services Program Manager hired.
- May 2006 – AIFC psychologists approved to provide vocational assessments for American Indian MFIP participants.

- 2006 – AIFC chose Lifetrack Resources as their partner organization to provide Employment Services to American Indian clients not served by AIFC. Lifetrack provided technical assistance as AIFC was getting its Employment Services program up and running.
- Fall 2006 – AIFC became MFIP Employment Services provider Consolidation of all American Indian MFIP recipients to two agencies, AIFC or Lifetrack. Families were offered the opportunity to choose one of the two consolidated providers.
- September 2006 – Five-session American Indian 101 training was held with the Ramsey County staff involved in the partnership. At the training, staff learned about American Indian Culture (topics addressed: treaties and sovereignty, spirituality, boarding schools, introduction to American Indian agencies and leadership)
- October 2006 – American Indian MFIP Employment Services caseload consolidated into two agencies: AFIC and Lifetrack Resources. Previously, five different agencies and more than 20 different job counselors provided Employment Services for American Indian MFIP participants.
- November 2006 – AIFC held an open house to showcase new services and partnerships.
- Early 2007 – All American Indian childcare cases were consolidated to one worker.
- February 2007 – Ramsey County Extension Triage Services joined the partnership. AIFC works with the department to serve American Indian MFIP participants who are approaching their MFIP 60-month lifetime limit. To facilitate Extension Triage Services, all extended American Indian cases were consolidated into two Employment Guidance Counselor caseloads.
- June 2007 – Talking Circle held with MFIP participants about their experiences on MFIP.
- August 2007 – Talking Circle regarding American Indian 101 training held with County staff participants.
- November 2007 – American Indian 102 training held, an extension of American Indian 101. At the training, Ramsey County staff gained knowledge of the client’s cultural context including history and worldview, awareness of own assumptions, values, and biases, and application of appropriate intervention strategies and skills.
- November 2007 – Visioning session regarding future activities of the Anukey partnership was held. 2008-2011 Work Plan developed.
- January–March 2008 – A second American Indian Culture Training 101 was held. Participants of this training included various staff from County departments:

Community Human Services, Public Health, Extension Triage, Children Services, Adult Services, Workforce Solutions, and staff of Lifetrack Resources.

III. Introduction

“It will not be enough to have a family work their way off of MFIP only to find themselves still in the grip of poverty while being fully employed. If Ramsey County and the American Indian Community focus only on improving MFIP outcomes, a grand opportunity will be missed. Ramsey County and the American Indian Community must go the next step to make sure that the programs and services emanating from Ramsey County move families up and out of poverty.” 12-29-05 Plan to Improve Outcomes for American Indian MFIP recipients in Ramsey County.

The tale of the Anukey partnership reveals an unusual history. In this story, top managers in the County departed from traditional problem-solving approaches by deciding to listen to and take direction from Community members. They connected with members of the American Indian Community who were open to partnering, despite numerous government betrayals their Community had experienced over hundreds of years. These Community leaders were willing to work with the County because they felt the well being of their Community was at stake.

The strong relationships individual members of the Anukey partnership have established with each other have led to the success and sustainability of the partnership itself. All members of the partnership, whether they are coming from the County or the Community, believe firmly in the possibility of serving American Indians within the welfare system in a better, more culturally-sensitive way and the importance of doing just that. Not only do they believe this can be done, they believe it is vitally important, and they have been finding innovative ways to improve services for the past 5 years.

The Anukey partnership began in 2003 when Ramsey County’s MFIP Employment Services Administration, Workforce Solutions, identified racial disparities in outcomes for American Indian welfare recipients. The County decided to approach the Community and ask them what they should do to address the disparities. The American Indian Community wanted to form a long-term partnership in order to deal with the disparities in an ongoing way, and the result of this desire is the Anukey partnership.

One element of the Anukey partnership that makes it unique among government-Community partnerships is the emphasis placed on training. Since the beginning of the partnership, Anukey has conducted trainings regularly for County staff to better understand American Indian culture and history. Participants in the trainings range from frontline County staff to top County administrators and managers.

By upholding the need to train County staff, the County is recognizing its responsibility in the complex problem of racial disparities. Rather than simply blaming the American

Indian Community for the existence of disparities, the County is recognizing the role that their staff play in ensuring the success of American Indian MFIP participants. Moreover, the trainings are ongoing and multi-part because the County and Community members of the Anukey partnership believe that cultural understanding is a process, not a quick fix that can be accomplished through a one-time event.

The eagerness of Ramsey County staff to learn about the American Indian Community and their openness to following the leadership of Community members are hallmarks of the Anukey partnership.

