

## EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: TUNNEL OF OPPRESSION

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### **Issue(s) Being Addressed:**

A nationally recognized program "Tunnel of Oppression" is an excellent way to educate your campus and community about pressing social issues.

### **Background:**

Originally developed at Western Illinois University, Tunnel of Oppression is an interactive, walk-through museum like experience which combines art, multi-media, words and other mediums of expression to evoke emotion and concern from those that walk through its doors. Tunnel of Oppression focuses on issues of concern that the world still faces today. This program is recognized nationally by NACURH and has been offered at a number of college campuses across the county.

### **Overview:**

Eastern Michigan University first offered Tunnel of Oppression in January 2005 in conjunction with a Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration. University Housing formed committees to tackle the five chosen themes of race relations, domestic abuse, access, sexuality and body image. Each theme had a staff/faculty sponsor and student room chair(s). The room chairs attended 3 meetings and relayed the information back to their team. Altogether, 60 students, faculty and staff worked on this project. The project name was changed to "Beyond Words" (from Indiana State University) to convey hope and progress.

The five rooms were located on the first floor of a residence hall on campus that did not have residents. There was an additional room with information on each issue as well as a wall covered with large sheets of blank paper for participants to put down in words how they felt. Evaluations were completed to ascertain their learning. There was also a room with counselors on hand for participants if they wanted to speak with someone about their experience.

### **The Event:**

The actual event took place January 16, 2005 from 6-9 pm, January 17, 2005 from 10 am – 8 pm, and January 18, 2005 from 6-8 pm. On the 18<sup>th</sup> at 8:30, there was a wrap up reflection during which the teams for each room were able to discuss their creations as well as answer questions from participants. The reflection proved to be worthwhile and meaningful as participants were further challenged to take back what they had learned and apply it to their everyday lives.

### **Key Components:**

- Hold the event in conjunction with another event on campus which will bring in a larger and more diverse audience
- Bring in an array of volunteers from varying departments which also allows for a larger and more diverse audience as well as a diversity of input and creative ideas.
- Getting support from around campus allows for a greater pool of resources; strong support from around campus means that you are one step closer to having a successful event; specific individual departmental supports could include: health education and services, housing, campus life or student activities, specific academic departments that may have a vested interest in the particular issues, and office of diversity and affirmative action.
- Start as early as six months in advance of the projected project date
- Establish a relationship with your facilities crew so they can help aid in the actual construction if needed or take down of physical objects
- Work with issues that can be tied to the campus and the surrounding community; This will help participants see the issues as relevant to their lives.
- To create ownership of the project, form committees of volunteers and allow them to choose their issue
- You want this experience to be like none other that your campus and community have experienced and you want people to walk away with these images in their head; Allow for creativity and shock value (hence the support of the campus is CRUCIAL for this to happen).