

International Child Welfare and Disability Collaborations

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Abstract

Background: In 2022 a collaboration between the University of Namibia (UNAM) and the University of Minnesota (UMN) developed with the intent of creating a research and training center for child welfare (CW) practice. The result of the collaboration was the creation of the Child Research Initiative & Training center (CRIT), housed at UNAM's School of Allied Health, Psychology and Social Work, with focus on research, training, and practice.

Methodology: In 2022, Dr. Nashandi, who had previously studied with Dr. LaLiberte, at the UMN, where she runs the Multidisciplinary Institute for Child Welfare (MICW). The two engaged in bi-weekly calls to discuss both the technical and adaptive components of creating such a center, centering Namibia and its context and realities. Partners were identified and included in early planning for the center, including UNAM faculty and administrators, government partners, NGOs, and funders (including UNICEF). A 3-day kick-off conference was held with representation of all 11 districts in Namibia. Conference proceedings were transcribed and analyzed for themes to inform initial research, and training.

Findings / Outcomes: Disability knowledge and skill was the significant need for both research and training. As one of the first activities of CRIT, comprehensive, on-demand, online disability training was provided by Dr. Hewitt and her team at the UMN. Over 150 people have completed this training. Other outcomes include, strengthened partnership with the ministry/government, the elevation of the CRIT within UNMA to become a Center for Excellence, and formalized partnership with UNICEF who expressed specific interest in partnering on the CRIT's research agenda. The CRIT was also submitted by the Ministry and included as a flagship program in the national development plan 6 (NDP6) of Namibia (2025-2030).

Conclusions: The collaboration between these universities has proven to be wildly successful and is a model, both technically and adaptively, for other international collaborations.