

Honoring Innovations Report

“A Newsletter for System of Care Communities in Indian Country” Issue #6, May 2012

A newsletter published by the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) describing best practices in American Indian/Alaska Native systems of care for current and graduated system of care communities.

A “best practice” in the field of American Indian/Alaska Native children’s mental health is a process, method, training, or event that is believed to have a direct link in providing the desired outcome.

NICWA believes that such a designated practice requires attention to seven specific criteria listed below.

- Longevity
 - Replicable*
 - Harmonious with Indigenous Values and Teachings
 - Sustainability
 - Community Acceptance
 - Input of Stakeholders Across Generations
 - Culturally Competent Staffing
- *When/Where applicable

This product was developed with support from the Child, Adolescent and Family Branch (CAFB), Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of CAFB, CMHS, SAMHSA, or the Department of Health and Human Services.



Culture is Prevention, Culture is Intervention, Culture is Healing

Culture is prevention. Culture is intervention. Culture is healing. These common expressions have always been understood to be true in Indian Country, and recent research has come to confirm this knowledge.

- Risk factors for youth delinquency and victimization include loss of language and culture, while protective factors from delinquency and victimization include knowing one’s Native language, participating in traditional ceremonies, and dancing or drumming at Pow wows.¹

1. Mmari, Blum & Teufel-Shone (2010). What increases risk and protection for delinquent behaviors among American Indian Youth? *Youth and Society*, 41, 382-413.

Historical Context

“Near the end of World War II, Congress began to withdraw Federal support and to abdicate responsibility for American Indian affairs. Whereas earlier assimilationists had envisioned a time when tribes and reservations would vanish as Native Americans became integrated in U.S. society, the proponents of ‘termination’ decided to legislate such entities out of existence. As a consequence, over the following two decades, many Federal services were withdrawn, and Federal trust protection was removed from tribal lands.

One policy from this era was an attempt by the U.S. Government to extinguish

- Community identity and participation, expressed through teens visiting older relatives and volunteering to help elders, was associated with lower depression, alcohol use, anti-social behavior, and levels of internalizing dysfunctional behaviors.²
- Strong cultural identity is associated with lower rates of suicide,³ school dropout,⁴ and substance abuse.⁵

2. Whitesell, N. R. (2008). Developing a model of positive development for indigenous youth. Paper presented at the Society for Research on Adolescence, Chicago, March 8th.

3. Chandler, M.J. & Lalonde, C.E. (Unpublished manuscript). Cultural continuity as a moderator of suicide risk among Canada’s First Nations.

4. Feliciano, Cynthia. (2001). The benefits of biculturalism: Exposure to immigrant culture and dropping out of school among Asian and Latino youths. *Social Science Quarterly*, 82(4), 865-879.

5. Moran, J. R., & Reaman, J. A. (2002). Critical issues for substance use prevention targeting American Indian youth. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 22, 201-233.

Native spiritual practices. A government prohibition on participation in traditional spiritual ceremonies continued until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. Despite the prohibitions and the Christianizing efforts by various churches, indigenous culture and spirituality have survived and are widely practiced. Even in areas where many Native people practice Christianity, traditional cultural views still heavily influence the way in which Native people understand life, health, illness, and healing.”¹

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). *Mental health: Culture, race, ethnicity—A supplement to mental health: A report of the surgeon general*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, 80.

Check out information online

First Nations Behavioral Health Association’s Catalogue of Effective Behavioral Health Practices in Tribal Communities
http://www.fnbha.org/pdf/fnbha_catalogue_best_practices_feb%2009.pdf

Native American Center for Excellence Service to Science Initiative
<http://nace.samhsa.gov/ServiceToScience.aspx>

Native Wellness Institute’s Youth Leadership Programs
<http://www.nativewellness.com/services/youthleadership.html>

Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, Growing Roots: Native American Evidence-Based Practices
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02791072.2011.628909#tabModule>

• Awareness of and loyalty to one's culture⁶ is linked to positive outcomes, such as school success,⁷ higher self-esteem,⁸ higher social functioning,⁹ increased resilience,¹⁰ and improved physical and psychological health.¹¹

When Native youth participate in the traditional practices of their ancestors, they are living their culture, which prevents behavioral problems that can lead to mental health problems. For the system of care communities, a youth's introduction to and participation in cultural practices can inhibit behavioral and mental health problems and provide healing—cultural healing.

