

# Tribal Youth Leadership Development Initiative

Healing Indigenous Lives

---



## INTRODUCTION

The United National Indian Tribal Youth's (UNITY) Mission is to foster the spiritual, mental, physical, and social development of American Indian and Alaska Native youth, and to help build a strong, unified, and self-reliant Native America through greater youth involvement. UNITY Defined: UNITY is a national network organization promoting personal development, citizenship, and leadership among Native American youth. UNITY has a long (40+ years) and impressive track record of empowering and serving American Indian and Alaska Native youth. UNITY is well regarded among the nation's Native American organizations, tribal leaders, and government officials.

---

---

The Tribal Youth Leadership Development Initiative builds on the successes of the past Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) National Intertribal Youth Leadership efforts and the Today's Native Leaders program. The initiative will support and enhance Native youth engagement, coordination, and action related to public safety issues, with a focus on juvenile justice and delinquency prevention in Indian country. UNITY will be recruiting a diverse group of youth leaders and mentors, who will design and facilitate intensive training in critical aspects of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention efforts for cohorts of youth throughout the country.

### **PEER BASED APPROACH TO NATIVE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT**

- Young people will receive training to serve as peer leaders who will provide training, mentoring, support, resources, information, and other assistance for their peers in efforts to increase public safety and creatively prevent and address juvenile delinquency.
- UNITY, with its trainers, youth guides, and mentors will offer regional youth leadership development trainings that will enable Native youth, and their adult advisors, to develop and carry out projects, programs, education, awareness campaigns, and other efforts within their communities
- The projects will benefit communities while providing valuable real-world leadership experiences that will better prepare the youth to succeed in their leadership roles.

UNITY, with its trainers, youth Peer Guides, and mentors will offer regional trauma-informed youth leadership development trainings over the next two-years. These peer led asset mapping, youth advocacy and prevention workshops will collect Native youth feedback, from those who have been impacted by trauma and the Juvenile Justice system. These efforts will give Native youth the tools they need to create awareness campaigns to increase public safety.

*According to the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) Native Americans also have disproportionately high rates of criminal offending and victimization. Arrest data from the 2003 UCR indicate that*

---

*American Indian or Alaskan Natives, who were approximately 0.9 percent of the population in 2000 account for 1.3 percent of all arrests (102:288). These figures are probably undercounts, because the UCR does not include arrests by tribal police or federal law enforcement (107:13). The arrest rate for alcohol violations (driving under the influence [DUI], liquor law violations, and drunkenness) for Native Americans was double the national rate (74). Native Americans experienced violent victimization at an annual average rate 2.5 times the national rate from 1992 to 2001.*

The UNITY Peer Guides are a cohort of Native youth (ages 14-30 years old) who serve as an advisory committee in the development and implementation of the Tribal Youth Leadership Development Initiative. Each of the Peer Guides were selected as key informants because of their ability to overcome past obstacles, dropping out of highschool, substance abuse, suicidal behaviors and other risky behaviors common among Native youth. The Peer Guides have given their feedback in identifying key risk and cultural protective factors which helped them in navigating the juvenile justice system and delinquency prevention programs.

While demographic trends indicate that Native youth are at risk of incarceration within their lifetime, relatively few studies have focused Native Americans. This leadership training hopes to collect qualitative and quantitative feedback from Native youth across the nation, to identify effective prevention practices and service gaps regionally. Regional data will also be reflective of the cultural differences among tribal communities and their established support systems. The UNITY Peer Guide cohort hopes that their collective “Native youth voice” can further assist with effective prevention programming in the future.



**Korbin Storms, Native Village of Unalakleet, AK:**

*“I would tell Native Youth that struggle to see themselves as leaders that they have resiliency in their DNA, that sometimes it takes someone who has been low and lost before to connect to others that are feeling that way, that they have a unique perspective and so much potential to enact change and that the best leaders are those that give hope to others,” said Storms.*

---

## **INTRODUCTION RECOGNIZING THE EFFECTS OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA ON NATIVE AMERICANS**

The Healing Indigenous Lives Initiatives plans to address the different types of trauma that Native youth have been exposed to within their communities in order to empower youth leaders to be a part of solution based thinking to increase public safety. Through guided self exploration, and peer testimonies of overcoming past mistakes, the leadership training aims to show that past traumas can be a source of empowerment to help others not make the same mistakes.

