



Isabella County Human Rights Committee

About the Committee

The Human Rights Committee (HRC) was established by the Isabella County Board of Commissioners in 2008. Its purpose is to promote human rights and diversity in Isabella County. The HRC also reviews and recommends action on issues and concerns related to human rights in Isabella County.

About the Study

In 2012, the Human Rights Committee received an allocation from the semi-annual 2% distribution of Tribal Casino Revenues to undertake a study of the nature and extent of acts of discrimination against Native Americans in Isabella County. Over 100 members of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe interviewed over a four month period.

Study of Micro-Aggressions

and Other Hostile Encounters Between Tribal Members and non-Natives in Isabella County



The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe

The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe is comprised of three bands of Ojibway (Saginaw, Black River, Swan Creek), who lived in the eastern region of what is now Michigan. For the past 200 years, the Tribe has been wrought with destruction, including wars, disease, forced relocations, and boarding schools. Today there are over 2,700 enrolled tribal members and about 1,900 living in Isabella County. Native Americans constitute the largest racial minority in the community. The Tribe is the largest employer in Isabella County and is responsible for \$216,313,967 in funds to the County since 1994.

What Are Micro-Aggressions?

Micro-aggressions are defined as subtle, less overt actions or language that demean or marginalize members of a racial or ethnic minority.

Results of the Study

The study revealed that numerous instances of micro-aggressions against Native Americans by non-Natives remain a significant barrier to progress towards creating an atmosphere of mutual respect in Isabella County.

Observed Stereotypes

- Historical
- Dirty
- Poor
- Lazy
- Uneducated
- Alcoholic
- Undeserving (most prominent)

The Costs of Visibility

- Overcharging
- Being followed
- Forced into false roles
- Invisibility and poor service
- Refusal to acknowledge cultural difference

Participants Said...

“People look down on us, you know.”

“Some of the people and some of the businesses here in town are discriminating.”

“They swear that everybody is on drugs or alcoholics.”

“If they see you’re Native, they treat you differently. Some, I’ve even heard them say ‘mark it up, mark the price up.’”

“And it’s almost like they were happier when you were down. They felt more in control.”

Responding to Acts of Micro-Aggression

- Be prepared
- Start where they are, not where you are
- Develop ready responses (see below)
- Challenge bias and take a vocal stand against it
- Remain calm and thoughtful
- Use it as a teaching moment

Here are starting points for your ready responses¹:

1. Assume Good Intent and Explain Impact
 1. “I know you mean well, but that hurts.”
2. Ask a Question
 1. “What do you mean?”
 2. “I’m sorry, what was that?”
3. Interrupt and Redirect
 1. “Whoa, let’s not go down that path.”
4. Broaden to Universal Human Behavior
 1. “I don’t think it’s a Native thing. I mean I think that applies to everyone.”
5. Make It Individual
 1. “You mean all Tribal members? Or are you speaking of someone in particular?”
6. Say OUCH!

To learn more, read the full report once it becomes available on the HRC web site (<http://isabellacounty.org/dept/hrc>).

1. From <http://www.ouchthatstereotypehurts.com/>