"THE SENSE OF SOLIDARITY":

relational ethics, peer support, & specialization resources for rural & Indigenous SW education program alumni

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Community Need

Humboldt Social Work Alumni are driven by a commitment to the shared ethics of rural and Indigenous SW, and seek to work in alignment with a relational worldview. These values often conflict with workplaces/create additional strain that lead to moral injury and feelings of isolation, frustration, and disappointment. When social workers are supported to engage in peer support and contribute to the growth and development of other SWers, it helps alleviate these challenges (Golia & McGovern, 2015). Additionally, new CSWE Educational Policy lists alumni services as a resource for student development (CSWE, 2022).
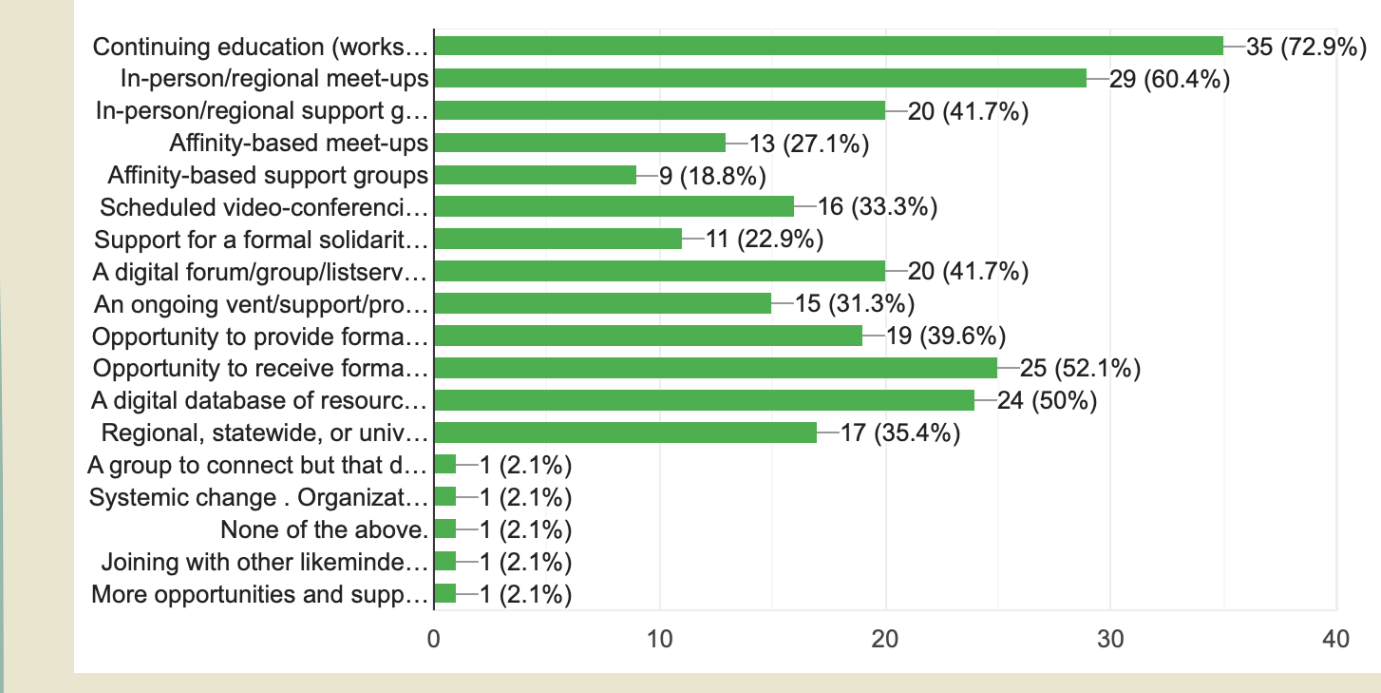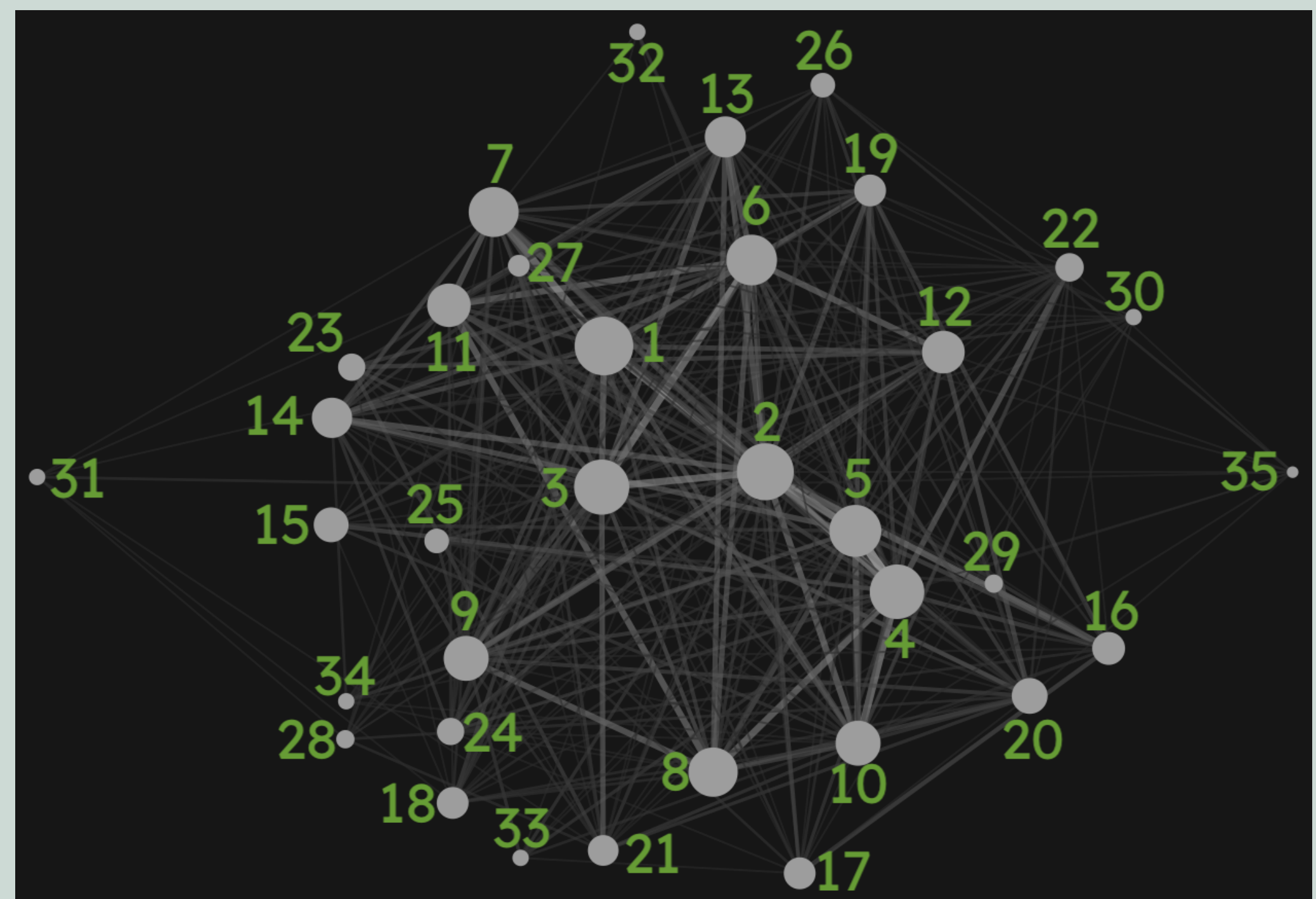
Credibility Statement