IV. Welfare Reform

To understand the Anukey partnership, it is necessary to understand the background of why Anukey exists: welfare reform. In 1996, Congress passed legislation that completely changed the welfare system by abolishing Aid to Families with Dependent Children and replacing it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The two major changes brought about by this legislation were work requirement for welfare participants' and the imposition of a 60-month lifetime limit for each person receiving welfare. Adults receiving welfare cash assistance would now have to work or face strict penalties in the form of sanctions, reducing the amount of their cash assistance. The 60-month lifetime limit meant that adults could only receive welfare for a total of five years, consecutive or non-consecutive.

Under TANF, each state receives a block grant of funding from the federal government and then has some discretion to design their welfare program. Minnesota's welfare-to-work program is called the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). When it began in 1997, the goals of MFIP were to get welfare participants working off welfare and out of poverty when leaving welfare.

Ramsey County MFIP Employment Services program provides job counseling and job search resources. Participation in Employment Services is mandatory for adults on welfare. In Ramsey County, Employment Services are administered by the County agency Workforce Solutions. Workforce Solutions oversees the program and initiates contracts with Community non-profit organizations, along with some County direct services staff, to provide job counseling and job training for welfare participants. Job counselors work with welfare participants to develop an Employment Plan, and welfare participants are required to seek and obtain work by following the steps of the plan. If they are not willing to cooperate, their MFIP case can be sanctioned.

An MFIP participant can face two types of sanctions: Employment Services sanctions and Child Support sanctions. Employment Services sanctions are imposed by Employment Counselors when an MFIP participant is not fulfilling their obligations under their Employment Plan. The first sanction reduces their benefits by 10% while the second sanction reduces it by 30%. Child Support workers impose Child Support sanctions if an MFIP participant is not cooperating with the child support process. Child Support sanctions reduce an MFIP participant's benefits by 30%, and result in closure of the caregiver's Health Care coverage. After a family incurs a combined total of six

sanctions of any type, they are put in full family sanction, which means their MFIP case is closed and they are no longer eligible to receive benefits. The family can reapply to MFIP but must be in compliance for a month before their benefits are restored.

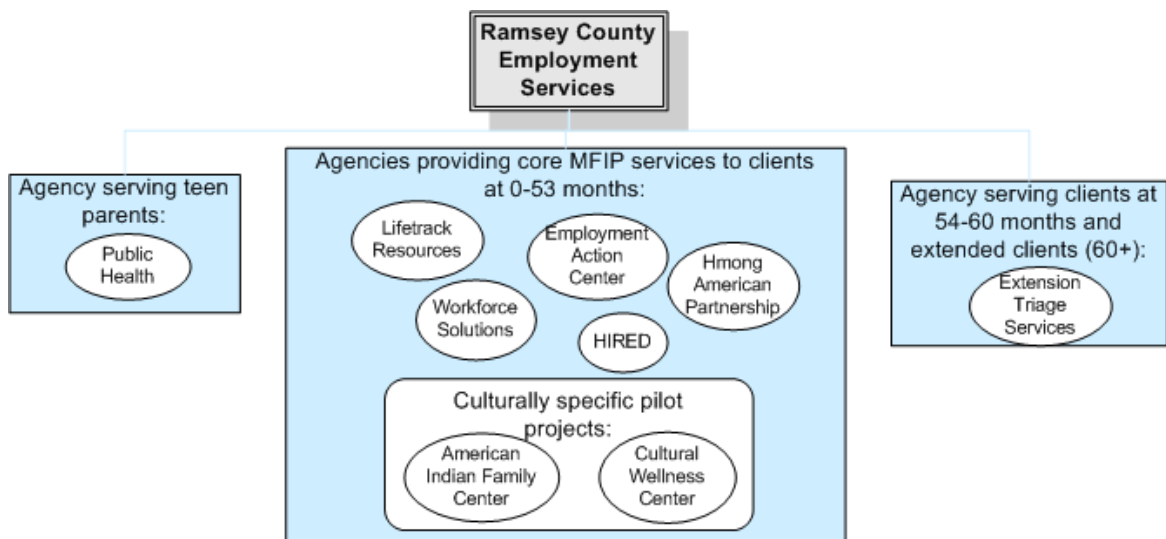
V. Project Origin

“It’s not just about helping our families find a job, but it really is about helping our families make a shift to living a self-sufficient life that’s grounded in who they are as Indian people.”

The impetus behind the process that eventually led to the Anukey Partnership came from the management of Workforce Solutions. In 2002, Workforce Solutions decided it would be important to evaluate their current Employment Services programs before putting out a new Request-For-Proposal (RFP) for Employment Services delivery. This process of evaluation led to a comprehensive redesign of Employment Services.

