

# **Historical and Intergenerational Trauma**

California Tribal Leaders Consultation Conference

Santa Ynez, CA.

March 25, 2009

**These following subjects and bullet points are a result of a Break Out session at the California Tribal Leaders Consultation Conference March 25, 2009. These are notes taken from ideas, observations and thoughts of the California Native participants:**

## **What do we see in our communities that is evidence of historical trauma?**

- People are still taking our children- Indian Child Welfare (ICWA) demonstrates damage to families up to 10 generations of problems
- Lack of Native foster parents
- Lack of safe places for children
- Some families not qualified as foster parents due to the different values of other cultures (non-Native) and different counties provide for different levels of funding for foster parents; i.e.: child care costs
- Language lost
- Drug & Alcohol abuse in adults and youth
- Suicides – no age limit and lack of community joining to counter
- “Subliminal” negative messages given to youth in schools, anger results with guilt – “...your kind”, “...you people”.
- History of destruction of Native people has not been factual. Past affecting present. Recently truth is getting into history books in school.
- This generation has grandparents that experienced violence, trauma, i.e.: not allowed to dance traditionally, did so at night with alcohol because of pain endured.
- Memories of culture suppressed.
- Attitudes of parents are passed on to children through statements like, “They didn’t pick you because you’re Indian/not white” – brings previous generation’s trauma to current generation.
- Indian boarding schools; multiple tribes come together causing conflicts/trauma in itself.
- Sexual abuse/child abuse in boarding schools and community

- Intra-tribal differences – anger passed on – family conflicts without knowledge of why, like the Hatfields and McCoys.
- Oppressed people oppress others.
- Tribal religion not “good” as seen by others.
- Tribal leaders emulate oppressors the way they treat their own tribal people.
- Disrespecting each other
- FORGOT what our values were
- “Vampire effect”: Abused children grow up to be abusers like being bit by a vampire, you become one.
- DEPRESSION
- No hope for youth
- Modern society focuses on pain avoidance and pleasure seeking.

## **Solution ideas for our communities:**

- Teach students over time the true history of California Natives. By the time they are in college, may be ready for more details but very difficult, be cautious.
- This is the time for formal apologies and cultural exchange for youth.
- Cultural pride can heal the pain/“bad” feelings they have, peel off the layers of pain.
- Understand what the “bad” feelings are and where they come from.
- Learn what sovereignty REALLY means – make laws that fit us, rule by consensus.
- RESPECT all people, get back to basic needs as human.
- Revive lost culture/ceremonies and incorporate into curriculum and every program.
- Be honest & ethical when making decisions for yourself and when acting on behalf of tribal members when in leadership roles.
- Focus on similarities – NOT DIFFERENCES.
- Live it, learn it, practice it, become it.
- Redefine how tribes do business: consensus rather than “Roberts Rules of Order”
- Accept we live in two worlds, bridge the gap between them.
- Heal self then serve the community, no promises but make COMMITMENTS.
- Meet the community’s needs, listen to them.
- Build self-esteem
- Create 12 – Step programs for youth/Empower youth
- Mentorship – parent/child “Power of the Pack”
- Identify their feelings, understand where they come from.
- Youth supporting healing.
- Let Behavioral Health departments know the importance of culture – policy change is necessary to be able to bill for cultural approaches to wellness/balance.
- Focus on PREVENTION
- Prevention starts in the home without outside funding by the mother and father, keeping children healthy and well.

- Intervention is what we are talking about for youth: i.e.: physical fitness, judicial system diversion, etc.
- 3 R's: RESPECT, RIGHTS, **RESPONSIBILITY**.
- Ceremonial leaders in programs may be drug tested when working with youth/wellbriety groups.
- Teach youth by example.
- Stop the anger in meetings by showing compassion.
- Sacrifice self, try to out give each other
- TALK Program for youth, no parents allowed, bonfire, adult instructors present, confidential.
- When culture is revived those we looked down on (winos) may become our strongest leaders as they become more in balance.
- Title IV b – Children's Welfare, new planning grant available up to \$300,000.00 to tribes.

## So Now What?

All tribes are similar – we have all survived intergenerational trauma, the time to survive is over; it's time to THRIVE.

We need to strive for balance/harmony in Mind, Body, Emotions and Spirit; emotions being the most difficult to overcome.

Money is not the answer as evidenced by tribes with large per capita, social problems may become more pronounced. We need to address intergenerational trauma first.

We need to reframe emotions into positive with self awareness and effort to change.

- Grow and feed the spirit of children
- Find the elders in your community that know your stories, songs and have them teach to community
- Train non-natives to be culturally competent that work with Native people
- Work together inter-tribally with “After – Care” programs
- HUG YOUR CHILDREN
- Learn how to be able to forgive
- Begin with ourselves
- Share what works- with each other
- Summer camps for youth – high school age – 5:1 youth to counselors and teach traditional values: male and female appropriateness
- Listen to our children – they can teach us
- Move away from negativity within ourselves
- Revive culture through teaching Native language to children 3 – 5 years old, brains able to learn most at this age.
- Work towards balance – not perfection, allow for mistakes, forgive self.
- Elders guide us through ceremonies.
- Need to welcome every child into the world again at birth, celebrate their lives, honor their stages of life.