§ § §

Interpretation of the meaning of cultural healing is widely varied, according to Ethleen Iron Cloud-Two Dogs, a tribal specialist from the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention and director of the former Ogala Sioux Tribe System of Care. "Traditional, cultural healing is not restricted to one definition," she said.

Cultural healing can be considered something that is only provided by traditional healers and restricted to certain practitioners, or it can be limited to sacred ceremonial practices such as the Sundance of the Plains tribes or sweat purification ceremonies, explained Iron Cloud-Two Dogs. It can be more broadly considered the cumulative effects of the cultural practices of a people. "If you were to put together all of the cultural practices of a people, you would have your treatment program because a cultural life is a life of

balance," said Iron Cloud-Two Dogs.

One inclusive description of cultural healing is when "culture drives the healing process," as used in the Old Minto Family Recovery Camp, a short-term residential care camp that works to improve a patient's spiritual, emotional, and mental health, located in Fairbanks, Alaska.¹² Cultural treatment should also be specifically tailored to the culture and traditions of the community, which are determined through community involvement and leadership. In 2007, the State of Oregon Addictions and Mental Health Division adopted the position that "a different framework is needed for working with Native American stakeholders, and these stakeholders must take the primary role in defining what works for Native American [communities]."¹³

It is also generally understood that cultural practices should accompany Western healing practices. The 2001 Surgeon General's report "Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity" reported that "alternative therapies and healers [are] generally used to complement care received by mainstream sources, rather than as a substitute for care."¹⁴ This framework is implemented at the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) in Portland, Oregon. At NAYA, an urban agency that provides case management services for youth, the case manager and youth jointly determine a development plan for the youth that involves both Western and traditional practices, such as conflict management and basket weaving.

Lillian Marquez, assistant project manager and family coordinator for the Lummi

12. Old Minto Family Recovery Camp (2005). Best practices forum program profiles: Old Minto family recovery camp. Best Practices in Substance Abuse Treatment for American Indians and Alaska Natives Forum, Projects 10-14.

13. Oregon Addictions and Mental Health Division. (2007, September 21). Position Paper on Native American Treatment Programs and Evidence-Based Practice. Retrieved April 30, 2012, from <http://www.oregon.gov/OHA/amh/ebp/native-american-trtmntpro-ebp.pdf>.

14. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). Mental health: Culture, race, ethnicity—A supplement to mental health: A report of the surgeon general. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services.

Nation System of Care, views cultural healing to be any practice that has been passed down through the generations. Whether it's building a fire or baking a pie, there are traditional practices that make up every step of the process. Knowing how to identify the best firewood or berries, using specific techniques to chop the wood or prepare the crust and filling, understanding and appreciating the appropriate way to start the fire or bake and serve the pie. This knowledge has been taught and learned in a traditional way, according to Marquez. "That's culture. That's what we do" she said of these teachings. "Any teachings are cultural teachings. They might seem so simple and kind of common sense, [but] they might get lost if we don't teach them."

§ § §

NICWA has long advocated that the best resources for solving any challenge come from within the community. An article, "Community Readiness: The Journey to Community Healing," by co-author Pamela Thurman, former system of care evaluator explains, "resources vary from community to community as do strengths, challenges, and political climates. Each community needs to use its own knowledge of its assets and limitations, its culture and characteristics, its values and beliefs, to build policies and programs that are congruent with the community's characteristics and meet the community's needs."¹⁵

Cultural practices are the strengths within the community which can be used to identify and develop the strengths of individual youth and foster healthy behavioral and mental health. As youth learn the traditional practices of drumming or hunting, they are able to develop a sense of self and an understanding of where they come from and who they are. They are able to identify where they are now and where they want to be.

15. Thurman, P. J., Pleased, B. A., Edwards, R. W., Foley, R., & Burnside, M. (2003). Community readiness: The journey to community healing. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35 (1), 27-31.

Continued on page 3...

Honoring Innovations Report is published by the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA).

5100 SW Macadam Avenue, Suite 300, Portland, Oregon 97239
P: (503) 222-4044 www.nicwa.org F: (503) 222-4007



NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting our children • Preserving our culture

Identifying Cultural Activities

Cultural practices that serve as protective factors and provide cultural healing should be tailored to each community and developed from the communities own resources and strengths. To generate some ideas about appropriate cultural activities for your system of care community, use the following list, developed by the Native American Youth and Family Center in Portland, Oregon, to think of all aspects of your traditional way of life and how the teaching and learning of those practices can enhance the healing process.

