



Barriers for Minority Populations in Kosciusko County

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**“We need to understand the requirements of
inclusion by exploring the behaviors of
exclusion.”**

Former U.S. Attorney General, Alberto Gonzales

Introduction

As the Kosciusko Leadership Academy (KLA) class of 2015-2016 gathered for their first meeting in downtown Warsaw, the KLA cadets were provided an introductory history of KLA. During this meeting, Jean Northerner, the founder of KLA, was rightfully praised for her inclusion of women in KLA from the start. It was apparent Jean had made a significant impact in elevating women to their place at the leadership table. While women were well-represented in the KLA class of 2015-2016, the KLA class was largely Caucasian. The thought of a predominantly white classroom raised larger questions of the inclusion of minority populations throughout the county. Inclusion of any group of people into any community of people often begins with positive efforts made by well meaning people, but ultimately are insufficient without understanding the barriers created by exclusion. As more and more thoughts arose about diversity in the county, more and more unanswered questions came up as well. This research team deemed it essential to explore the behaviors of exclusion, that is, those barriers that minority populations experience, in order to best increase the involvement of minority populations and improve inclusion within Kosciusko county.

Background of Kosciusko County

Kosciusko county does not lack minority involvement due to a shortage of minority populations in the county; over 11% of the county population identified as a race other than white according to the 2014 census data. According to the United States Census Bureau (2014), Kosciusko county had a population of 78,564 in 2014. The racial distribution of Kosciusko county is displayed in Table 1:

Table 1

Racial Characteristics of Kosciusko County (N = 78,564)

Race	%	Estimated Population
Black or African American	1.1%	864
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.4 %	314
Asian	1.2%	943
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	79
Two or More Races	1.2%	943
Hispanic or Latino	8.0%	6,285
White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino	88.6%	69,608

The 2014 census data reported a 1.3% decrease in the “white alone, not hispanic or latino” population since 2010. In addition to the population that identified with a minority race in 2014, 4.1% of the overall population indicated foreign birth. While the U.S. Census attempts to include undocumented immigrants in the census data, the success of such efforts are unknown.

In addition to discovering the demographic makeup of Kosciusko county, the researchers sought to learn about events and organizations that already exist in Kosciusko county that seek to promote diversity efforts. The Orthoworx Diversity Council is well known to be the main organization that pursues diversity within the county. The mission of the Diversity Council is to increase diversity awareness and acceptance within our community. In order to learn more about the issues surrounding diversity and current efforts being made by the Diversity Council, the research team met with the chair of the Diversity Council, Gennie Brissette-Tipton, who is also the Orthoworx Communications Specialist.

Through meeting with Gennie, the research team was able to learn of current projects the Diversity Council was working on as well as the overall mission and scope of the Diversity Council. It was also helpful to learn the greatest diversity needs in the

county. Through this meeting, we learned that the largest initiatives made by the Diversity Council involve World Languages Week at Warsaw Community High School, a cultural fair at Sacred Heart School, a cultural First Friday in Warsaw, hosting a MLK, Jr. Day luncheon each year, and an annual diversity rally promoting diversity of all kinds. Gennie shared that the Diversity Council believes diversity awareness starts with our children and a change in our community begins with a change in how the community's children view different people groups. Gennie's assessment of the community was that the community has much opportunity for growth in terms of diversity awareness and cultural acceptance. Gennie mentioned MANY barriers that minority populations experience when coming to this community for employment. She cited issues with food, places of worship, interpersonal misunderstandings, and a general lack of diversity awareness. Based on the many needs, many questions, and limited knowledge of diversity issues in the county, this research team deemed it best to discover the barriers for minority populations rather than initiate a project that was not based on an understanding of the needs of minority populations in the county.

Research Method

The research question that guided this investigation was: "What are the barriers for minority populations in Kosciusko county?" The researchers conducted 12 semi-structured interviews that lasted 30 - 60 minutes in duration. This format allowed for both guided questions and time/space for follow-up questions as needed. After introductions, the researchers provided each participant an introduction to KLA and the purpose of the research. After gathering some basic demographic information, the following questions guided the interviews:

1. As it relates to integration into a mostly white community, can you explain any barriers you experienced when you first entered this community?
2. Have you experienced any barriers in your neighborhood? If so, please explain.
3. Have you experienced any barriers in your workplace? If so, please explain.
4. What barriers have been the most frequent and or long-lasting?
5. What barriers that you have faced whether in the community, your neighborhood, or your place of work would cause you to think about leaving this community?
6. What went well or positively as you entered this community, workplace, neighborhood?