In 2002, Workforce Solutions had contracts with 15 different Community non-profit organizations to provide Employment Services for MFIP participants. Each of these 15 organizations provided the same general services to MFIP participants, regardless of the specific needs of the family or the length of time that they had been on MFIP. Each organization also served participants who had been extended beyond 60 months. Through the Employment Services redesign process, and a competitive selection process, Workforce Solutions structured the number of organizations providing Employment Services and specialized services based on the length of time participants were in the 60-month timeframe on MFIP. The following chart shows the organization of Employment Services in Ramsey County after the redesign and completion of the subsequent RFP selection process.

Employment Services after Redesign



The examination of outcomes in 2002 revealed significant disparities when broken down by the race/ethnicity of MFIP participants. Compared to all other groups, American Indians were less likely to leave MFIP employed, more likely to stay on MFIP three or more years, and more likely to be sanctioned. American Indians, despite being one of the smaller populations numerically, had the highest sanction rate of all the racial/ethnic groups, 31% in comparison to 21% of the overall county sanction rate in 2002.

Rather than deciding what these disparities meant and how to address them on their own, managers in the County decided to invite leaders from those communities of color to discuss the disparities in two Community conversations. One participant in these conversations advised the County that since they had no established reputation or trust in the American Indian Community, they should find someone who did and who could gather information from the Community and bring recommendations back to the County. John Poupart, President of the American Indian Policy Center, agreed to fill this role. After consulting with St. Paul Indians in Action, a collaborative group of American Indian organizations in St. Paul, and other individuals, Mr. Poupart proposed a three-step process. First, creating a working relationship between Ramsey County and the American Indian Community, then figuring out what was causing the high sanction rate, and finally establishing a process of making Community-recommended improvements to County programs.

“The strong theme that came out of the conversations was if we wanted to tackle those disparities, the County ought to turn to the Community to tackle that and not assume we could do it from inside the system out.”

“[The Community was saying] we trust that if we can develop a working relationship, the other things will follow and become apparent.”

The American Indian Community chose the American Indian Family Center (AIFC) to be the lead agency in collaborating with Ramsey County, including the Community Human Services Department and Workforce Solutions. County staff began meeting with Mr. Poupart and AIFC staff to implement this plan. The first step of the plan was about relationships, not programs, and so this small group of people spent many months of meetings simply getting to know each other.

One factor that unified this emerging partnership was the common goal of developing a plan that the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners would approve and fund. The County Manager at the time was determined to set aside funds that would last for three years during the pilot project regardless of the financial environment of the County. The idea of having a fixed budget for three years was also embraced and approved by the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. In November 2004, the Board approved the goal of co-locating two Financial Workers at the AIFC and

“The two-legged creature that we took to the County Board became a three-legged now. We got the Indian Community, MFIP, and the County Board... each of those corners of the triangle depends on the other to keep this project successful, so each corner of the triad has benefits to talk about, to show that their investment in this project is beneficial to their constituents and to the public in general.”

granted the group money to continue the Community planning process into the Employment Services area.

In the process of preparing to co-locate two Financial Workers at AIFC, the partnership expanded to include more staff from both the County and AIFC. Concurrently, the partnership held Talking Circles with MFIP participants and staff to refine its goals and develop a master-planning document that included an implementation plan.

At the end of 2005, partnership members decided it was time to name their collaboration. They selected the word Anukey because it means “to work” in the Ojibwe language.

VI. Methodology

The methodology used in this research was designed to be new, Community-based, non-traditional, participatory and innovative. From the beginning of the process, the Anukey Evaluation Committee, composed of members of the partnership, shaped and guided the methodology and implementation of this research. The Evaluation Committee was involved in developing the interview instrument, discussing the appropriateness of its content, and selecting the interview participants. County Evaluation staff continuously sought information about strategies, skills and methods that would be appropriate for and support the American Indian Community. Evaluation staff also ensured that all feedback from members of the partnership was incorporated into the study to increase its cultural relevance to the American Indian Community. Since this study was new and exploratory, the process needed to be adjusted while the study was happening.

From the County Evaluation perspective, the involvement of members of the partnership in all stages of the study activities was crucial. Evaluation staff viewed the partnership as the driving force behind the study. The implementation process used in this study and the production of this report took an unusual amount of time and energy not often available in the government evaluation process. Too often, research is a one-way, extractive process. Communities are asked to contribute to a variety of research projects, both government and academic, and they rarely hear what happens with the research findings nor how the research findings were used to benefit their communities. Because of this common research history, effort was made to dismantle this history of distrust. . The implementation process of this study was successful because the Anukey partnership was already solid, based on respect, honesty, and shared leadership working cooperatively in the Community and County to eliminate racial disparities.

