

Guiding Principles for African Nova Scotian Student Support Workers



Ubuntu

“Nurturing student well-being in African Nova Scotian communities”

At the core of the African Nova Scotian Student Support Worker (ANSSSW) Program is Ubuntu—a guiding philosophy deeply rooted in African wisdom. The ANSSSW approach to education and student well-being is shaped by Ubuntu. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of caring for one another. As mentors and advocates, ANSSSWs integrate Ubuntu into the educational system through a focus on centering students within their culture, nurturing their well-being, and fostering a strong sense of identity. Through embracing Ubuntu principles, students are equipped with the confidence and support necessary to actively engage, take pride in themselves, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

History

Ubuntu, a term from Southern Africa’s Bantu languages, emphasizes community and connection. As explained in *Everyday Ubuntu*, by Mungi Ngomane, *Ubuntu* is a central idea in many African Bantu languages, highlighting the importance of community and connection. The saying “*Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*” captures this: “A person is a person through other persons” or “I am because we are.” It reminds us that our humanity is tied to others. “Ubuntu is a way of life from which we can all learn,” Ngomane (2020, 14) writes, “We feel it when we connect with other people and share a sense of humanity; when we listen deeply and experience an emotional bond; when we treat ourselves and other people with the dignity they deserve.” *Ubuntu* teaches us the importance of interconnectedness and nurturing meaningful relationships in our communities.

The Role of *Ubuntu* in the ANS Student Support Worker Program

ANSSSWs who embrace *Ubuntu* recognize that nurturing the well-being and achievement of students is not just an individual endeavour but a communal responsibility. By fostering a sense of belonging and community, they can create environments where students feel supported, empowered, and valued for their diverse cultural identities.

Interconnectedness and Collective Well-being

Ubuntu highlights the interconnectedness of individuals and communities, advocating for mutual support and collective well-being. *Ubuntu* teaches us that “there is enormous strength in recognizing the value of our unity, especially if we want to make the world a better place.” (Ngomane 2020, 41) Simply put, it means showing love and respect for everyone, recognizing that our own development is tied to the development of others. “The bedrock of the philosophy is respect for yourself and for others.” (Ngomane 2020, 13) True to the spirit of *Ubuntu*, ANSSSWs strive to understand individuals within the context of their family, community, environment, and spirituality. Engaging with students in a manner that respects these aspects fosters a culture of empathy and respect.

Living *Ubuntu* Daily: Embracing *Ubuntu* Philosophy in Student Support Work

Living *Ubuntu* daily involves recognizing the infinite worth of every individual and acting with the awareness that our actions impact the broader community. *Ubuntu* serves as a guiding philosophy for ANSSSWs, promoting a holistic approach to student well-being and achievement. By embodying the principles of *Ubuntu*, ANSSSWs contribute to a compassionate, inclusive, accessible, and supportive educational environment. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu highlighted, *Ubuntu* isn’t just about what we do but how we live. Similarly, an ANSSSW’s role goes beyond their responsibility to promote inclusivity, support student development, and foster collaboration within the school community. ANSSSWs engage in intentional practices that prioritize the well-being of students of African ancestry. They check in with these students to ensure they feel safe, accepted, and that they belong at their school and in their classes. This caring extends to nurturing their body, mind, and spirit. ANSSSWs approach their work with a culturally responsive mindset, combining concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action to positively impact the personal well-being and academic success of every Black child and youth. (Gay 2018)

References

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