Strategy 3: Learning Community Initiatives – Tunnel of Awareness Community Gathering

Facilitator(s): Resident Mentors

Date (When Lesson Takes Place): March – Week 4

Target Audience(s): Floor communities

Community Involved: All

Rationale/Purpose:
The purpose of this Community Gathering is to engage residents in a social justice dialogue and reflection through the annual Tunnel of Awareness event. Tunnel of Awareness is a unique and interactive social justice experience that is in its third year at the University of South Carolina.

At Tunnel of Awareness, participants will have the opportunity to move through different exhibits that focus on specific social awareness topics, including suicide awareness, HIV/AIDS, gender and more. Tunnel of Awareness seeks to help participants develop a deeper awareness of social issues that continue to plague society today.

University Housing Learning Goals:

Awareness of Others Goal 1 – Evaluate cultural biases while working towards valuing others for their differences
- Tier 1 – Identify their cultural views while recognizing differences in others’ views

Awareness of Others Goal 2 – Incorporate a variety of viewpoints into their understanding of the world
- Tier 1 – Identify that cultural viewpoints exist beyond their viewpoints

Materials/Preparation:
- Materials for social activity afterwards
- List of upcoming events/initiatives
- Materials needed to create advertising
- Card Swipe Machine
- Determine a time to attend the Tunnel of Awareness based on resident availability and pre-register the group online

Facilitator Guide:

1. Before the Community Gathering:
   a. Gather the materials listed above. Crafting resources can be accessed via the University Housing Resource Room located on the Garden Level of Patterson Hall.
   b. Touch base with your supervisor to:
      i. Gather important updates that need to be shared.
      ii. Discuss any purchases or funds that will be used for the community gathering.
      iii. If applicable: Discuss with your co-RM(s) how the community gathering will be executed (individually or jointly).
   c. Create a list of upcoming events/initiatives to share with the floor.
   d. Develop an innovative and engaging advertisement to publicize your community gathering. This can be anything from digital media, fliers, door clings/hangers, post-it notes, etc.
e. Participants are able to pre-register online or walk up to Tunnel of Awareness, and will go through the Tunnel in groups of 10 or less.
f. Decide on a time to take your floor through the Tunnel based on the availability of your group. Encourage students who are not able to attend with your floor, to go through the experience on their own time to fully participate in the next floor meeting activity.
g. What topics are covered in Tunnel of Awareness? Each year, there is a proposal period to decide what issues will be in that year’s experience. The exhibits will be decided upon by mid-February of each year and will change each year based on the proposals received.

2. During the Community Gathering:
   a. Part One: Tunnel of Awareness Experience
      i. Participants will be debriefed prior to entering the Tunnel – this debrief will let participants know what to expect and prepare them for possible intense feelings and reactions to the exhibits.
      ii. Participants will then enter the Tunnel, which contains several exhibits organized as rooms. Each group will then progress and walk through a self-guided tour of the Tunnel.
      iii. At the end of the Tunnel there will be a Light Room where students will have the opportunity to share their thoughts or takeaways on a large banner with thoughts from other students, as well as pick up resources on how to get involved with the community or in helping the various topics that they observe in the exhibit.
   b. Part Two: Community Gathering/Reflection of Tunnel of Awareness and Bulletin Boards
      i. Let your residents know why reflecting on the experience is necessary. The reflection period after participants go through the Tunnel is an important aspect of the overall experience.
         1. The reflection period provides participants an opportunity to process their feelings after seeing the exhibits. The exhibits are purposefully meant to inspire strong emotion.
         2. The reflection period allows participants to go deeper into their overall experience and to connect what they have learned with their past experiences.
         3. The reflection period helps participants gain a better understanding of how the issues they learned about fit into a more global context and relate to their lives.
      ii. Question Prompts: Please ask 1-2 questions from each category below.
         1. What?
            a. What are you feeling right now?
            b. What happened in the Tunnel that you reacted strongly to?
            c. What did you see or experience or learn in the Tunnel that surprised you?
            d. Which exhibit did you have the strongest reaction to, and why?
            e. What questions do you have that you want to pose to the group as we move forward in our dialogue?
         2. So what?
            a. What did you learn during the Tunnel or from viewing the bulletin boards that you didn’t know before you went through?
            b. Did your thoughts on any of the issues presented change? How?
            c. What did you agree with? What did you disagree with?
            d. How did these experiences affect how you view these issues in society?
         3. Now what?
            a. Where do you want to go from here?
            b. How do the issues explored in the Tunnel appear in your own world? In the Carolinian community?
c. What can you do with the knowledge and experience that you gained in the Tunnel or through the information you received on bulletin boards?
d. What, if anything, will you do differently after this experience?
e. How will you inspire others to care about the issues that you have explored?