For this report, 16 informal interviews were conducted with current and former members of the Anukey partnership. The interviewees ranged from front-line County and AIFC workers to current and former managers, planners, and Community consultants. Questions varied from partnership origin and mission to perceptions of success and were addressed to capture the history, learning, policy, and operational and systematic changes. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes, both common and distinct. The themes were systematically coded and analyzed to address the findings and produce this report. Additionally, all documents such as meeting minutes and work plans pertaining to the Anukey partnership were reviewed to

capture the innovation of the partnership and to fill in gaps in the history. Workforce Solutions' Evaluation staff and a Research Assistant in collaboration with the American Indian Family Center (AIFC) completed this work.

VII. Population Served

Ramsey County MFIP program serves an average of about 7,200 cases of eligible adults per quarter that are required to participate in employment service activities. Out of these 7,200 cases, the American Indian caseload represents about 2.6%, African American 38%, Hmong 18%, Other Asian 5%, Hispanic 5%, Somali 5%, Other Black 3% and White 22%. In serving the American Indian caseload, the American Indian Family Center was selected to provide MFIP Employment Services to American Indian participants in Ramsey County, and had to partner with a Ramsey County Employment Services provider to utilize the employment services expertise. The American Indian Family Center decided to partner with Lifetrack Resources to collaboratively address the needs of American Indians more holistically in Ramsey County; Lifetrack bringing the expertise around MFIP rules, regulations, and client direct services, and AIFC bringing the cultural expertise.

The Anukey partnership was available to all American Indian MFIP participants in Ramsey County. However, American Indian participants could choose to remain with the mainstream employment service provider or choose AIFC or Lifetrack. The majority of participants decided to be served by the Anukey partnership. All American Indian MFIP participants were assigned to one of the two Financial Workers who are now housed at AIFC. Currently, some American Indian MFIP participants receive Employment Counseling services at AIFC, while others receive these services at Lifetrack Resources. Extension Triage Services in Ramsey County works with American Indian MFIP participants who have been extended beyond the 60-month lifetime limit based on eligibility criteria established by the State legislature, and are still on MFIP for reasons of disability, mental illness, or other extenuating circumstances.

VIII. Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders in the Anukey partnership are Ramsey County and the American Indian Community. The partnership is comprised of Ramsey County Community Human Services, Workforce Solutions, Lifetrack Resources, the American Indian Family Center, and the American Indian Policy Center. Representatives of these agencies and organizations meet monthly to oversee and develop the work of the partnership. Subcommittees such as the training committee and the evaluation committee also meet on a regular basis to further develop plans and recommendations into the larger Anukey partnership. The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners has a stake in the success of the partnership because they funded the work and approved this new way of providing services. The greater St. Paul American Indian Community has a stake in the partnership because the goals of Anukey include improving the well being of the American Indian Community in St. Paul by moving families out of poverty.

IX. Funding

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved initial funding for the process that led to the Anukey partnership on February 4, 2003, as part of the redesign of MFIP Employment Services. According to the Board of Commissioners' minutes, funding was set aside for "Community-based planning efforts to make recommendations to the County about means for improving those outcomes." Those outcomes refer to the racial disparities Workforce Solutions identified in 2002. The intended funding was for Community planning efforts in both the American Indian and African American communities.

Subsequently, the County Board understood the complex issues facing the American Indian Community and made an informed decision to provide continued funding to the project. This funding was approved outside the Request-For-Proposal (RFP) process as it was intended to serve American Indian MFIP participants specifically, rather than the whole MFIP population. Moreover, the American Indian Community felt that since Ramsey County had approached them to collaboratively address the disparities affecting their Community, competing with other organizations for the funding was taking a step back in enabling them to do what the County had asked them to do.

"The Board supported [funding this project on a non-competitive basis] because we were addressing disparities, it's not like we would go out and do a competitive process to identify who was best in a position to be able to address those things- it was about relationships."

X. Original Objectives

The County and the American Indian Community both entered the Anukey partnership with key objectives they wanted to achieve. While there was overlap between some of the objectives, others were distinct to the County or Community perspective. The original objectives are as follows:

Community Objectives

- Build a trusting relationship with County
- Reduce sanctions of American Indian MFIP participants
- Increase American Indians' successful transitions off MFIP

County Objectives

- Create a culturally specific service delivery model
- Improve outcomes for American Indian MFIP participants

The American Indian Community goal of building trust with the County was articulated in John Poupart's 2004 "American Indian Community-Based Plan: A Response to Disparities in MFIP Sanctions." The other two original objectives were articulated when AIFC hired a consultant to facilitate the emerging partnership in December 2004, and to develop a work plan addressing the goals of the project: "Increase the number of

American Indian MFIP recipients successful in moving off of MFIP and reduce the number of American Indian MFIP recipients experiencing sanctions.”

Ramsey County’s original objectives were stated in the meeting minutes of the Board of Commissioners as well as in interviews with the staff who initiated this partnership.

