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NDSU program receives grant funding to launch LGBT-affirmative training

FARGO – Two new grants will help faculty members in North Dakota State University's couple and family therapy program share their expertise on providing supportive therapy to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender clients.

By: [Ryan Johnson](#), INFORUM

FARGO – Two new grants will help faculty members in North Dakota State University's couple and family therapy program share their expertise on providing supportive therapy to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender clients.

Associate professor Christi McGeorge said a \$60,000 grant from the Otto Bremer Foundation, as well as a \$3,300 grant from the Fargo-Moorhead Foundation, will be used primarily to offer training to practicing therapists in the community.

The grant funding also was awarded to program coordinator Tom Stone Carlson and assistant professor Kristen Benson.

Training sessions will be from 1 to 4 p.m. March 1 and April 12; interested therapists are asked to call Michelle Pearson at (701) 231-8534. Faculty members also will be available to visit therapy agencies in the region to provide additional staff training.

McGeorge said the course will give local professionals an overview of the issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity, including how homophobia and heterosexism can negatively affect the therapy process, as well as offer specific things they can do to make their practice more affirmative and supportive.

It's an important issue in Fargo-Moorhead, she said, because the community serves as a regional "hub," with many rural residents coming here to find therapists who are equipped to help their families and relationships.

"People who hold negative beliefs about any population and maybe also don't have the skillset to work with those populations, they may be well-meaning therapists, but they can create great harm," she said.

McGeorge said the NDSU program surveyed couple and family therapy students nationwide, finding nearly 60 percent had received no training on working with LGBT clients.

"It's really important that they have this opportunity to both explore their own beliefs and explore their own skillset," she said. "While our program is dedicated to training therapists to do this work, most training programs don't address working with the LGBT community."

The new funding also will be used to expand the NDSU program's family therapy services to the LGBT community and continue development of the LGBT Mental Health Alliance, a group founded by McGeorge about seven years ago to provide resources to practicing therapists and to help local residents find affirmative therapists in the region.

She said the money will allow the alliance to launch a website, making it easier for professionals and residents to network, find the latest LGBT therapy resources and look for help when they need it.

NDSU's couple and family therapy program has scheduled a kickoff event from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. today to discuss the project and hear from the foundations that are providing the grants.

The event will be at the Family Therapy Center, 1919 N. University Drive in Fargo, and is open to community therapists, members of the LGBT community and students interested in pursuing graduate work in family therapy.

Readers can reach Forum reporter Ryan Johnson at (701) 241-5587

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