iii. Tips for Facilitating Dialogue:
   1. Tip #1 – Silence is Golden
      a. A key to good facilitation is developing a healthy respect for silence. The silence can feel unbearably long and your mind starts racing with doubt – “Did they understand my question? Is anyone interested in this topic?” To cover, we often try rephrasing the question or asking a different (hopefully, more interesting!) question altogether. Meanwhile, the audience was still thinking about your first question… now they’re totally confused. Which question do you want them to answer? To avoid this entire mess, pause long enough to allow attendees to absorb the context of your question and mentally prepare their responses. This can take time so have a sip of coffee or water while you wait it out. The longer the silence, the higher the likelihood that someone will eventually speak up to break the verbal log jam.

   2. Tip #2 – Ease Them Into It
      a. Speaking up in a crowd is tough. Most people abhor public speaking and revealing information outside of the familiar walls of your company requires a trusted environment. Don’t walk into the group and put out a zinger question and expect everyone to jump in and chat away. Recognize this and warm your audience up before you expect them to break down and admit their deepest fears. Here’s the idea… give them LOTS OF CLUES that talking among the group will happen. Perhaps set up an intro where you frame the conversation for a few minutes and then start asking questions (aka “opening up the room for dialogue”). Even better, tell them the question you will ask well in advance. Then avoid the qualitative personal response questions and instead use the “show of hands” option a few times. This gets people’s bodies moving, drives a little more interaction, and warms them up to being called upon.

   3. Tip #3 – Stimulate Dialogue
      a. Have you ever seen a facilitator call on someone in the group to provide context and as soon as the last words leave the commenters mouth, the facilitator is on to the next topic? Does that feel like a conversation to you? Probably not, and it won’t feel like a conversation to anyone in the room either. If someone is providing context, ask a few thoughtful follow-up questions. This healthy exchange might trigger ideas for others in the room and it provides time for them to formulate thoughts and jump in. You must build momentum and follow the natural flow by embracing unique points of view within the context of the broader discussion. Now that the conversation is humming, let’s keep it going…

   4. Tip #4 – Control “Excessive Talkers”
      a. Nothing kills engagement more than an “Excessive Talker.” If one person goes on and on about their experiences (whether on/off topic) you will lose your audience. How many times have you seen audience members
quietly pull out their cellphone and get up and “stretch” in the back of the room? That’s code for, “You just lost my attention.” Instead, wait for the “Excessive Talkers” to take a breath and then jump in with, “So it sounds like what you’re saying is…; has anyone else had the same experience?” If they’re not breathing (“Excessive Talkers” are superhuman) then you have to simply cut them off completely, but politely. Cite time constraints as the culprit, offer to parking lot their issue or take it offline and move on. Make sure you call on someone else to talk so _____ doesn’t grab the reins again. This takes practice and more than a little courage. The goal is to make them feel listened to while acknowledging the need to move on.

c. **Part 3: Hall Updates**
   i. Provide residents with any important updates that are/will be occurring in the hall.
      1. Upcoming events and building initiatives:
         a. Community-wide, LLC specific, CET, Hall Government, etc.
      2. Date and time range of next community gathering.
      3. Important building updates from your supervisor.

b. **Part 4: Social Activity**
   i. This is a chance for you to use your RM community development funds. A list of appropriate activities is listed below, but it is not comprehensive. If you want to something that isn’t on this list, it must be pre-approved by your supervisor.
      1. Baking cookies/cupcakes/brownies for your residents and allowing them to mingle on the floor.
      2. Floor Dinner.
         a. *Example:* Ordering pizza/other foods for a meal.
      3. Take your students to Yoghut, Russell House, etc. as a floor outing.

3. **After the Community Gathering:**
   a. Follow up with any resident who seems distraught/uneasy/confused about their experience or the conversation.
      i. Ask what experiences are sticking with them and how you can help.
      ii. Be sure to use referral resources when necessary (Counseling Center, LGBTQ Center, etc.).
   b. Meet with your supervisor and let them know about any student that was struggling with the Tunnel of Awareness experience.
   c. Submit an Interaction Form.

**Assessment:**
1. Interaction Form.
2. Tunnel of Awareness Surveys