
Working with American Indian and Alaska Native Individuals, Couples, and Families

Webinar Question and Answer (Q&A)

June 23, 2015

Question: Historical trauma has been mentioned several times as a critical cultural consideration for working with this population. Do you feel that demonstrating respect for this is the most important factor for establishing a rapport with AI/AN individuals and families?"

Answer: *Terry Cross, Executive Director (retired), National Indian Child Welfare Association:*

To make sure that your services are trauma-informed -- in other words, understanding the impact of trauma, it may be a matter of acknowledging it, but certainly understanding behaviors that you might see as a manifestation of that historic trauma. In the Toolkit, we use an example of a grandmother who was abused in boarding school who comes home and has hypersensitivity to criticism, and has developed a set of protective behaviors. Then she shelters her children, communicating that fear to the next generation. So the next generation [is] developing a set of behaviors, and interacting with a world, that are based in the mother's fear and trauma, but keep them from engaging in healthy relationship practices. So just understanding how historic trauma is with us still today, and an intergenerational pattern, is important in that sort of story.

Question: Are any of these programs also considering or integrating traditional roles of extended family members in their child rearing?

Answer: *Nicole Earls, Human Services Director, Quileute Nation:*

Absolutely. In fact, we don't even speak to it, because we're so used to it, but in all of our programming, we have a way to address that. We have a lot of extended family members, grandparents raising grandchildren, aunties with their nieces and nephews, and so everything we do, we offer it as family. And we don't add a little sidenote that extended relatives are welcome too. We treat it as, this is the same to us as if you were the typical two-parent household. That's how we do that. I hope that helps.

Elaine Topsy, Director, Chippewa Cree Tribal TANF Program:

We have our kinship in relationship that's very strong in our community, and the young people have gotten away from it, on what the meaning is of the uncle having responsibility and being able to discipline nieces and nephews. We have a chart [that] was developed by a language program, and so, viewing that chart and going over the kinship and the relationship and how that's set up in a family is very helpful to people. The other thing is being able to address each other in a relationship-home way, like "Auntie" in our language that carries more respect. Or even their sister and their brother - those carry such in-depth meaning in our tribe when you talk about your brother, the

respect you have of your brother. Covering that kinship in those words helps develop that meaning how everything is tied together, related in our Indian way -- the air and everything. So that can be a huge, huge lesson, and you can only do a little bit of it, but having that kinship chart really works.

Question: Since you've started implementing aspects of the Toolkit, have you seen any positive outcomes or changes, such as reduction in domestic violence, lower teen pregnancies, or better parenting skills?

Answer: *Nicole Earls, Human Services Director, Quileute Nation:*

I'll say that, since the Toolkit's new, we haven't really started implementing things in relation to that, but in the last nine years of our Youth and Family programming, and the groups that we do with the teens and the high schools, the Mom's Lunches and the Family Fun Night, we have seen an increased graduation rate in our teens, especially those that are attending the school in Forks. We have seen a decreased teen pregnancy rate. I wouldn't say that we're down 100 percent, but we have definitely seen a reduction, and we are better than the national average in that dropout and that teen pregnancy rate, and before we were worse, and that's nine years of work.

We have also seen a reduction just in the past two years -- because I've got some really active, very, very good ICW case workers now -- we've seen a reduction in the number of removals, because we've started to implement Family Preservation Services. I've got a great FPS worker, I've got a great TANF worker, and we're seeing more services to keep families together, and so the reductions have gone down. We've had fewer removals in this last year, and that speaks volumes compared to historically what was happening. We're also being able to reunify and giving our kids more services in independent living and things like that. So we have seen some really great things. We definitely still have room for improvement, and that's what we keep saying is, there's ways that we can do more. We'd love to do more with our elders and really start to get that youth relationship with the elders more robust and learn more, like Elaine was mentioning, the family relationship. What is it? What is that for our community? I don't know, and I really want to learn. So I hope that answers the question.

Question: Where can I find a copy of this presentation?

Answer: Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/events-archive to download a copy of the slides, recording, transcript, and a Q&A document from this webinar.