The main area of overlap between these two sets of objectives was in improving the outcomes for American Indian MFIP participants, which essentially meant reducing the sanction rate. One County staff person noted that although there were three different disparities identified in the racial disparities study, the American Indian Community chose to prioritize one – reducing the sanction rate. There remains broad agreement among partnership members about the importance of this goal; ten out of the 16 people interviewed identified reducing sanctions or better outcomes for participants as their definition of success for the Anukey partnership.

“The driver behind all of this was the disparities in outcomes and how the MFIP system just really was not effective working with American Indian families and that we wanted to change that.”

“The vision hasn’t changed- the group just hasn’t fully implemented their vision.”

Almost all the members of the partnership stated that the original vision has not changed significantly as the partnership has evolved. Some members mentioned that strategies and goals may have changed and relationships and trust have evolved but the overall vision remains the same.

When asked what they would have done differently in developing the Anukey partnership, most members of the partnership had few suggestions. Some members mentioned that the partnership developed organically and they observed “everything that happened kind of allowed other stuff to happen.” Only one member of the partnership would have suggested something in addition. “In hindsight, the attention necessary to implement the Employment Services program was much greater than anticipated. Choosing to develop the employment services program area was a conscience choice on our behalf, we were working to try and meet the needs of our Community. However, balancing the needs of the all programming and projects challenged the administrative capacity of our agency.”

XI. Challenges

Two challenges that came up most frequently in the interviews; the rigidity of the MFIP rules and regulations, and staff turnover within the Anukey partnership.

Several partnership members talked about the inflexibility of the rules and the limitations they face in making changes that would benefit American Indian MFIP participants. County staff expressed

“The reality is we can’t do a whole lot different at the end of the day... we still have to follow the same rules and regulations as anyone else.”

disappointment about being unable to implement needed changes because of the “wall” of regulations they face. Members of the partnership were very aware of the multiple levels of bureaucracy involved in the welfare-to-work system and how each level adds to the rules and regulations.

"The County mentality can be very much deliverables, tasks, disparities— let's get it reduced, numbers, and I think we just created this forum where we talked about relationships, we learned about each other, and didn't rush stuff. And that time spent on the front end really has proven to be time well spent."

Staff turnover was an issue relatively early in the partnership when the two key County staff who first reached out to the American Indian Community left their positions in 2004 and in 2005. Most members of the partnership who talked about this identified it as a challenge the partnership had successfully overcome. One person would have preferred to have more than just those two County people involved at the very beginning so that more relationships would have been in place prior to their departure.

Other challenges identified in the interviews included everything from the County's historical dominance in partnerships to the difficulty of taking time to build relationships in an outcome-based environment. It was challenging for the County to establish credibility in the American Indian Community and some Community members found it difficult to understand and navigate the County's system of services.

Further challenges identified range from the very practical such as the space limitations at the AIFC's building, to the very broad such as the fact that racism exists in the system. Some members of the partnership expressed concern regarding future challenges such as the long-term sustainability of the partnership. The County's history of being unable to maintain partnerships because of funding availability or reductions was not encouraging to one member of the American Indian Community.

"Is the County really committed to the long-term, collaborative relationship that really builds and that isn't fund driven? If it's about disparities, how do we continue to have this conversation?"

"If I never contribute any other thing, that was worth all the heartache and the headaches and the work—I definitely feel good about that experience."

Despite these challenges, all of the members of the partnership felt that they had been personally enriched by their participation in Anukey. Many of the non-Indian members said that learning about the American Indian culture through trainings and the new relationships built in the partnership, had enriched them. Some partnership members talked about going on to seek more information through reading about American Indian culture and attending cultural events in their personal time.

Partnership members commented on the connections to their own cultures, one American Indian saying that being part of Anukey made them think more about what their own culture is, and a non-Indian participant finding similarities between American

Indian culture and their own. Both Community and County people valued the relationships they gained through working with “people of such good vision” in Anukey.

“My challenge is working in a system that I essentially don’t trust.”

A few members of the partnership said they felt like they were really helping people by working with Anukey and that being part of Anukey made them feel good about living in Ramsey County. One partnership member gained a new understanding of what families have been through in government systems.

One person learned new communication styles and another finds the long-term planning for the partnership exciting.

One member of the partnership found the challenges of Anukey enriching because of the personal dilemmas they faced about the work: “it made me look at myself and do some thinking.” Another member expressed the sense of

“[Anukey is] an opportunity to improve people’s lives just by knowing more about them and being a little flexible in our approach.”

accomplishment they feel about being part of Anukey: “I feel I have a chance to be part of the accomplishment of doing something to positively impact (potentially) the future of an entire Community—at least as that future relates to the County.”

XII. What Makes Anukey Work

Anukey is unique among government-Community partnerships because as one County staff person said, “we often don’t have things that go this smoothly.” Several members of the partnership identified two characteristics of this partnership that differentiate it from other government-Community partnership efforts: AIFC is recognized as a center of the American Indian Community in St. Paul, and the population of American Indian MFIP families is of a manageable size—a few hundred families rather than thousands.