Research shows the effects of historical trauma can be manifested in many ways [HHS Publication No. SMA-14-4866 (2014)]. Among Native Americans, it has included the following:

- A breakdown of traditional Native family values
- Alcohol and other substance abuse
- Depression, anxiety, and suicidality
- Child abuse and neglect and domestic violence
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- General loss of meaning and sense of hope
- Internalized oppression, self-hatred

The Native youth advisory committee believes that allowing a safe culturally centered space to acknowledge past trauma is vital in preparing future leaders to create public safety awareness campaigns. By allowing participants who may have experienced trauma in various ways to express themselves in creative and culturally centered ways, it will give youth an opportunity to see themselves as part of the solution instead of self-hatred that manifests in risky and negative behaviors.

Historical trauma can be expressed in three ways:

- Historical unresolved grief is the result of historical trauma that has not been sufficiently acknowledged, expressed, or otherwise addressed.

---

<sup>4</sup> This Initiative is supported by a cooperative agreement (2018-TY-FX-K002) between UNITY, Inc. and the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

- Disenfranchised grief is the product of historical trauma when loss cannot be voiced publicly or is not publicly acknowledged. Here, the authors list “the lack of recognition of the generations of loss of American Indians from colonialism, disease and other factors, and the corresponding lack of recognition of their right to grieve these collective experiences” as an example of this type of grief.
- Internalized oppression occurs when “traumatized people ... internalize the views of the oppressor and perpetuate a cycle of self-hatred that manifests itself in negative behaviors.”

Please see the following resources for more information on topics specific to how historical trauma (e.g., forced relocation, boarding schools, and incarceration) affects Native Americans:

- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. (1999). “Oyate Ptayela: Rebuilding the Lakota nation through addressing historical trauma among Lakota parents.” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 2(1-2), 109-126.
- Duran, E., Duran, B., Brave Heart, M. Y. H., & Horse-Davis, S. Y. (1998). “Healing the American Indian soul wound.” In: Danieli, Y., (Ed.) *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*. New York, NY: Plenum.
- Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). “Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(3), 316-338.
- Manson, S. M., Beals, J., Klein, S. A., Croy, C. D., & AI-SUPERPFP Team. (2005). “Social epidemiology of trauma among two American Indian reservation populations.” *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(5), 851-859.
- Strickland, Q., Walsh, E., Cooper, M. (2006). “Healing fractured families: Parents’ and elders’ perspectives on the impact of colonization and youth suicide prevention in a Pacific Northwest American Indian tribe.” *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 17( 1), 5-12.
- Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). Full report on the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. Washington, DC: the National Institute of Justice and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.). Fact sheet: Historical trauma. Retrieved on February 28, 2014, from <http://gainscenter.samhsa.gov/cms-assets/documents/93078-842830.historical-trauma.pdf>

## **INCORPORATING A HOLISTIC CULTURAL APPROACH TO INCREASING PUBLIC SAFETY AND TAKING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

---

Research shows those who have strong cultural ties and strong sense of belonging are significantly less likely to partake in risky behaviors. While UNITY recognizes that members of marginalized groups do not have identical experiences of disempowerment, there are ways for youth to celebrate their diversity and cultural teachings to further empower Native youth leaders (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Growing evidence illustrates that strong identification with certain aspects of American Indian culture is protective for Native youth (Waller et al, 2003; Kulis, Napoli, & Marsiglia, 2002; Moran et al., 1999; Whitbeck, Hoyt, McMorris, Chen and Stubben, 2001).

Incorporating Native values is vital in building youth leadership. Our Peer Guide advisory committee believes that a holistic approach to restorative justice and community building is most effective. The Peer Guides believe that increasing family and community connections through prosocial behaviors will make significant impact on Native youth's ability to take responsibility for their past mistakes.



**Josiah Lester, Navajo-Dine, AZ :** *“A Native youth should never feel ashamed of struggling to become a leader, especially at such an early age. A lot of young Native people can relate to coming from broken households and decades of historical trauma, which can be the root of a lot of their struggles. The best teachings come from failure and I believe that if I did not fail and hit rock bottom, I would not be in the position I am now. I want to let Native youth know that it is never too late to*

*accomplish what they want or who they want to become.”* said Lester.

The Peer Guides believe that the journey is about connectedness between individuals, families, and the community. The training will incorporate the collective experience between generations and incorporates the four directions, stages of group and life development, and the four elements of balance. These concepts have successfully addressed community prevention efforts in the [SAMHSA Gathering of Native Americans curriculum](#). The training will allow participants to share their history of trauma and the issues of mental and substance use disorders and suicide that spawned from that trauma

---

<sup>6</sup> This Initiative is supported by a cooperative agreement (2018-TY-FX-K002) between UNITY, Inc. and the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

---

in order to help others overcome the same obstacles. Because of this transformative process, the Peer Guides elected to name the youth empowerment training **“Healing Indigenous Lives”**. While healing, these are difficult conversations that require spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional endurance as we move from conversation to action addressing public safety and prevention efforts.

