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 to providing the desired outcome.

NICWA believes that such a practice requires that seven specific criteria are met. The program must: demonstrate potential for longevity; be replicable; exist harmoniously with Indigenous values and teachings; be sustainable; secure community acceptance; include the input of stakeholders across generations; and demonstrate culturally competent staffing.

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Strategies for Successful Social Marketing

By Tara Freed Ferkinhoff

Social marketing refers to the practice of applying marketing principles to a social cause in a way that not only helps the targeted audience, but also benefits society as a whole. For example, every day we are consumed with marketing campaigns telling us to buy a certain brand of clothing, brand of car, etc.

Social marketing campaigns don’t tell us to “buy,” but rather encourage us to behave or think differently about a social cause like substance abuse prevention or the reduction of stigma that surrounds mental illness. The practice of social marketing is not to be confused with “social media” (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc.). However a social marketing campaign may use social media as a tactic or vehicle to help promote a specific goal or message, but simply setting up a Facebook page or Twitter account does not mean you are doing social marketing.

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Social marketing is important everywhere—especially in a system of care community. A system of care is "a spectrum of effective, community-based services and supports for children and youth with, or at risk for, mental health or other challenges and their families, that is organized into a coordinated network, builds meaningful partnerships with families and youth, and addresses their cultural and linguistic needs, in order to help them to function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life."

Social marketing is a vital component in the success of implementing a system of care approach. Think about it this way. It will not matter if your community succeeds in providing services and agency collaboration if families and youth feel like there is too much stigma in the community to ask for or use those services. Social marketing can also be used to communicate your goals and vision. If you cannot clearly communicate what your system of care initiative is trying to achieve and how you expect collaborators to behave as systems partners, then success will be even more challenging.

Additional Resources


SAMHSA’s Caring for Every Child’s Mental Health Campaign website (www.samhsa.gov/children) is rich with social marketing and communications information and best practices.
Now that you know what social marketing is and why it is important, let’s get you started with the top eleven strategies for successful social marketing. Even if your community has already begun your planning—or you are implementing social marketing plans right now—these tips will confirm what you are doing right or will help get you back on track if your community is struggling.

1. **Ask the experts, namely families and youth!**
   Families and youth have firsthand experience dealing with the issues you are addressing in your social marketing campaigns. Let them use their knowledge and passion for change to guide this process.

2. **Develop a social marketing committee.**
   Social marketing should not be a “one-man-band.” You need to involve families, youth, grant team members, and a variety of stakeholders. Everyone will bring something to the table that will make your social marketing efforts even more successful.

3. **Plan it out.**
   The success of social marketing begins with a plan. Your technical assistance provider has templates and examples that will guide your community in this process. Do NOT start buying, printing, or marketing anything until your community has a solid social marketing plan in place.

4. **Define your audience.**
   We all want to save the world, but we can’t do it all at once. Social marketing works best when you have a well-defined audience. The “general public” should not be an audience.

5. **Provide a clear message.**
   Similar to the need of defining your audience, you also need to define a clear message with a clear call to action. What do you want people to think? What do you want people to do? One small tip: Many celebrities and companies have resorted to “shock and awe” strategies in their marketing. But with marketing and social marketing, research shows that scare tactics don’t work.

6. **Evaluate your progress.**
   Evaluation is an important part of system of care planning—especially with social marketing initiatives. When you develop your social marketing plan, make sure you have measurable objectives for whether your target audience is getting your message and if it is helping to move them towards the action you intend.

7. **Get support and learn from others.**
   There are a ton of people out there that can help. Your technical assistance providers are a great start. They have limitless resources and knowledge that can help make sure your community succeeds. Other system of care communities are another great source of support. Ask them what has and hasn’t worked in their communities. They may have some great ideas—at the very least they can provide great emotional support as you go through this process.

8. **Partner with the community.**
   Community partners can play a major role in your social marketing efforts. Building community relationships will not only help social marketing now, but also the ability to sustain your social marketing in the future.

9. **Think sustainability.**
   As you develop your social marketing plan, ask yourselves about the resources available to sustain your efforts. This should be an ongoing conversation—not one that comes up at the end of your grant.

10. **Trust the process.**
    Social marketing campaigns, no matter how successful, will not result in overnight change. Changing and influencing people’s beliefs and actions will take time. Trust the process and keep moving forward.

11. **Last, but not least, have fun!**
    Social marketing is a great way to develop relationships, build trust, and make impactful and positive changes in your community.