“There’s always some magic in collaboration because it’s basically people and what they’re willing to put out there, to do and try, and we just have a good mix of personalities and a good mix of skills.”

Several people mentioned internal County factors that paved the way for a successful partnership: strong leadership and the support and participation of top managers at the beginning in three key places—Workforce Solutions, Community Human Services and the County Board of Commissioners. The American Indian Community is credited with deciding that the key factor was to build relationships by being direct and frank.

Anukey works because of the quality of relationships between the individual people of the partnership. The County and the Community share influence and leadership in Anukey. One partnership member described this equal exchange: “The County people made the effort to learn about American Indian culture and the Community people made the effort to learn about the County culture and the MFIP rules.” Anukey has had fewer

struggles than other Community-based partnerships because of the carefully paced trust building approach and the purposeful process that the Community initiated.

On a practical level, Anukey works because the County Financial Workers and the AIFC Employment Counselors work together. American Indian partnership members mentioned how important it was to see the Financial Workers making an effort to be part of the Community by participating in Community events.

Overall, Anukey works because it is creating a sub-system within the big system. Anukey is an ongoing partnership so it has the ability to continue evolving to meet the changing needs of American Indian MFIP families.

XIII. Taking Risks

Ideas about risks in the Anukey partnership were mentioned several times from both the County and Community perspectives. One County staff person remembered a Community member asking early on in the partnership, “What do we have to lose?” The members at that time felt that American Indians were being served so poorly under the existing system that trying something new, even if it didn’t work, would not have been worse than what was currently happening.

Another County staff person articulated the risk the County perceived in admitting that they found racial disparities in their MFIP outcomes:

“Going out into the Community and saying essentially we’re not doing a very good job, and we want to talk about it—government doesn’t tend to take those kinds of risks because generally what they’d like to say is we’ve got it all together, we’re doing really well...but it’s been a non-issue in the press.”

Ramsey County is the first county in Minnesota that took courage and initiative to address racial disparities. Ramsey County convened County and Community leadership to discuss its findings and state that the County Employment Service delivery system in use was not working for American Indians. At the start of the partnership, the County was committed to solving the racial disparities and as the work began, the County made the commitment to work with these Communities to come up with solutions and to fully implement their recommendations to address the unique challenges communities of color were facing in moving toward economic and family stability.

By developing this type of partnership with a specific Community one County staff person felt that she was running the risk of co-opting communities of color to impose a bad program on their own people. While there was broad agreement within the Anukey partnership about the need for systems change, there was some concern about putting cultural partners in a difficult spot by asking them to carry the program forward while simultaneously figuring out how to change the system. What the partnership has chosen to do may or may not be the

“Sometimes I felt like the ‘Indian scout’ hired to keep an eye on the people and kind of keep them in line.”

best solution, but the partnership had to start somewhere to begin to solve the racial disparities and, at the time, this was a reasonable thing to do.

XIV. Accomplishments

When asked about the significant accomplishments of the Anukey partnership, the most frequent responses from members of the partnership were:

- The partnership itself; the history-making relationship between the County and the American Indian Community
- Co-locating Financial Workers at AIFC and their collaboration with all agencies in the AIFC building
- AIFC becoming an Employment Services provider
- The trainings about American Indian culture and history

Other accomplishments identified include those specific to the partnership such as the relationship building at the frontline staff level, sustaining the partnership through staff changes, and long-term planning and visioning for the partnership.

Community members of the partnership cited the accomplishments of bringing County resources and employees into the Community and working with County leadership that believed in AIFC's ability to make things better. Furthermore, Community members believe that the success of Anukey has been instrumental in enabling the American Indian Community to begin discussions with the County's Child Welfare/Child Protection departments.

“One of the big accomplishments is the fact that we can now open that door [to Child Protection] because our Community has been at that door for a long time trying to work and never been heard. Now with the success of Anukey, we have some weight to our voice that is helping us feel heard.”

Adding the Employment Services program was a significant operational change for the American Indian Family Center. Additionally, AIFC Employment Services' staff decided to use a new outcome measurement tool developed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Employability Measure. This tool will be used statewide beginning in late 2008. Because AIFC was one of the first agencies to implement it, AIFC Employment Services' staff has been able to provide feedback to the State on how the tool can be effectively used with MFIP participants.

Lifetrack Resources, the agency chosen by AIFC to collaboratively provide Employment Services to American Indians, made an operational change in its data tracking practices as a result of Anukey. They began to track the reasons for sanctioning American Indian MFIP participants.