Kinship, Family, and Gender Roles

- Participating in extended family culture
- Learning about family structures and traditions
- Maintaining strong family ties
- Family stories: knowing family and cultural history
- Learning about male and female cultural roles

Tribal Crafts

- Cradleboard making
- Shawl making
- Basket weaving
- Making dream catchers
- Flint making
- Bow making
- Beading
- Blanket making
- Making traditional attire or regalia for Pow Wows or other ceremonies
- Making ribbon shirts
- Tanning hides
- Learning to work with animal skins
- Sewing quilts
- Learning the Native language
- Making jewelry
- Making moccasins

Subsistence, Food, and Medicine

- Gathering or harvesting traditional foods
- Planting and growing traditional foods
- Cooking traditional foods

- Picking and drying herbs
- Picking berries
- Digging camas roots or other root foods
- Fishing
- Hunting
- Gathering or harvesting sea resources
- Smoking meat or fish
- Knowing what wild foods are good to eat
- Knowing plants and medicines and identifying seasonal foods
- Peeling bark for medicine or craft use
- Picking grasses or roots for weaving
- Making traditional Indian tobacco

Music and Dance

- Drumming and singing
- Participating in or attending a Pow Wow
- Intertribal dances
- Specific tribal dances
- Social dances

Games and Sports

- Hand games
- Stick game songs
- Indigenous sports
- Tribal games
- Lacrosse

Ceremony, Rituals, and Ways of Acting

- Purifying rituals, purifying lodges, sweat lodges
- Constructing a sweat lodge
- Choosing the right rocks for a sweat

- lodge
- Smudging
- Sacred dances
- Sundances
- Fasting
- Vision quest
- Paying attention to dreams
- Pow Wows
- Talking Circles
- Native ways for showing respect and honor
- Communication skills with the elderly
- Practicing spirituality
- Correct ways for handling sacred or traditional items
- Showing respect for beliefs and ceremonies

History, Cultural Knowledge, Cultural Skills

- Knowing tribal history, laws, treaties, rights, reservations, clans
- Knowing the meaning of sovereignty
- Learning tribal history
- Learning Indian names for landmarks

Traditional Forms of Living

- Canoe family journey
- Horsemanship
- Storytelling and listening to stories
- Learning to tell tribal stories and legends
- Learning about the birds and what they do
- Camping and participating in tribal retreats

...continued from page 2

The youth of the Lummi Nation System of Care live by the motto, “we focus on our journey and our destination.” Marquez says that when teaching the youth to harvest oysters or salmon, they are also teaching the youth to find an inner strength that makes them feel grounded. “It gives them back their self-respect and their dignity and their purpose, allowing [them] to find out what [they’re] good at and reaching toward it,” she said.

Iron Cloud-Two Dogs expressed the importance of traditional practices. “The individual, the family, and the tribe will have the opportunity to live in balance.” As a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Iron Cloud-Two Dogs spoke of the Lakota traditional practice of greeting the morning star. It requires discipline, as one must rise very early in the morning to greet the sun and honor this important spiritual entity. It also requires a modest and humble awareness as one appreciates that without

the sun, we would be in darkness.

“When in balance, it creates discipline to live in a healthy way,” said Iron Cloud-Two Dogs. A life of balance includes a healthier, clearer mind. A life of balance includes a healthier, emotional awareness and ability to ask the spiritual entities, such as the sun, for help. A life of balance is the result of cultural healing.

Clay Geronimo: Troubled Youth to Accomplished Horseman

Clay Geronimo described himself as a “troubled youth.” When he was six years old, he left his mother’s household and was raised by his grandmother. He never knew his father. “I acted out because I didn’t know how to handle the situation,” he said. “I was involved in gangs and other negative stuff.” Today, Clay is a husband and father of two, holds a bachelor’s degree in hotel and restaurant tourism management, and works as a social marketer and technical assistant coordinator for the Mescalero System of Care.

When asked about how he turned his life around he said, “one day I came to my senses and I started reaching out for help and seeking positive things in life.” Cultural practices were one of the things within his grasp. He clung to the teachings of his culture and developed respect and honor for his ancestors. Clay became involved with cultural traditions, such as tribal singing and drumming, paying respect to his tribal elders, and tribal prayer.