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Tribal Social Marketing: Telling Our Stories, Restoring Balance

For years, tribes have implemented social marketing campaigns as part of Circles of Care and Systems of Care grants to publicize children’s mental health programs and services; overcome lingering stigma associated with accessing mental health supports; and to promote positive behavioral change within individuals, families, and communities. Yellowhawk System of Care Project Director Dolores Jimerson explains, “Social marketing is about changing beliefs and attitudes about children’s mental health service delivery.” Tribal system of care communities can point to numerous examples of how social marketing has been implemented with great success. Such work can vary in scope and sophistication, from word-of-mouth campaigns in rural communities to full-scale public relations and advertising efforts. Although such campaigns differ in some respects, common threads of collaboration, community participation, having a clear message and strategic goal-setting—all aimed at influencing positive behavioral change—are woven throughout social marketing efforts.

Often social marketing efforts must work around obstacles unique to Indian Country. For example, the Muscogee Creek Nation’s Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Program’s service area covers an area roughly equal to the size of New Jersey. As such, system of care outreach and social marketing efforts rely heavily upon partnerships and personal relationships. Lindsley Harry, social marketing and technical assistance coordinator, elaborates, “It’s hard to sit down with just one community at a time. So what we’ve done is partner with other grant programs within the [Creek Nation’s] Department of Health. Through collaboration, we’ve been able to pool resources.”

While Lindsley and her team use traditional forms of communication for outreach, such as direct mail and announcements in the health department newsletter and tribal newspaper, they have equally prioritized developing strong relationships with youth and families and gone to great efforts to encourage their participation in social marketing. “The whole staff has worked to get positive word of mouth by going to the schools and working with the student groups,” says Harry. “We partner with families closely, too, so they can tell their stories to other families. I think that it’s very important for people to hear from other families how there has been a positive change for them, and how behavioral health services can help with that. Some parents are really stepping up, even beyond their issue areas, and trying to help us reach others by telling our message.”

With growing support and buy-in from youth and families, the Creek Nation’s systems of care social marketing goals have similarly expanded beyond promoting services to include promoting suicide prevention and anti-bullying awareness. For their anti-bullying campaign, tribal public service announcements aired across Oklahoma. This media outreach was coupled with several high-profile community events dedicated to raising awareness. Harry explains, “After watching the movie Bully, our youth coordinator thought we should get the youth involved. We rented out an AMC theater for one night and we invited the schools that we have partnerships with. In that setting, we had youth tell some of the challenges that they go through. It showed other students that they weren’t alone. It generated a huge response from schools wanting us to do a ‘Bully Tour,’ get their teachers, principals, and superintendent involved, and get them to make policies on disciplining bullying behavior.”

The Muscogee Creek Nation has demonstrated how social marketing can be integral to implementing a systems of care approach in the community. As Jimerson states, “Social marketing is intended to compliment system of care programming by including everyone as a social marketer. ‘Everyone’ includes young people and their families who receive services, evaluators who can share information on if the system of care services and supports are effective, the workers who are involved in delivering and coordinating care, and administrators. You need all of these perspectives to develop effective social marketing approaches. The approaches will be as diverse as the different audiences whose (continued on next page)
attitudes and beliefs you are trying to change."

Indeed, taking traditional marketing techniques and tailoring them to reach the various audiences served by tribal systems of care is exactly what both Urban Trails San Francisco and the Cherokee Nation’s Behavioral Health Program have done with remarkable success.

Commuters in California’s Bay Area may have unknowingly been the target audience for some riveting examples of urban Indian system of care social marketing. For months, youth participated in digital arts training and focus groups to develop the key elements of Urban Trail’s 2013 public service announcement campaign featuring posters and placards on BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) trains and MUNI light rail trains throughout the region.

According to the Urban Trails San Francisco website, “This campaign was developed through a series of community photo shoots, Photoshop design workshops, focus groups and creative brainstorming sessions, and committees of youth and families who gave their input on design.” Ads featured slogans like “You’re On Indigenous Land” and “We Are Still Here” and were aimed at addressing historical trauma and de-stigmatizing mental health treatment for youth.

Overcoming negative stigma was also a goal for the Cherokee Nation. Dr. Misty Boyd, Cherokee Nation Behavioral Health psychologist, says that as part of their initial planning grant, “We began work on a social marketing plan primarily to address the stigma surrounding mental illness for youth and families. Our vision was to take it further and use that kind of campaign to empower the youth and their families to be involved in mental healthcare and wellness conversations overall.”

Taking advantage of technical assistance offered by Vanguard Communication’s Leah Holmes-Bonilla, Boyd’s team launched the Hero Project. In order to avoid any negative stigma associated with the term “behavioral health,” the program sought to develop a new brand for their system of care services. Boyd continues, “We were inspired by the National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day campaign for that year ‘Heroes of Hope.’ We got to thinking about how ‘hero’ translates in Cherokee. A hero is someone that is loved or admired. That really resonated with all of us. We knew immediately that our children are our heroes. We love and admire our children and youth and we know all the good that is in them.”