Policy Accomplishments

County members of the partnership held up the reduced rate of sanctioning American Indian MFIP participants as an accomplishment. One County member of the partnership

talked about how the County and the Community are meeting each other halfway in this partnership and explained, “The sharing of the historical trauma experienced by the American Indian Community says something about the level of trust that has developed within this Partnership.”

Many members of the partnership identified operational changes that have occurred within the County as a result of Anukey. The County has changed its system of service delivery to American Indian MFIP participants, the County has consolidated American Indian caseloads, MFIP Vocational Assessments can now be done in a culturally competent way by AIFC psychologists, County staff are more aware of American Indian culture after the trainings, and the placement of Financial Workers in the Community is going very well. According to one County staff person, “We’ll never go back to where we were before. We know too much now and can never do that.”

Systemic Accomplishments

“One member of the partnership saw the fact that County Commissioners are aware of the work going on in the American Indian Community, and support it, as an indicator of systemic change. Others mentioned the County’s outreach and investment in the Indian Community. Yet another remarked on how, for the first time, American Indian people are working together with other American Indian people on behalf of their Community and the County.”

“There’s actually been an outreach to come in and say how can we do a better job instead of saying this is what we can do better for them, and then going in and dictating to the Community this is what you have to do, and you will be successful because that didn’t work.”

Some members of the partnership talked about systemic changes they would like to see as a result of Anukey. One said maybe someday the County lobbyist could include possible MFIP rule changes in the County’s legislative proposal that could make a big difference for this population.

“Ultimately, if there’s not some changes even at the State level, there’s a limited change that we can make at the County.”

Currently, there is no separation in the law regarding MFIP delivery for different ethnic groups so any policy changes passed now would be applied to everyone on MFIP. Another potential systemic change that members of the partnership would like to see is to have other counties in Minnesota learn from the Anukey model.

Other Minnesota counties and the State’s Department of Human Services are interested in ways to address racial disparities. According to an interviewee, Dakota County visited AIFC and met with the American Indian leaders who are involved in Anukey. Although Dakota County was interested in the Anukey model, they were disinclined to invest the resources Community members felt it would take to develop a strong partnership.

Other counties have pursued independent means of reducing disparities. Anoka County consolidated its American Indian caseload and combined Employment Services and Financial Worker positions into one position to serve this population. According to an interviewee, Hennepin County has Child Protection workers in the Community and has co-located Financial Workers at the Fond-du-Lac pharmacy.

“Of all the accomplishments, I’m hoping to see that our families feel better off and feel like things are going better because they’ve been involved with us.”

While these accomplishments are undeniably significant, several interviewees talked about how it is important to keep in mind the bottom line: does the Anukey partnership make a difference for the participants? At the moment, this question remains unanswered in a documented way. The Anukey Evaluation sub-committee is developing a plan to survey American Indian MFIP participants at a Community event determine any differences they have experienced since the beginning of the Anukey partnership.

XV. Societal Context

The context surrounding the Anukey partnership revolves around two major issues: the persistence of racism and many types of disparities and historical trauma within the American Indian Community.

The Anukey partnership exists in the context of many indicators showing that American Indians in Ramsey County lack access to resources and are economically distressed and disadvantaged in Ramsey County.¹ American Indians are disproportionately represented in the prison population, the homeless population, and among truant school children. All of these disparities relate to the long history of the oppression of American Indians and the entrenched nature of racism in society.

One partnership member observed that every county in Minnesota with a significant population of either African Americans or American Indians has racial disparities in their MFIP program. This realization made the person question “How much of this is an implementation issue and how much of this is hardwired into the state program?”

As one member of the partnership pointed out, ‘MFIP - under federal policies, makes it hard for participants to obtain or further their education. American Indians are likely to come on welfare with very low education levels.’ In addition, another partnership member believes that ‘American Indian families were not familiar with new ‘welfare to

“[We’ve got] a number of families that have grown up on what welfare used to be, producing another generation of welfare-dependent families.”

work’ system expectations and did not fully participate or comprehend the potential impact their non-participation would have.’ To compound the issue of non-participation further is the fact that the rules and regulations of Tribal TANF – welfare to work administered by tribal governments on the reservations, are very different compared to regular TANF or MFIP.

¹ “Anukey Partnership Update and Talking Circle.” PowerPoint slides. August 2007.

These American Indian families that may have lived in, on or off the reservation and in the urban area may not have clearly understood which rules and regulations applied to them and when.

The original study that revealed racial disparities in Ramsey County’s MFIP program also uncovered the issue of misapplied sanctions. The evaluators looked at American Indians who had been extended beyond the 60-month time limit for reasons of mental illness, low IQ, or serious physical illness and found that these same people had been sanctioned for non-participation while they were on MFIP.