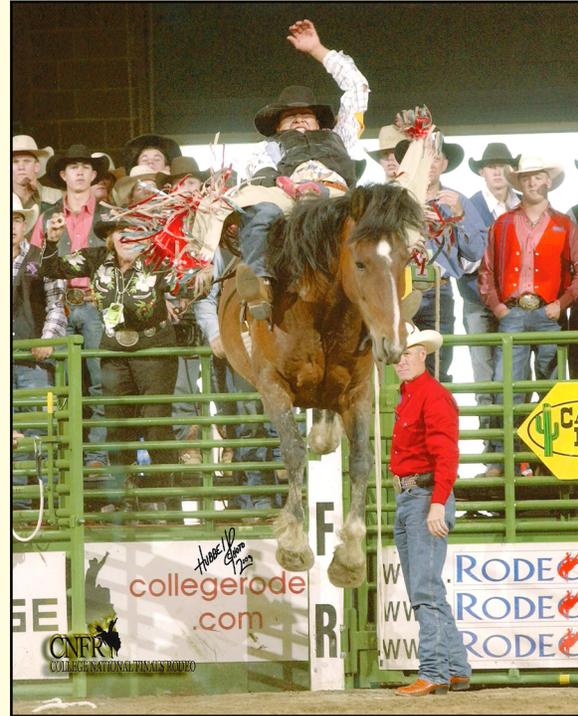
Prayer became a big part of Clay’s life, as he explained that “prayer is for everything.” When hunting, he offers a prayer of thanksgiving for the harvest of a deer. Part of that prayer of thanksgiving is a promise to put the gift to as much good use as possible. Clay shares the meat with his family, gives the hide to his aunt for tanning, donates the hoofs to the traditional healers, and keeps the antlers to remind him of his prayer of thanks. “Prayer really helps me get close to the earth,” he said.

Clay also started giving his time to help others as a volunteer. His grandmother got him started washing vans that were used at the Mescalero elderly program where she worked. Then he started volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club and for Boy Scouts of America. As a chaperone for a Boy Scout camping trip, Clay felt a connection to his tribal ancestors. “Apaches were nomads, moving around and setting up camp and taking it down,” Clay said. He was able to integrate ancestral ways into the camping trip and share those teachings with the youth by making bows, building a fire, and offering prayers of thanksgiving.

As he became more involved with his tribal culture and history, Clay realized how much he valued being engaged in his culture. Clay is a direct descendant of Geronimo, the great Apache warrior and spiritual leader. “I didn’t want to hold his name and not know about our culture,” Clay said.

Part of being a great Apache warrior was horsemanship. Clay’s family has always raised horses, and as Clay became more connected to his culture and ancestors, he became more and more involved with caring for the horses. “Horse culture was a big part of the Apache way of life for travel and nomadic living,” he said. “Apaches used to hunt, gather food, and battle on horseback.”

Clay’s relationship with horses developed into a love for rodeo. In high school, he started competing as a bareback rider and bull rider. He finished second in the state for bareback riding and represented New Mexico in the National High School Rodeo



Clay Geronimo competing at the College Nation Finals Rodeo in 2009.

competition.

When Clay was accepted to New Mexico State University, with a full-ride Gates Millennium Scholarship from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, he joined the rodeo team and made it to the College National Finals Rodeo his freshman, sophomore, and junior years. In 2007 and 2008, Clay competed in the Turquoise Professional Rodeo Circuit and qualified for the Indian National Finals Rodeo and the International Indian Finals Rodeo representing the United States. “I have qualified for lots of finals, but still haven’t won a big one,” Clay said.

While Clay still competes in rodeos, he is preparing to get involved with a new kind of horsemanship. This summer, the Mescalero System of Care will be the first Native organization in New Mexico to open an equine therapy program, where Clay will work as the director. He is eager to share his horsemanship experience, and that of his ancestors, with the youth. Through the equine therapy program, the youth will learn discipline, responsibility, and appreciation. They will learn to introduce themselves to the horse and how to be one with the animal.

At 24 years old, Clay remembers what it was like to be that prideful teenager, who got into trouble. He’s grateful that he learned to ask for help because he knows that his teenage dreams of being an accomplished rodeo athlete wouldn’t have come true without the support of his family and community. And now he is helping teens learn to ask for help. Clay says he is no longer prideful, but proud. “I am proud of who I am and where I come from.”