IndigiWellbeing™: Pilot of a wellbeing program grounded in Indigenous culture

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**Background**
- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased stress, anxiety, and decreased wellbeing.
- This has been amplified in communities that are already facing disparities and bearing the brunt of the pandemic, such as Indigenous communities.
- The IndigiWellbeing™ Program was created as a potential method of ameliorating negative mental health outcomes by focusing on wellness from an Indigenous perspective.

**Activities**
- During the current pilot year of IndigiWellbeing, a list of wellness topics that originated from or incorporated aspects of Indigenous culture.
- All event speakers were Indigenous, to center Indigenous voices.
- All events were open to everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, as well as those under the age of 18 with parent permission.
- Each virtual session was conducted over password protected ZOOM, designed to be one hour.
- One session was conducted over Winter Break to provide a stress relief family friendly event during the stressful Holiday season, Winter Storytelling Wellness with the author of Fry Bread.
- The one in-person event to date provided a mentoring opportunity for students with guest Angeline Boulley, author of the Fire Keeper’s Daughter.
- Incentives for attending events were given to all who attended or items from Indigenous businesses were raffled at the end of the virtual events.
- Surveys were conducted to gauge the impact of events on participant mental wellbeing, future events desired, ways to improve the program and demographics.

**Purpose**
- IndigiWellbeing is an Indigenous led initiative that has been positively received in its pilot year to engage with the University of Arizona and greater Tucson Indigenous communities.
- It is one of few wellness programs focused on Indigenous wellness throughout the country that is situated in a University.
- IndigiWellbeing aims to provide programming (virtual and in-person as appropriate with the pandemic) related to infusing culture into wellness to bring balance back into the lives of students and community members.
- Future programming will incorporate survey feedback such as participants desire for more programming with Indigenous authors in person, more events with Indigenous speakers/presenters from outside the United States and Canada (First Nations).

**Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wellbeing Events</th>
<th>Unique Registrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress Busting Breathing Techniques</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breath of Life: Indigenous Yoga</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Storytelling Wellness: Kevin Maillard, Author of Fry Bread</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re)Imagining / (Re)Creating Spaces for Intergenerational Healing: A Queer &amp; Two-Spirit Pathway to a Healthy Well-Being with Souksavanth Keovorobath</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling Wellness: Angeline Boulley, Author of Fire Keeper’s Daughter</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness through Pow wow Aerobics: Dallas Arcand</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Unique Attendees over all events:</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professions of Event Attendees**
- Tribal Leader: 1
- Student (Undergraduate): 31
- Student (Graduate): 68
- Staff-University of Arizona: 45
- Faculty-University of Arizona: 24
- Faculty or staff-Other University than University of Arizona: 24
- Community Member-non UA affiliated: 72

Figure 1: Affiliation of attendees for IndigiWellbeing programming across all six events so far.

- IndigiWellbeing programming has had 284 unique individuals participating in one or more event.
- Almost half of all registered participants identify as American Indian/Alaska Native/Indigenous.

**Discussion**
- IndigiWellbeing is an Indigenous led initiative that has been positively received in its pilot year to engage with the University of Arizona and greater Tucson Indigenous communities.
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- IndigiWellbeing aims to provide programming (virtual and in-person as appropriate with the pandemic) related to infusing culture into wellness to bring balance back into the lives of students and community members.
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**Conclusion**
- Culturally grounded programming is needed to improve wellbeing, to potentially offset negative mental health outcomes among Indigenous populations.
- While launched as a response to combat the negative mental health effects of the pandemic, IndigiWellbeing will continue to help increase the visibility of wellness and Indigenous ways of positive adaptation.

**References**

**Acknowledgements**
- University of Arizona American Indian Initiatives

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Image 1: PhD Student/IndigiWellbeing coordinator William Carson, putting together mailers for the Winter Storytelling Wellness event with Kevin Maillard.

Image 2: Results of the IndigiWellbeing post events survey which asked those who attended whether the wellness events had a positive effect on their mental wellbeing.

Image 3: Our first in-person event, Storytelling Wellness with Angeline Boulley at Loews Venteana Canal. All participants were required to wear KN95’s, we provided and social distance.