Eighty percent of the American Indians in extension at the time of this study had also been sanctioned, leading one member of the partnership to believe that the high sanction rate was not so much a compliance issue as it was an issue of inappropriate expectations: “Maybe if we’d known what we knew at five years, we wouldn’t have sanctioned in the first, second, or third year.”

“Here’s an example of institutional racism—we’re responding to people who are unable to participate by punishing them. And then we get to the end of the road and we go, ‘gee, you couldn’t do it, could you.’”

“As I sit there and listen to all the stuff about sovereignty and land, it’s amazing to me that they ever agreed to sit down and talk to us [County people].”

Some of the issues that affect American Indian MFIP participants are distinct from other MFIP populations. For instance, centuries of government policies have attempted to deprive American Indians of their land and their culture. As a result, American Indians tend to distrust government.

With the shift to urban areas after World War II, American Indians struggled with the loss of some norms that had been traditionally defined in Community. According to one partnership member, the basic skills lost included self-esteem and a work ethic. This person explained:

“The boarding school era and the historical traumas have affected a lot of our families’ ability to understand and pass down parenting skills, and so we’re always working with our families on refining and helping them be good parents because they’ve lost what was traditionally passed on in a Community setting.”

One significant disparity that affects American Indian MFIP participants’ ability to find and keep jobs is the high rate of mental health issues in the American Indian Community. AIFC is very clear about its mission to foster “stable families, stable homes, stable lives,” but as one partnership member observed, “mental health issues tend to interact in un-stabilizing ways” with employment.

Another challenge to American Indians is being immersed in a society where European American culture is so dominant:

“What do you really expect an employment service counselor to do after 500 years of genocide? Is it at all realistic to think that an employment service counselor can change those kinds of issues?”

“Our people have to interact with a Community that’s not its own a majority of the time, and that culture clash sometimes really interferes with a person’s concept of their self-identity and self-esteem. Because that might be how you act when you’re with Indian people, but you have to interact with these people and those people—it’s probably why we have so many mental health issues.”

The Anukey partnership is working in this context to try to reduce disparities affecting American Indians that arise within Ramsey County programs and services.

XVI. Conclusion and Recommendations for Similar Partnerships

Conclusion

The Anukey partnership is a uniquely successful joint effort between local government and a cultural Community. However, the factors that make Anukey successful and unique can be replicated in other settings by other government institutions that truly desire to partner with a Community of color. First and foremost, the government entity must approach the Community without a preset agenda. Government must be open to whatever the Community brings to the table, and they must listen to the Community with great care. In order for any real change to occur, the partnership needs to be long-term, not one-time. And in order for a long-term partnership to flourish, influence must be shared equally among government and Community.

Hopefully, in the future, Anukey’s uniqueness will be passed to other Counties and government institutions as they learn from this model and adapt it to working with their own communities of color.

Recommendations

The advice members of the Anukey partnership had for other communities and government entities considering a partnership is to center on the theme of listening. Anukey members believe that the way, in which, a county or other government body approaches a Community they want to partner with is crucial to the success or failure of the effort.

- ✓ “Really listen instead of going in with preconceived notions. Be ready to learn.”
- ✓ “Don’t go out and ask if you’re not going to do what the Community wants you to do. Don’t go out and ask and then say, ‘Oh, we know better’.”
- ✓ “Go to the Community and ask about what’s working and what’s not working.”
- ✓ “Make the relationship an objective.”

- ✓ “If you're going to do it, don't come riding in with trumpets blaring, flags flying and say, ‘look what we thought up for you.’ Come in and say, ‘we need your help.’ And from there, go.”
- ✓ “Stop coming up with a plan and start listening.”

Another batch of recommendations involve how to build the partnership:

- ✓ “[Have a] common vision and then determine how we get there together because we can’t do it independently of one another.”
- ✓ “Be honest about outcomes.”
- ✓ “Find that piece of the Community that understands the mandates and measurements and the outcomes that need to happen.”
- ✓ “Own that it is the system that is not working for families, rather than the families not working for the system.”
- ✓ “It has absolutely got to be joint decision making. It cannot be you advise us and then we’re going to go into our little vacuum and figure out how we should respond.”
- ✓ “Include some of the people that are hurting as members of the partnership.”
- ✓ “Allow the Community to assess the system.”
- ✓ Be open and flexible to going outside your traditional system model of service delivery for all because not one size fits all.”
- ✓ “It takes courage and some willingness and some clarity of purpose to be the one real outlier of all the counties.”
- ✓ “If you can take this system of 8,000 some families and create these pockets that don’t think like the whole large system but say these are the families and here’s the context they need to be served in—then you don’t drown in the logistics.”
- ✓ “Be willing to challenge the bureaucracy—don’t just keep doing things the same way because that’s how we’ve always done it.”
- ✓ “The American Indian population [is unique] and you have to respect how things evolve and happen in the Community if you want to work with them.”