

## **Strengthening the cultural wellbeing of indigenous social work students: Confronting racism and promoting cultural safety and respect**

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Recent research (Zuchowski, Savage, Miles & Gair, 2013) has identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island social work students confront significant racism during their field education placements. These experiences compound the difficulties confronting Indigenous people seeking to enter the profession of social work with a view to change. Recurring themes in the literature highlight the serious need for change such as the social work profession's complicity in forcibly removing Indigenous children from their family, culture and country; in disregarding Aboriginal experience and cultural ways of helping; and in perpetuating the unchallenged influence of Eurocentrism in social work practice and education. Attracting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to social work will contribute to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges, skills and ways of working in professional practice and in social work education.

This presentation will describe and extend the findings from a 2011 collaborative research project which explored field education experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work students and graduates. The original outcomes from the project highlighted experiences of subtle and overt, personal, organisational and cultural racism as every day features of field education placements and discussed the significant implications of these experiences for social work education units and agencies. This presentation will advance these discussions by highlighting strategies to address racism and support students throughout their social work education; including the use of cultural mentors and cultural preparation programs for non-Indigenous field educators.

### **References:**

Zuchowski, I, Savage, D., Miles, D., & Gair, S. (2013). Decolonising field education - challenging Australian social work praxis. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education*, 15 (1), 47-62.