Description of Participants

A central goal of the participant selection was to provide a diversity of organizations, genders, and races. Table 2 displays the participant characteristics of gender, race, job level, and workplace. A majority of the participants were male ($n = 9$, 75%), and Hispanic or Latino ($n = 7$, 58.3%). The racial breakdown was similar to the minority population of Kosciusko county, which is predominantly Hispanic or Latino, and followed by several other races. While it was not the intention of the research team, the participants represented a variety of job levels. In addition to the diversity in the Table 2, the 12 participants represented some diversity of geographical locations within Kosciusko county, including two individuals that commute from Akron, Indiana, to Kosciusko county for employment.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Minority Sample Population (N = 12)

Characteristics	n	$\%N$
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Sex		
	Male	9 75%
	Female	3 25%
Race		
	Asian	1 8.3%
	Black or African American	3 25%
	Hispanic or Latino	7 58.3%
	Other (Croatian)	1 8.3%
Job Level		
	Lower Management	2 16.7%
	Middle Management	3 25%
	Upper Management	4 33.3%
	Professional Employee	3 25%
Workplace		
	Financial	3 25%
	Educational	2 16.7%
	Industrial Services	3 25%
	Law	1 8.3%
	Medical Device	2 16.7%
	Religious	1 8.3%

Results

As the KLA researchers collected the interview data, the interview notes were shared via Google Docs. The data was then entered into Excel and analyzed for recurring words and themes. The following words appeared in the interview data three or more times:

Table 3

Recurring Words in Interview Data

Community	11
Experience	8
Family	7
Minority	7
Church	5
Culture	5
Issue	5
Help	4
Discriminate	4

Difference	4
Food	4
Race	4
Diverse	3
Accept	3
Comfort	3
Language	3
Status	3
Share	3

As it relates to the first question involving barriers during initial integration into Kosciusko county, the participants described a community that is largely welcoming but also lacking resources and support systems. Three participants noted a lack of places for worship, three mentioned lack of food options, and three mentioned a lack of entertainment and cultural events. Surprisingly, four of the participants said that they did not experience barriers upon entering Kosciusko county. Some participants had lived as a minority in other communities or grew up in an area similar to Kosciusko county, which may have assisted these participants with their adjustment to Kosciusko county. Although the participants generally cited a good transition to the community, some did express barriers. For example, one participant was referred to as “you foreigner,” even though the participant is a naturalized U.S. citizen. One experienced harassment by law enforcement and another stated that the community is welcoming “if you are willing to adapt to the white culture.”

Questions 2 and 3 involved barriers in the participants neighborhoods and workplaces. Many of the participants noted a welcoming and professional environment in the community and limited or no barriers as a minority. Although the majority expressed this attitude, some shared difficulties with stereotypes and communication.

One participant's wife recently voted in an election, and on her way out, she heard a voice behind her say, "Your vote won't count." Other participants noted difficulty in making friends and breaking into social circles. Many of the participants are employed in educational or professional organizations that are more intentional in embracing diversity, but one noted that there are not many people and outlets to share one's heritage in this county.

Questions 5 and 6 involved barriers that caused participants to think about leaving Kosciusko county and positive steps already taken in the community. While many participants cited limited barriers in their circles, the participants generally agreed that there is a general resistance to embracing diversity in Kosciusko county. The community can be welcoming, but only to the extent to which you are willing to conform the norms and cultures that already exist here. One participant said that "someone once told me that globalization is when everyone speaks English and is a Christian." The majority of participants noted that overcoming barriers and embracing diversity requires respect, giving individuals space to enjoy their own culture, and seeking to understand cultures without judgment.

Solutions

Diversity within Kosciusko county can act as an agent to make the community stronger or build walls to separate people from one another. Three participants noted the central role that education plays in becoming a community that embraces minority populations. While Orthoworx is doing a good job in raising cultural awareness in the community, more needs to be done. One participant suggested that the leaders in our school systems need to make diversity education a greater priority. As a community,

one participant mentioned that as a biological family changes, adapts, and grows with new family members, so too our community should change and adapt as new colors and cultures join the community.

Opportunities to expand upon this current research project abound. The researchers would encourage a survey of minority populations in various languages to capture the experiences of those minority populations that are less comfortable with English.

Kosciusko county has many great resources that attract all kinds of people. Our community has beautiful lakes, great schools, and excellent employment opportunities. The county needs to continue to be a welcoming community that actively pursues diversity and seeks to learn from minority populations. As one participant stated, “In the end, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation, we generally share the same goal of providing our families a chance for a better future and I think that activities that focus on improving the status quo are enriching and can help bring communities together, make communities stronger and increase the sense of affiliation.”

References

United States Census Bureau (2014).

<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/18085>