Misty and her team set out to ensure their messaging intentionally empowered youth, families, and communities. Boyd states, “One thing that we really like about the system of care philosophy is how much importance is placed on the youth, family, and community to be their own experts, and help themselves. We wanted to be able to convey that too.” “Hero” was used as an acronym, Helping Everyone Reach Out, in order to emphasize the community’s role in creating change.

Tribal communities of all capacities can engage in successful social marketing efforts by following best practice models.
As Boyd explains, “It’s not the agency that’s doing the good work. We’re here to empower and support the people to do the good work for each other.”

Establishing this brand was integral to increasing awareness in the community. “We have a name and a logo that is meaningful, and something people can identify with,” says Boyd. “That’s done more to get the conversation started than just about anything else in the world.”

Wearing Hero Project t-shirts and handing out stickers, pencils, and other goodies at community events “always gets people talking,” according to Boyd. “They come up and ask, ‘What is this Hero Project thing?’ And when we’re able to explain it to them, they often tell us about a child in their family that they’re concerned about or something similar, so it really starts a conversation.” Having a clear message and call to action turns the use of give-aways and “stuff” into an opportunity to communicate with your target audience.

Such conversations are really at the heart of the goals of social marketing and systems of care. As Jimerson succinctly puts it, “System of care values and philosophies are aligned with tribal ways of being. Tribal people value relationships, sharing, honoring families and cherishing children, collaboration, and everyone’s voice being valued.” She concludes, “Social marketing is powerful. All of Indian Country has a story. Social marketing is a way to tell our stories to restore balance.”
The Value of Social Marketing in Systems of Care

It's difficult to put a price tag on change. What is one child’s mental health worth? How can a community's awareness of children's potential be quantified? What is the dollar value of caring adults who make a difference in the lives of children? Some of you have been asked these very things and perhaps struggled to articulate an answer to those who are concerned with budgets and the bottom line. There may be no simple answers, but there is a business case to be made for social marketing.

Think about successful national campaigns like “Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk.” This Ad Council and U.S. Department of Transportation campaign reported an 84% recall of the messages among the audience tested. Campaigns like this have impact—even if it’s just raising awareness of the specific issue—and are rooted in the tenets of social marketing:

1) A well-defined audience;
2) A clear call to action; and
3) Measurable objectives.

A decade ago, project directors and others who support children's mental health programs, did not see social marketing as a priority. They thought that the process took time away from what they considered their mission—the actual delivery of services. But even programs that offer the world's best services and supports, if done in a vacuum, will find it difficult to garner support for continuing to deliver those services. Today, some of these same project directors are lamenting, "I wish I had started social marketing efforts sooner," largely because of social marketing’s implications for sustainability. Effective sustainability strategies, as documented by Stroul, Blau, & Freeman, that benefit from social marketing include:

* Cultivating strong interagency relationships;
* Involving stakeholders;
* Establishing a strong family organization;
* Using evaluation results; and
* Creating an ongoing focal point for managing the system of care.

It is difficult to imagine that the “Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk” campaign would have had any traction without these strategies. Although the campaign was a great idea, it took partnerships, evaluation, and clear messaging to transform it into actual behavior change.

For systems of care, partnership is likewise critical. Children and youth depend on many entities to meet their emotional and behavioral health challenges, such as agencies, providers, family members, community supports, and funding sources. These groups must work together to achieve effective system building.

The Tiwahe Glu Kini Pi social marketing plan focusing on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation was recognized as a finalist by the Excellence in Community Communications and Outreach recognition program, which showcases and celebrates the outstanding achievements in communications and social marketing by system of care communities. Tiwahe Glu Kini Pi created a social marketing plan and program logic model to demonstrate the organization’s goals and success in meeting objectives. Youth, as well as families and partners on its advisory board, all provided input on the two documents that were grounded in their culture.

In developing a plan that evolved based on strong community, family, and youth participation, Tiwahe Glu Kini Pi addressed some of the most common questions communities face: How do we get started? Who should we involve? How do we move forward? By developing a plan that everyone can contribute to and understand, people feel a sense of responsibility in seeing their efforts move forward.

This social marketing plan is one example of many that tribal communities have developed in the last decade. We recommend you review Tiwahe Glu Kini Pi's plan at www.vancomm.com/pdfs/Tiwahe-Glu-Kini-Pi-Social-Marketing-Plan-Logic-Model.pdf because peer-to-peer sharing is one of the best ways that communities can learn. Communities can adapt and tailor their efforts and learn from the challenges and successes of others.

Article excerpted from www.samhsa.gov/children/value-social.asp with additional information provided by Leah Holmes-Bonilla.

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