1. This Native youth leadership training will give Native youth the tools they need to accept responsibility for past mistakes and an opportunity to give back to their community in positive ways. This will build their sense of purpose, through strengthening their cultural understanding of [“Belonging”](#) found in the GONA (Gathering of Native Americans) Curriculum.
2. Through addressing past trauma as part of the Medicine wheel life cycle teachings of [“Mastery”](#) participants can recognize past traumas as a catalyst for growth. UNITY youth are eager to encourage their peers that lessons learned through adversity can be a focus for community based prevention campaigns.
3. Peer led life skills and community resources will be shared to encourage help seeking behaviors for Native youth who may need additional support. Peer Guides feel that this traditional concept of [“Interdependence”](#) builds life giving connections and helps youth feel less overwhelmed by challenges they may face.
4. The cultural teaching of “Generosity” can be transformative in restorative justice. This process of helping others increase public safety is a healing experience for those who feel the guilt of their past mistakes. Peer Guides aim to give Native youth an opportunity to see themselves as a positive role model to future generations.



**Angela Noah, White Mountain Apache, OR:** *“This is an opportunity for you to help yourself and your community. You are a leader. There are too many issues and precious time to not waste in doubting ourselves. Trust your abilities and implement them. You have a whole community that needs you and is rooting for you”* said Noah.

---

Research shows that American Indian cultures value extended family networks, which is a connecting protective factor linking Native youth to even greater social/affective emphasis on the collective ([Pewewardy, 2002](#)). Characteristics of American Indian cultures further from the individualistic (Western) end of the continuum include conformity, respect for authority figures—elders, in particular—spirituality, expressive creativity, and holistic belief systems ([Meyer, 2009](#); [Cook-Lynn, 2006](#)). [Waller, Okamoto, Miles, and Hurdle \(2003\)](#) note that, “in Indigenous cultures, individual standing is typically related to the extent to which individuals fulfill their responsibility to be helpful to other members of the family/clan/tribal group” (p. 82). Because relational and communication values influence personal interactions, affirming those values encourages students to learn how to resist substances while feeling culturally comfortable, which enhances the chances of program success ([Harthun, Dustman, Jumper-Reeves, Hecht, & Marsiglia, 2008](#)).

#### Further Readings and Resources:

- Cutler, M. (n.d.). Multigenerational trauma: Behavior patterns in cultures [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from [http://edweb.boisestate.edu/instituteforthestudyofaddiction/pp/Historical\\_Trauma\\_and\\_Grief.ppt](http://edweb.boisestate.edu/instituteforthestudyofaddiction/pp/Historical_Trauma_and_Grief.ppt)
- Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23*(3), 316-338.
- Forced Migration Online. (2012). What is forced migration? Retrieved from <http://www.forcedmigration.org/about/whatisfm/what-is-forced-migration>
- Gump, J. (2010). Reality matters: The shadow of trauma on African American subjectivity. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 27*(1), 42-54.
- Johnson, J. (n.d.). This is Indian country. Retrieved from the University of Idaho American Indian Studies 484 course website: [http://www.class.uidaho.edu/engl484jj/Historical\\_Trauma.htm](http://www.class.uidaho.edu/engl484jj/Historical_Trauma.htm)
- Michaels, C. (2010). Historical trauma and microaggressions: A framework for culturally based practice. *Children, Youth & Family Consortium's Children's Mental Health Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.cmh.umn.edu/ereview/Oct10.html>
- Morgan, R., & Freeman, L. (2009). The healing of our people: Substance abuse and historical trauma. *Substance Use & Misuse, 44*(1), 84-98.
- Kneebone, E., Carey, N., & Berub, A. (2011). The re-emergence of concentrated poverty: Metropolitan trends in the 2000s. Retrieved from [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2011/1103\\_poverty\\_kneebone\\_nadeau\\_berube/1103\\_poverty\\_kneebone\\_nadeau\\_berube.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2011/1103_poverty_kneebone_nadeau_berube/1103_poverty_kneebone_nadeau_berube.pdf)
- Rich, J. & Grey, C.M. (2005). Pathways to recurrent trauma among young Black men: Traumatic stress, substance abuse, and the “code of the street.” *American Journal of Public Health, 95*(5), 816-824.
- Sotero, M. (2006). A conceptual model of historical trauma: Implications for public health practice and research. *Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice, 1*(1), 93-108.
- Wasserman, E. (2004). Issues in conducting research on crime victimization. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice, 2*(4), 65-73.