As a euro-descendent queer born and raised on unceded Wiyot land, I work in responsibility to engage in anti-colonial struggle. For our communities to thrive we must ensure that retention of ethical, passionate social workers is addressed **now**. I have seen the agencies we work for continually fail us in this, so we must take the lead.

As a current student, a colleague of alumni, and former youth recipient of support from alumni of the Program, I have a personal interest in doing justice to the needs identified in this project.

Acknowledgements

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Methods

I created a question guide (Creswell, 2018) using resources from prior SW alumni research efforts and literature. I created focus group questions and a mixed-methods survey using the guide. I facilitated a focus group with members of my cohort, and distributed the survey through multiple channels to reach Program alumni. I used an Indigenized mixed-methods approach in my analysis and design, leveraging thematic co-occurrence analysis, trend analysis, and relational epistemology (Chilisa, 2019, pp. 147-166).

Force-directed Graph

I utilized force-directed graphing to better understand relationships between codes that are not readily apparent in the conventional thematic co-occurrence matrix. This ensures that data is not understood only in terms of bi-lateral intersections, but the complex relational web between themes.

1. R: Connectedness
2. N: Shared Values
3. PS: Consultation
4. R: Leadership
5. R: Responsibility
6. N: Resource Sharing
7. R: Personal Growth
8. PS: Mentorship
9. N: Connection to Program
10. E: Anti-Oppressive Practice
11. PS: Skill-Sharing
12. N: Regional Connections
13. N: Specialization Support
14. R: Reciprocity
15. R: Service
16. E: Isolation/Difference
17. E: Comp. Practice/Values
18. N: Ongoing Education
19. R: Hope
20. N: Comm. Building / Care
21. S: Peers Outside Agency
22. E: Advocacy
23. N: Virtual Connection
24. PS: Supervision
25. E: Moral Distress / Injury
26. C: Limited Capacity/Time
27. S: Peers In-Agency
28. S: Therapy
29. Disapp./Dissat. in Program
30. C: Burn Out
31. S: Supervisor
32. R: Accountability
33. C: Retribution
34. R: Legacy
35. S: Natural

"Which of the following do you think would help your personal sustainability, if they're not already something you utilize?"

Concept map of the focus group transcript and open-ended survey questions, utilizing noun-phrase analysis. This assisted me in refining my thematic codes.

REFERENCES

Theoretical Issues

- Agency barriers, little success alleviating client suffering, limited advancement, negative perceptions of SWs, and chronic stress correlated with mental health struggles (Turley, et al., 2022; Wirth, et al., 2019).

- Limited ability for justice-doing practice contributes to moral injury [aka burnout] (Reynolds, 2011).

- Ed. program ethics not aligning with community work reality creates isolation, frustration, & hopelessness (Richards-Schuster, et al., 2015).

- Mutual accountability, ongoing education, competent supervision/mentorship, peer support, and community grounded in liberatory, relational ideologies able to take collective action increase sustainability and wellness (Campbell & Lavallee, 2020; Collins, et al., 2020; Golia & McGovern, 2015; Reynolds, 2011).

Program Recs

- **Engage Native Wellness Council & Comm. Advisory Committee:** Present on Update to CSWE Policy re: Alumni; guidance on alumni org. in feedback processes; develop policy/practice for alumni integration re: programming support & mentorships.

- **Engage University Administration:** Plan formal Program/Alumni org. relationship [e.g. MOU or grant deliverables]; liability-mitigated mentorships [co-develop mentorship pedagogy & process w/ Alumni org.].

- **Leverage Alumni Participation:** Instructors access alumni support [e.g. helping facilitate activity or project; help w/ getting supplies]; opportunities for alumni to volunteer [e.g. help plan intensive; task/event alumni could sponsor or host like annual dinner or mixer; sponsor awards]; alumni-ran workshops/trainings/seminars for students & CEUs [e.g. clinical: MI or macro: focus group facilitation]; help anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts [per CSWE]; develop method for organized/equitable requests in an organized and equitable manner; resume eNewsletter accessible to alumni & partners.

Alumni Community Recs

- **Activate:** Initial organizing body; awareness of need/possibility; initial convening w/ light discussion/community building; relationship build w/ NWC & CAC.

- **Vision:** Organization structure; Resources; Peer Support; Connection to Program.

- **Organize:** Strategic Plan for gradual growth; A core annual/biannual activity; Mobilize Structure; Train Leaders/Facilitators; Collab w/ Program for Mentorships; Develop format/schedule for ongoing ed./trainings/etc.

- **Action:** Launch Annual/Biannual Activity; map member regions & specializations; thorough outreach to potential members; formal relationship w/ Program; resource/membership hub; pilot regional & support groups; pilot mentorships

- **Sustain:** Annual strategic planning & membership evaluation; rotation of leadership; maintain annual/bi-annual core activity; CEU structure.